

# THE RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

**T**ERRIBLE THINGS are being done in our time. Our newspapers and news bulletins are filled with accounts of acts of terrorism, oppression, enslavement, human trafficking and other atrocities. Some things that are done, by Boku Haram and Isis for instance, seem to be more than inhuman. They seem quite demonic.

We are experiencing something of what the people in Mark's Gospel were experiencing: the people of Jesus' time were very aware of evil spirits—they felt beset by demons.

Hence the people came to Jesus in great crowds. They saw Jesus as the powerful one who could cast out evil spirits. The evil spirits tried to control him, but they could not. Jesus drove them out and brought goodness and peace in place of evil. That was Jesus' mission - he came to defeat and drive out evil and to rescue humankind from the powers of darkness and establish God's rule. He 'brought us out of darkness into his own wonderful light'. Jesus saves.

It is said that the missionaries in Papua New Guinea once asked the locals: 'What have the missionaries brought you that you most appreciate?' They were expecting them to answer that they most appreciated schools and education, or hospitals and health. Instead they answered that they most appreciated how the missionaries had freed them from fear, meaning the fear of the powers of evil.

The Gospel of Mark is an account of the essential message of Christianity. Humankind needed/needs to be liberated. The powers of evil were so strong that it was necessary for the Son of God to come to rescue humankind and to drive out the evil spirits. The power of God in Christ was needed to liberate us.

Mark's Gospel makes us aware of the

drama. When Jesus began his mission he entered into immediate conflict with the demons that were possessing people. When Jesus cast out the demon that was possessing the man who came to Jesus in the Synagogue, the demon threw the man into convulsions and left with a loud cry. The event made a deep impression on everybody who witnessed it.

St Paul reflects on the blessing that is ours because God is with us: 'If God is for us who can be against?' With God on our side we are with the strength.

We can appreciate our baptism in the light of these reflections. Baptism is the first of the sacraments of initiation. This sacrament brings us into the Church community, into God's family; we become adopted sons and daughters of God. We then dare to call God 'Our Father'. But baptism is just the beginning, our initiation into the life of following Christ. God has done and continues to do great things for us. While God does all, and we accept with open arms God's gifts, we are not wholly passive in the relationship. It is for us to allow ourselves to be drawn into union with God, and not to put resistance or obstacles in the way of drawing closer to God.

On Ash Wednesday we have ashes put on our foreheads as a sign of repentance, and we hear the command to 'turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel'. Every year we enter into this special season of repentance and conversion. At the beginning of every Mass we express our sorrow for our sins, ask for God's mercy and plead for God's help to enter into everlasting life. Truly, Christians are not converts but people on a journey of conversion.

Jesus, as in Mark's Gospel, is the liberator. We must allow Jesus to liberate us.

—**Barry Brundell MSC, Editor**