

PREGO EXTRA

Background notes
for the Gospels of
FEBRUARY 2012
Year B



5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1:29-39

He cured many who were suffering from diseases.

The whole town was gathered at the door.

Jesus has carried out an exorcism immediately followed by the physical healing of Simon's mother-in-law which we find in today's Gospel.

On both occasions the people had seen 'something new'. Jesus didn't use traditional methods and acted and spoke with an authority they had not seen before.

He entered the house of Simon and Andrew.

Archaeologists have unearthed the probable remains of this house near the synagogue in Capernaum, under the ruins of the ancient church that was built on this site. The house consists of a cluster of small rooms built of basalt rock, surrounding an open courtyard that was probably shared by the extended family.

Simon's wife is not mentioned here but she later accompanies him on his missionary journey (1 Cor 9:5)

The fever left her and she waited on them.

Simon's mother-in-law was bedridden with fever, which at that time was often caused by malaria and could be life threatening. There was a particular way of dealing with this fever laid down by the Talmud. It involved the use of certain objects, selected readings from Exodus and finally a magic formula.

Jesus healed with a gesture and the unique authority attributed to him previously in the synagogue.

The woman's reaction in 'waiting on them' is a model of discipleship: The Greek verb, *diakoneō* later becomes a standard word for Christian ministry (Acts 6:2) from which we derive the word 'deacon'.



That evening after sunset.

Word had spread rapidly and crowds of people came seeking Jesus' help. They waited until evening because the Sabbath law forbade them to carry a burden through the town. This would have constituted work which was forbidden.

(cf Jeremiah 17:24)

On this occasion the 'burden' to be carried would have included the sick people who were unable to walk. The Sabbath ran for 24 hrs ending at six pm, (when three stars could be seen in the sky).



In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house.

The time and place chosen by Jesus to find respite from the crowds were especially suited to prayer. 'Long before dawn', puts us in mind of the psalmists (Ps.57:8) '*I mean to wake the dawn.*' also (Ps.92:2) *It is good...to proclaim your love at daybreak.*

The lonely place recalls the desert, a place of solitude conducive to intimate communion with God. Mark 1:3-13 also Mark 6:46, 14:32-42

The purpose of Jesus' mission.

'Because this is why I came.'

When Simon and his companions find Jesus he makes a solemn declaration of the purpose of his mission.

Jesus made a similar statement before his crucifixion when questioned by Pilate regarding his Kingdom, '*Yes I am a King, I was born for this, I came into the world for this...*' (John 18:37),

Jesus saying that this was why he came, suggests more than a public appearance but alludes to his being sent into the world by his Father and implies his pre existence (see Mark 9:37)

By saying '*Let us go elsewhere...*' (v.38) Jesus is including his disciples in his mission, as he sets out to preach in the synagogues of Galilee.

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1: 40-45

**“If you want to, you can cure me.
Of course, I want to!”**

Healing miracles

In today's Gospel Mark tells us about yet another healing miracle of Jesus. It is the third in as many weeks and the account follows the same pattern as previously.

Jesus heals an individual and then moves on.

Leprosy

It has now been clearly established by exegetes that leprosy, the debilitating skin condition sometimes called “Hansen's disease” after the Norwegian physician who first identified the bacterium which causes it, was all but non-existent in biblical times. The term was used in the King James bible translation and subsequent editions of the Bible have kept it.

Nowadays medical science recognises that what we read as leprosy would cover a host of dermatological complaints from psoriasis to dermatitis.

Being a leper

Fearful of possible contagion, society as a group sought to protect itself by ostracising the sick person. The book of Leviticus (see today's 1st reading) details carefully the conduct which had to be kept. People at the time believed leprosy to have been caused by one's sins or by demons. Any healing, whatever its causes, must be witnessed by the priest who alone, according to Mosaic Law, is able to declare the person “clean”, that is able to take once again his place in society.

