

SERMON 914

February 8, 2015

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

984th Week as Priest

811th Week at St Dunstan's

76th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

IMMEDIATELY

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

The Gospel of Mark has an urgency that will not stop. The word *immediately* occurs more than a dozen times in the first few chapters. Jesus is constantly under pressure from everyone around him—disciples, scribes, Pharisees, even his own family.

When Jesus left the synagogue at Capernaum, a fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, he was immediately taken to the home of Simon Peter and Andrew his brother. Simon's mother-in-law was seriously ill, and only Jesus could save her. Calmly, quietly, the Master came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. She was healed instantly, and began to cook them a meal. (By the way, don't you find it interesting that Simon Peter had a mother-in-law?)

But before darkness fell, hundreds of people had come to the house and gathered around the door. The sick, the demon-possessed—the whole city in fact—was there. Without hesitation, Jesus began curing them, healing their diseases, and casting out many demons. It was exhausting work, draining his energy, and yet he would not quit until all who desired were healed. Their needs were immediate, and Jesus responded with love and compassion.

A peculiarity of Mark's story is something called "the Messianic secret." Jesus is known to be the Christ, that is, the Anointed One, the Messiah, by only a handful of people—and they are held to absolute silence on the matter. But the demons know as well, and Jesus demands secrecy, because the fullness of time has not yet arrived.

Pay careful attention, and you realize that Jesus has worked hours into the evening and until the morning. "While it was still very dark," said Mark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. He has not had another meal, and he has had no sleep, and only when the crowds have dispersed does Jesus find time to himself. Any of us would have followed my mother's sage advice—that is, that ninety percent of your

problems can be solved with a good meal and a good night's sleep. But not Jesus. He must pray to the Father, and that is what nourishes him and gives him rest.

But not for long. Simon and his companions hunt frantically for the Master, and when they find him they exclaim, "Everyone is searching for you!"

Hardly a moment's rest for the Son of God. Barely time to catch his breath, and then he rises for another long and difficult day.

"Let us go on to the neighboring towns," says the Lord. "For that is what I came to do."

Now this is an ancient story, and in it we find the constant anxiety and the relentless need of his followers to be a powerful and debilitating influence. Everything happens immediately. We need you, Jesus. Heal us, now. Save us from the time of trial. Deliver us from evil. Immediately. Not later. Now.

Ancient, but also terribly modern. For this is exactly the way we are. We live in an age of anxiety. We are, ourselves, stressed out, and tired, and exhausted from all that we do. We work long hours. We skip meals, or we go through the drive-through and grab a burger and fries, full of fat and sugar. We drive too fast. We hurry

everywhere we go. We can't slow down. We have all these appointments. We can't stay. We've got to go. We need something, anything, everything—now, immediately. And we find ourselves in the terrible dilemma that we can't, but we have to; we have to, but we can't.

This is no way to live, is it? But we've been doing it for years. Ask any college student how they're doing and you'll get the same answer, time after time: "I'm tired. I'm stressed out. I'm too busy. I have to, but I can't. I can't, but I have to."

And it's not just students. Ask any retired person how they're doing, and you'll get the same answer there: "I can't believe how busy I've been since retirement. How did I ever find time to work? I'm tired. I'm stressed out. I have to, but I can't. I can't, but I have to."

Dear friends, we are wearing out ourselves—our souls and bodies—with all this continual hurry and desperate worry and unhealthy anxiety and unrealistic expectations for ourselves and everybody around us.

We need to slow down. We need to be still and know who is God—and realize that work is not your god, and money is not your god, and other people's expectations of you, they're not god either.

Just because somebody tells you to do something immediately, that doesn't mean it's true. And if you are under tremendous pressure every day of your life to get it all done, faster than before, with new and improved results, and at less cost—and it is affecting your physical health, and your mental well-being, and your family life, and your marriage—then maybe it's time to slow down and take a good long look at what you're doing with your one important and precious life.

Perhaps the only thing you need to do immediately is to stop what you're doing and get back to where you once belonged—to that quality of life that is measured not in minutes and hours, and dollars and cents, but in relationships, and recreation, and common meals, and important conversations, and prayers, and time for restoration and rest and recovery. Don't wait too long to begin that recovery, because the pressure and stress of modern life is relentless, and it will not let you go unless you let go of it yourself. Not immediately, but soon, and very soon indeed. **AMEN.**