

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's first reading, Moses conveyed to the people God's promise that he would raise up a prophet like him, in other words, a new Moses. Some might wonder which of the Old Testament prophets was the new Moses. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, argued strongly that Jesus was and is the New Moses.

In last Sunday's Gospel, we heard Jesus' summary teaching: "*This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel*" [Mk. 1:14-15]. This week I read an interesting commentary on last Sunday's Gospel that is relevant for understanding today's Gospel. Sister Mary McClone made the point that "*The kingdom of God is at hand*" was the essence of Jesus' preaching and activity. She wrote, "Mark recorded precious little in the way of Jesus' preaching because he wanted to demonstrate that Jesus' actions embodied God's reign."<sup>1</sup> This is quite a contrast with Matthew and Luke Gospels, both of which contain Jesus' teachings in detail.

The fact that Mark's Gospel contains so little of Jesus's specific teachings is significant. In effect, Mark was saying that Jesus' actions speak louder than his words. Sister Mary McClone wrote, "In his obedience and in what he offered humanity, Jesus inaugurated God's reign in history. Jesus was the fulfillment, the culmination, of God's promises to the chosen people: the one sent to catch others up in the dynamic of his life."

What was true for Jesus is also true for us. We need always to remember that our actions speak much louder than our words. We can only fulfill our vocation to proclaim the Gospel to others if our actions match what we say we believe. For example, in a study of the unchurched in the United States many years ago, many of the unchurched said they were unchurched because they found that the church were often no better than they were and were often worse. Let me give a very contemporary example. Some Catholics have been shocked, even scandalized, by language used by fellow Catholics on social media in recent months.

When we live what we say we believe, our actions embody God's reign. In other words, our actions, however small they may be, demonstrate that God's kingdom is in our midst at least in an initial way. In Matthew's Gospel, the kingdom of God is compared to a mustard seed that grew and became a large bush or to yeast that leavened an entire loaf of bread. I would even argue that small kindnesses often have the biggest impact.

Today's reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is a continuation of last Sunday's second reading in which Paul began by writing that "*the time is running out....For the world in its present form is passing away*" [I Cor. 7:29 & 31]. Therefore, Paul's words today have to be understood in the context of last Sunday's reading. When he wrote First Corinthians, Paul was convinced that Jesus' return in glory was imminent. Therefore, he recommended that couples not marry so that they could be more focused on preparing for the coming of the Lord.

My brothers and sisters, over the centuries, based on today's reading, many bishops and theologians have argued that celibacy and/or consecrated virginity is a higher calling than marriage. It seems to me that those who would make that argument have a big problem. Neither celibacy nor consecrated virginity is a sacrament, but marriage is. We believe that the love of Christian man and woman for each other in marriage is a sign and sacrament of Christ's love for the Church. In other words, when Christian couples love each other in marriage, they are not only a sign of Christ's love for the Church, but they embody Christ's love for the Church and make his love for the Church real and present in our world today. Therefore, they make the reign of God real and present in our world today.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mary McClone, "Third Sunday in Ordinary Time: Mind-blowing metanoia," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/scripture-life/third-sunday-ordinary-time-mind-blowing-metanoia>.