

10th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B
Greg Kandra

Lectionary 89:

Gen 3:9-15

Ps 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

2 Cor 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/061018.cfm>

Possible preaching themes:

- We might consider this the second original sin: blaming others for our own weaknesses and mistakes, or passing the buck (from Genesis)
- Are we able to resist the modern temptation to listen to the crowd, instead of “doing the will of God” (from the Gospel of Mark)
- The compulsive and destructive power of “group think” that can lead to criticism and condemnation of others (from the Gospel of Mark)
- Standing firm when it is tempting to be persuaded by deception and manipulation (from Genesis and the Gospel)

Possible scientific resources:

- A social worker offers an accessible and timely look at the phenomenon of “mob mentality,” particularly through the prism of the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/facing-trauma-together/202101/the-psychology-mob-mentality>)
- What is “groupthink”? A Yale psychologist coined the term in 1972, and unpacking its causes, meaning and impact can help us understand leaders’ “terrible decisions.” (<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/groupthink-the-need-for-a-diverse-workplace/0/steps/263876>)
- It’s an idea as old as Genesis, but how much do we understand about the tools manipulators use to deceive us? A psychologist looks at “covert manipulators” and the seven tactics they use try to control others. (<https://psychcentral.com/lib/tactics-manipulators-use-to-win-and-confuse-you>)
- A doctor explores the psychology of “mob mentality” and violence (<https://drwendyjames.com/the-psychology-of-mob-mentality-and-violence/>)
- The opposite of having a mob mentality, or “groupthink,” is independent thinking. What inspires someone to stand apart from the crowd? (<https://www.magneticmemorymethod.com/independent-thinking/>)

Homily outline combining resources:

- **Introduction:**

- At the outset of Mark's Gospel, we find that Jesus has returned home. But his reputation precedes him. He has been driving out demons and curing people and when he arrives home, he is quickly surrounded by a crowd.
- People evidently find his remarkable works inexplicable and bizarre. Both Jesus's own relatives and those in the neighborhood conclude that Christ is possessed by the "prince of demons" and that ["he is out of his mind."](#)
- Jesus responds by answering them in parables. This does not seem to satisfy the crowd.
- His "mother and his brothers" arrive and try to speak to him, presumably to take him to safety or talk some sense into him.
- However, Jesus barely acknowledges them, explaining instead that "whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

- **The Scientific turn**

- Mark takes pains to mention the presence of the crowds pressing in on Jesus. Here, their presence takes an almost pathological turn toward what might be considered a ["mob mentality."](#)
- Psychologists point to [various causes](#) of this mentality, including "deindividuation," or losing a sense of identity; a diffusion of responsibility, since so many are involved; and pure emotion. In this episode, the crowd starts to turn against Jesus, with all these factors at play.
- In today's readings from Mark, some of this "diffusion of responsibility" echoes what we heard in [the first reading, from Genesis](#), when Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. It also foreshadows [how people will turn against Jesus when he stands in judgment before Pilate](#). (In fact, that may be the most vivid example of "mob mentality" in the Gospels.)
- The reading from Genesis and this passage from Mark show how easily we may be tempted to shirk responsibility, go along with the crowd and even pass on blame, following the direction or suggestions of others. So-called ["covert manipulators,"](#) according to psychologists, can sway opinion or lead to bad, even catastrophic, decisions.
- Considered from this perspective while reflecting on the first reading about Adam and Eve and the serpent, we could perceive the manipulations of the mob to be the real "tempter" in Mark's episode — demonstrating how people are lead away from trusting their own instincts or believing their own eyes.

- **Christ's response to the crowd**

- In this Gospel, Jesus responds not with anger or defensiveness, but with his skills as a storyteller and weaver of parables. He also relies on reason: "How can Satan

drive out Satan? if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand.”

- He speaks boldly — even shockingly — about what it means to be a member of his family. “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”
- Those final words, in many ways, convey the deepest message of this Gospel passage, and a challenge to those who hear it today.
- **The Takeaway:**
 - This encounter with Jesus and the crowd shows how mistrustfulness, doubt and anger can quickly spread, and how easy it can be to suspect the worst of others — even the Son of God.
 - But Christ’s final words in this episode serve as a reminder and a challenge: what matters ultimately to be a member of Jesus’s “family” is to do the will of God.
 - In this context, that means listening to the message of Christ, bearing witness to his miraculous healings, and acknowledging the tremendous good being done. It means standing apart from the crowd condemning Jesus, the ones accusing him of being possessed by Satan, and understanding that his mission is not to tear apart but to build up.
 - Jesus does not promote “groupthink” or mob action. Instead, throughout his ministry he invites community attentiveness and a dialogue of care.
 - It is in being sisters and brothers to each other that we can grow in the spirit of faith about which Paul speaks in today’s second reading, which in turn allows us to both receive and share the mercy we hymn in today’s Psalm.
 - Bonding as a community and growing as sisters and brothers does not wipe out differences of opinion, or our individual preferences. Instead, fostering a shared ecclesial vision allows such differences to enrich us in such a way that we do not dismiss those who disagree with us as simply “out of their minds.”

Tags: community, groupthink, manipulation, psychology