The encounter between Jesus and the leper

The two parties here break the accepted rules. The leper who does not keep to the prescribed 12 feet distance and Jesus who actually touches the sick man.

Clean and unclean

The contact between Jesus and the leper is in clear breach of the social rules. By touching him, Jesus himself becomes unclean and as an outcast has to move out of town.

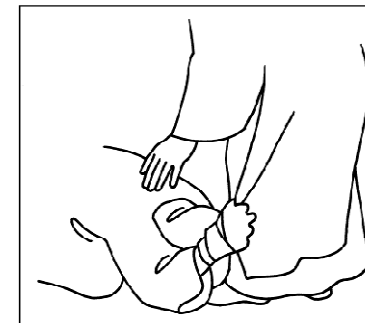
Yet it would seem that the people were not deterred and followed him wherever he went.

Jesus takes on himself the stigma of the Unclean and this foreshadows his ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross.

Mind you say nothing to anyone. Go and show yourself to the priest

Jesus shows here that he is keen to follow Mosaic Law in its details. This may partly explain why he asks the leper not to spread the news of his healing. He must go and see the priest first.

However, it could also be another example of Mark's “Messianic secret” (see 4th Sunday in ordinary time)



7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark 2:1-12

The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

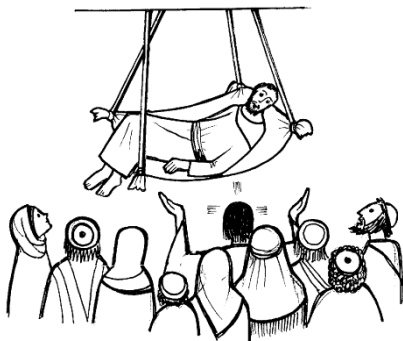
Jesus had completed his tour of the synagogues and returned to Capernaum where he encountered opposition from the religious authorities. Today's Gospel tells the first of five conflict stories which culminate in a plot to kill Jesus.

There was no room left even in the front door.

In the mornings Palestinian people would open their front doors extending an open invitation for anyone to come in and go as they pleased. Their doors were only closed if they needed privacy. The house that Jesus was in probably had no hallway and the door would have opened onto the street.

News of Jesus' return to Capernaum had attracted a large crowd, filling the house and blocking the pavement outside. The four men who had brought their paralysed friend on a stretcher couldn't possibly get in to see Jesus through the doorway.

They stripped the roof



The roof of a Palestinian house was flat and often used as a quiet place to rest. There was usually an outside staircase giving access to it. The roof was made of flat beams. The space in between the beams was tightly packed with brushwood and clay and then waterproofed. Often grass grew on the roof of a Palestinian

house. The men would have easily been able to dig out the filling from between the beams and lower the man into the house, repairing any damage later.

My child your sins are forgiven.

In Palestine at the time of Jesus it was believed that illness was a consequence of sin; that God was angry with the sick person. The Rabbis had a saying, 'There is no man healed of his sickness until all his sins have been forgiven him'.

How can this man talk like that?

He is blaspheming.

It seems that the Sanhedrin, whose duty it was to deal with anyone thought to be a false prophet, had sent scribes to see what Jesus was doing. They would have been shocked at Jesus' words believing that only God could forgive sins. For a human to make this claim was blasphemy which carried the penalty of death by stoning. (Leviticus 24:16)

Jesus knowing what was in the minds of these experts in the law, challenged them. As they firmly believed no one could be cured unless they were forgiven, then this man who could take up his bed at Jesus' command and walk home must surely have been forgiven.

Therefore Jesus' claim that he, '*The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.*' must be true.

The Son of Man.

This is the first time that Jesus has referred to himself as the 'Son of Man' a title that will later become more prominent in the Gospel, especially as Jesus' passion draws near. In doing this Jesus gives the people a deeper insight into his identity.

The guardians of orthodoxy begin to be threatened by the presence of Jesus.