

# THE LIVING WORD OF GOD: DISCOVERING ITS RICHES

A Parish Introduction to Study of the Bible  
*by Msgr. Peter Nugent*

## V. REFLECTIONS ON THE PASSION ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

Beginning with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Christian message began to be preached as good news for people to hear and believe in. In time, the written forms that we know from the New Testament continued this work, addressing this message to a wider part of humanity, helping them to realize this was truly good news in whatever state of life they found themselves, in the very real conditions of their life experience.

Mark seems to be the first to write an extended account of Jesus. Other evangelists in time copied much of what he wrote, but felt that newer versions were needed with changes or modifications that would bring out an emphasis directed to the particular needs of a new group of people that they were familiar with. Many studies of the gospel of St. Mark examine features that are brought out by this evangelist, and offer explanations of why there is a certain emphasis that he seems to be giving to the words and actions of Jesus.

We take a look at St. Mark's account of the crucifixion to examine the content closely. St. Mark was writing for the Christians in Rome. His featuring of the profession of faith by the Roman centurion can be looked at as the powerful statement by a true Roman that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. In the opening of the gospel, St. Mark wrote: "Here begins the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1,1). At the very death of Jesus, this man, someone they could identify with, made that all-important profession of Christian belief.

The centurion was present at the crucifixion to bear to the local Roman authority the authenticated statement that the execution of a criminal was accomplished. The gospel words tell us of how this man reacted after "seeing how he died". These words had an immediate meaning because of the role taken by the centurion for the government. But as we look at many parts of the gospel, the deeper meaning for Roman Christians becomes clear: this cruel and disgraceful death, endured by slaves and people not having the privilege of Roman citizenship, had meaning for Christians, who even in times of severe persecution, were called by God to imitate their Lord. This was their way to eternal glory, as they knew from the resurrection of Jesus. It was in the plan of God that the apparent disaster endured by Jesus actually led to his victory. This passage can be considered at the climactic point of Mark's entire gospel. The doctrine of the Cross in Christianity was something original and puzzling for believers. St. Paul understands the great challenge the preachers of the gospel were presented with: "We preach Christ crucified, offensive for Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles". (1Cor 2,23). All the more is its challenge for Christians suffering prejudice, persecution and even death.

Jesus repeatedly prophesied his suffering, death and resurrection. St. Mark's gospel features this message of the Lord--and along with it, the great impatience and frustration of Jesus with his apostles. Their incomprehension and lack of faith showed up repeatedly. Their desire for prominence as close associates of Jesus was constantly on their minds.

The modern day believer has a need to read this gospel. The example of Simon of Cyrene who literally carried the cross of Jesus in his time of suffering is presented for us. Our pain and sorrow must be understood in light of all that happened to our Lord as God's will for us. Let's all keep this in mind and heart when we are called upon to imitate our Savior--so that we can share in his glory.