

Tuesday in the First Week after the Epiphany

January 11, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Year One: *Hebrews 2:5–13**; *Psalms 8*; *Mark 1:21–28*

On Sunday, we had the first eleven verses of Mark, words about John the Baptist and his ministry, the baptism of Jesus by John, “the heavens being ripped apart,” and the words of the Father for Jesus, “You are my beloved son; in you I have taken delight.”¹ We should have heard the next two verses that complete the story of Jesus’ baptism: “And immediately the Spirit cast [Jesus] out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, begin tested by Satan; and he was with the wild animals; and the angels were serving him.”²

Yesterday, we heard about the beginning of Jesus’ preaching: “The time has been fulfilled, and the dominion of God has come near you! [Change your mind] and believe in the good news.”³ And we heard of him calling two pairs of brothers, Simon and Andrew, and James and John. He said, “Come on after me, and I’ll make you become fishers of [men and

¹ Translation: Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, Anchor Bible 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 158.

² Mark 1:12–13, Translation: Ibid., 167.

³ Mark 14–15. This is Marcus’ translation save for my choice to translate *μετανόεω* with its literal meaning. Ibid., 171.

women].”⁴ Today they are on their way to Capernaum. On the Sabbath, Jesus goes into the synagogue and begins to teach.

Professor Joel Marcus, whose translations I’m using today with a few changes, writes that in the New Testament, a synagogue is a place where the scriptures are read, discussed, and taught.⁵ In the gospels, they become a place for God’s dominion and God’s presence to be revealed. It is the place where Jesus first battles with an “unclean spirit”—“Jewish terminology for a demon.”⁶ Dr. Mark Davis calls his remarks on this passage, “Separating a Man from his Cage.”⁷ Two things here from Marcus. First, he points out that there is “no room for demonic opposition to God.”⁸ Second, Jesus’ crying out with a loud voice from the cross is a death cry. The language here suggests that the demons, who have recognized who Jesus is, are dead.⁹ On this day, people greet Jesus’ teaching and power with amazement and approval.

⁴ Mark 1:17. Ibid., 179. I translate *ανθρώπων* as “men and women” instead of “people.”

⁵ Marcus, 186.

⁶ Ibid., 187.

⁷ <http://leftbehindandlovingit.blogspot.com/2015/01/separating-man-from-his-cage.html>, (accessed 24 January 2018).

⁸ Marcus, 192.

⁹ Ibid., 189.

When the subject of exorcism came up in sacramental theology at Nashotah House, Father Louis Weil told us that, while staying at the Dominican House in Washington, D.C., he met a friar who was studying some aspect of demonic possession. That friar was supervised closely because his subject was considered real and dangerous for him, the friar. Evil presents itself in different ways; evil is still abroad among men and women. For Christians, death in this life is not death in the life to come. I close with this prayer for the Sunday closest to October 5. Its core dates from the Leonine Sacramentary, the earliest we have, from around A.D. 600:¹⁰

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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¹⁰ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 14, 193.