

Lesson 15

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

The Holy Gospel: Mark 1:29–39

Jesus' public ministry took on a double emphasis: teaching and healing. Both had been evidenced at the synagogue in Capernaum, when a man possessed by an evil spirit interrupted Jesus' teaching. Jesus had dramatically silenced the spirit and ordered him out of the man. The incident led to a continued ministry of healing—in Peter's home within the circle of Peter's family, and outside the home in response to the people of Capernaum who expectantly brought their sick to Jesus.

After the synagogue service, at Peter's invitation, Jesus went to Peter's home for the evening meal. In Jewish custom, this was a joyous gathering of the family as the conclusion of their Sabbath worship. Peter's brother, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were probably also present—possibly also Philip and Nathanael. There had been a close relationship among these fishermen even before their call to follow Jesus. Zebedee, the father of James and John, operated a fishing business of some proportion. Peter and Andrew and Philip, from nearby Bethsaida, and possibly also Nathanael all may have worked alongside James and John in their father's business. And now they had added reason to be together, now that Jesus had become the center of their lives.

209. What does this family meal following the synagogue service suggest for our observance of the Lord's Day?

At the house, they found Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever, as Dr. Luke reported it in his Gospel. The Healer reached out His compassionate hand and the woman was immediately healed.

210. What does "immediately they told [Jesus] about her" suggest to us? How did Peter's mother-in-law give evidence of her enjoying an instantaneous, complete healing?

211. When the Sabbath ended, the people were free to carry out the joyous "work" of bringing their sick to Jesus. What was Mark saying with his "the whole city was gathered together at the door"?

212. What does it say to us that Mark, and also Dr. Luke, wrote of "all who were sick" and those "oppressed by demons"? Why did Jesus not allow the demons to testify about Him? (See Mark 1:23–26.)

The next morning, Jesus was up before dawn, out of the house, even out of the town, to find a desolate place (the Greek even calls it a “desert” place) for a time of prayer.

213. Why did Jesus, the Son of God, feel the need to pray to His Father in heaven? What do you think Jesus talked to His Father about on this morning after He had had such impact on the people of Capernaum?

214. What does His going to a desolate place for prayer say to us for our prayer life?

Peter and the others searched for Jesus until they found Him. They reported that the crowd had assembled again, fully expecting Jesus to continue His ministry to them. Then, however, we learn what was on Jesus’ mind—His outreach to all the villages of Galilee. The Gospels may be seen as describing three separate tours carried out by Jesus among the Galileans during His “year of popularity.”

215. What does Jesus’ “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also” say to the Church in its Gospel mission?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 40:21–31

Isaiah was God’s prophet during the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. It was a time of great peril for the nation. Assyrian armies had conquered the nations to the north, including the kingdom of Israel. They swept southward toward Jerusalem, overwhelming villages along the way. But Isaiah continually assured Hezekiah that God would prevent them from conquering Jerusalem. A siege was begun—and it ended suddenly when, in response to Assyrian arrogance and blasphemy, “the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (2 Kings 19:35).

Chapters 1–39 of Isaiah deal with that history and Isaiah’s related prophecies. With chapter 40, the thrust changes to a future conquest of Judah by Babylon, and the eventual return from exile of a remnant to rebuild. Chapter 40 begins the prophetic poems that announce the coming judgment of the nations and their gods and the vindication of Israel. They promise a return of exiles from Babylon, but also have a cosmic, end-times thrust.

216. What is suggested by “Has it not been told you from the beginning . . . from the foundations of the earth”?

217. How is Yahweh’s authority over the natural world described? How is His authority over the world’s mighty people manifested?