

January 19, 2017. Homily for Thursday of Week 2 in Ordinary Time

(Heb.7:25-8:6; Mk.3:7-12)

Anniversary Mass for upcoming first anniversary of Mother Blanca's death

Ever since the end of the Christmas/Epiphany season and the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus a week ago Monday, our weekday Mass Readings have been taken from the Letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel of St. Mark.

The Letter to the Hebrews is a profound, theological reflection on the saving actions of Jesus Christ, seeing Him according to the various divine titles such as the Son of God, the great High Priest, and today the constant Intercessor before the Throne of God on our behalf.

The Gospel of Mark omits anything to do with Jesus' Birth---begins with John the Baptist, and quickly moves through Jesus' life and ministry until He gets to the victorious end of the Story.

Today's Gospel Reading is at the beginning verses of only Chapter 3, and already, at the end of yesterday's Gospel passage, we heard of the first secret plans being laid between the Pharisees and the Herodians on how they might put Him to death----get Him out of the picture---end this story before it gathers too much more momentum.

In these five brief verses today, St. Mark summarizes everything that had already taken place while barely beginning Chapter 3.

Even though there are huge crowds coming to follow Him from all over the region, from as far away as Jerusalem, Idumea, and Tyre and Sidon, Jesus decides to move away from those huge crowds of people.

It was not that Jesus wasn't pleased with the crowds of people gathering, but He had become aware that they were coming for the wrong reasons. St. Mark said that they were coming because the crowds "heard what He was doing", namely He had cast out demons, healed a man with leprosy, a man who couldn't walk, and yesterday, we heard how Jesus healed the man with the withered hand who didn't even ask Jesus to do so.

And so the crowds were becoming dense and dangerous, and Mark says Jesus ordered His disciples to get a boat ready so that He wouldn't get crushed by the crowds.

As you know yesterday we had a very nice trip into the big city of Medellin. Talk about crowds of people?! We were in traffic jams with busses, cars, motorbikes and bicycles everywhere. There are no crowds like this in Kalamazoo, believe me! If Sr. Mary Theresa wasn't such an excellent driver, we would not have survived. It was wonderful to be in the city, to see the Shrine of Mother Laura, the first canonized native born Colombian Saint, and her

tomb, to visit briefly with some of Sr. Mary Theresa's, Sister Dora's, and Sister Obeira's Family, and to see the home where Mother Blanca had lived before entering the convent---but I was very glad to get back here to the peace and calm of La Ceja.

In some ways, perhaps that was something like Jesus was experiencing at that moment. He just had to get away, not because He didn't want to be with all those people in need, but because those people who were pursuing Him had the wrong motivation for doing so.

I've often thought that in a situation like that---with hundreds of people there in need---if Jesus wanted to, of course He could have healed them all with one word.

But that's not what Jesus does, is it? Jesus seeks after the individual---Jesus wants each person to come to Him in their need. Jesus heals/forgives/reconciles/encourages/sets free from evil spirits one person at a time. Just as all of us are gathered together here in the Presence of Jesus in His Word and in the Eucharist, He can only come into our hearts if/when we come forward to receive Him, Body and Blood, in Holy Communion to be our strength and our joy.

We who follow Jesus are to follow Him in that same spirit of bringing to Jesus one person at a time.

We have to start, of course, first of all with ourselves. It's not good enough that we spent time in prayer yesterday to think that we don't need to do so today. No, we need to keep our relationship with Jesus strong, fresh, vibrant, and real. Every day we wake up, we are just a bit different; we will deal with new challenges this day; we will encounter new problems and perhaps we will be posed with a dilemma that we don't know how to handle. So, our prayer each day, and throughout each day, strengthens our own relationship so that we are each fresh and ready to bring that same Jesus to those challenges, problems, or dilemmas we will face.

As today's passage from the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that in the end---at the highpoint of the Gospel Story---Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection accomplished the forgiveness of the sins of the world and won the gift of salvation for all who choose to accept it. That's why these words are so beautiful and reassuring from today's First Reading: "*Jesus is always able to save those who approach God through Him, since He lives forever to make intercession for them.*"

Jesus intercedes for each of us, knowing our particular needs, at the Father's Heavenly Throne---Just as He continues to pray His Prayer for Unity, a prayer which all Christians throughout the world pray more fervently these days during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity---"that they all may be one, Father, even as you and I are One---may they be One in us."

We are celebrating this Holy Mass in prayerful remembrance of Mother Blanca, founder of this community, as we approach the first anniversary of her death. Just as Jesus faithfully was committed to doing the Father's Will in complete submission, and just as the Blessed Mother said "Yes" to God's invitation, and continued to say "Yes" consistently throughout her life, so too is Mother Blanca an exemplification of the beautiful Psalm we have prayed for today's Mass: "Here am I Lord, I come to do your will." We can be confident that she continues to do the Lord's will now, interceding for all of us. May her memory continue to live on in this holy place, and within the lives of each of you as members of this religious community.

As we begin this brand new day and thank God for all that He will bring into our lives this day, may we do so with the intention to truly live the same words of today's Psalm: "*Here am I, Lord, I come to do Your will.*"

May God bless you, now and always!