

Session 2

Immediately

Mark 1:14-45 | A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim: Participants discover the shape of Jesus' first day of public ministry: a kingdom announced, disciples called, demons silenced, the sick healed, a leper touched. They will find the first commands of silence, the seed of the study's central mystery, and they will see that from the very beginning Jesus' holiness does not retreat from what is unclean; it advances and heals it.

Catholic Touchstone: The kerygma and ongoing conversion. "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (1:15) is the sentence the Church places on our foreheads every Ash Wednesday. The kingdom is at hand because the King is here, and he immediately begins gathering a visible community around himself (CCC 541-543, 1427-1429).

What You Need to Know

Mark 1:15 is the summary of Jesus' entire preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." The word for time here is *kairos*, not clock time but the appointed moment, the hour history has been waiting for. Every promise from Session 1 is now coming due.

Watch the word "immediately" (*euthys*) pile up: the fishermen leave their nets immediately, the demon is confronted immediately, the leper is cleansed immediately (1:42). Mark's pace is a theological statement: when the King arrives, everything happens now.

Three times in this passage Jesus commands silence: to the demon in the synagogue (1:25), to the demons at evening "because they knew him" (1:34), and to the cleansed leper (1:43-44). Scholars call this pattern the Messianic Secret, and it will run through the whole Gospel. Why would Jesus hush true statements about himself? Do not answer this for the group yet; let the question itch. Part of the answer: demons shouting titles is not the kind of knowing Jesus wants, and a wonder-working Messiah acclaimed by crowds would be misunderstood as a political liberator. Who Jesus is cannot be understood apart from where he is going, and nobody knows where he is going yet. This is the thread behind the sealed guesses the group wrote last week.

The leper scene (1:40-45) deserves special care. Leprosy in the Law meant total exclusion: torn clothes, covered lips, the cry "Unclean, unclean," dwelling alone outside the camp (Leviticus 13:45-46). Touching a leper made you unclean. Jesus touches him, and the contagion runs in reverse: instead of uncleanness flowing into Jesus, holiness flows out of him. Then Jesus sends the man to the priest to offer "what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people" (1:44), honoring the Law's public, priestly verification of cleansing (Leviticus 14). The Church has long seen here a pattern that finds its full form in the Sacrament of Penance: the healing comes from Christ, and Christ himself wills that it be verified and celebrated through a priestly ministry. Present this as a resonance the text invites, not as a proof-text; the direct institution of the sacrament is John 20:21-23, which arrives in Session 3's discussion of forgiveness.

One translation note to hold honestly: in 1:41 our RSV2CE reads "moved with pity," and most manuscripts have that word (*splanchnistheis*). A few early witnesses instead read "moved with anger" (*orgistheis*), and some scholars think anger, at the disease, at what sin and death have done to God's world, is what Mark wrote. The Church's translation is what we teach from, and nothing doctrinal turns on the variant, but if a sharp

participant has read about it, you can say honestly: either way, Jesus' response to human misery is not indifference. It moves him, and he acts.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 2:44 and 7:13-14.** "The kingdom of God" is not a vague spiritual mood; it is Daniel's promised reign that God himself sets up, which crushes the kingdoms of the world and grows to fill the earth. When Jesus says this kingdom "is at hand," he is announcing that Daniel's clock has struck.
- **1 Kings 19:19-21.** Elijah calls Elisha, who asks to kiss his father and mother goodbye, and is permitted. Simon, Andrew, James, and John are given no such scene: they leave nets, boat, and father immediately. The call of the greater Elijah's Lord outranks even the greatest prophet's call.
- **Leviticus 13:45-46 and Leviticus 14.** The leper's living death outside the camp, and the elaborate priestly ritual for verified cleansing, the ritual Jesus explicitly tells the healed man to complete. Jesus does not abolish the Law's priestly economy; he fulfills and works through it.
- **2 Kings 5:1-14.** Naaman the Syrian. When the king of Israel is asked to cure leprosy he tears his clothes: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" (5:7). In Israel's memory, cleansing a leper is God's work. Keep that in your pocket for question 8.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, on the call of the fishermen)

Preaching on the calling of the first disciples, St. John Chrysostom marvels at the quality of their obedience: they were in the middle of their work, nets in hand, and at a word they left everything, not waiting to finish the day's catch. This, he says, is the obedience Christ asks: not to delay, not to negotiate the timing, but to follow at once, leaving even legitimate goods for the sake of the One who calls.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions of the Psalms, on Psalm 86 [85])

St. Augustine gives us the key to scenes like Mark 1:35, where Jesus rises before dawn to pray: Christ "prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God." The Son's prayer is not playacting; the eternal Son, having truly become man, truly prays, and he draws our prayer up into his own. When you pray this week, Augustine says, recognize your own voice in him, and his voice in you.

Voices of the Church: St. Bede the Venerable (Commentary on Mark, on the cleansing of the leper)

St. Bede observes that in touching the leper, the Lord shows he is not rendered unclean by the contact; rather his healing power cleanses, for he is the Law's Lord: where our touch would be defiled, his touch heals, because the divine power works through his true human flesh. And by sending the man to the priest with the offering Moses commanded, Christ shows humility toward the Law he himself gave, and shows honor toward the Law he himself gave; and the Church has long drawn the further lesson: do not despise her public ministry in the very moments God has

healed you privately.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 541-543:** In Jesus' word and works the kingdom is at hand; to enter it one must accept his word and join the family gathering around him.
- **CCC 1427-1429:** Jesus' call to conversion ("repent") is not a one-time event but the ongoing task of the whole Church and every baptized life.
- **CCC 1503-1505:** Christ the physician: his compassion toward the sick, his touch of lepers, and his identification with the suffering.
- **CCC 2602:** Jesus often withdraws to pray in solitude; his prayer embraces all people, and he teaches us by his example.

Thread Watch

Thread Watch (leader only)

The Messianic Secret: OFFICIALLY PLANTED this session: 1:25, 1:34 ("he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him"), 1:43-44. Note carefully for the sealed guesses: the beings who correctly identify Jesus so far are demons, and they are silenced. The guess asked for the first HUMAN confession. Say nothing; just enjoy watching them notice.

Torn (*schizo*): Dormant this session. Do not mention it.

The Way: Developing quietly: Jesus is constantly in motion, "throughout all Galilee" (1:39), and following him means leaving where you were (1:18, 1:20).

The Bread: Not yet planted.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state Mark 1:15 from memory as the summary of Jesus' preaching and explain "kingdom," "repent," and "believe" in Catholic terms.
2. Participants notice the silence commands themselves and begin forming theories (without leader resolution).
3. Participants discover the Naaman background and articulate why cleansing a leper is a divine act.
4. Participants can answer the "even the demons believe" question: what saving faith is and is not.
5. Participants commit to one concrete morning-prayer practice modeled on Mark 1:35.

Time Note (90 Minutes)

Win 15 min | Build 55 min | Send 15 min | Closing prayer 5 min. **Pre-chosen cuts if running long:** drop Build question 4 (Simon's mother-in-law) and compress the Elisha comparison in question 3 to a single leader sentence. Do not cut the leper sequence or the steelman; they carry the session.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you walked into Galilee announcing that the waiting was over. Walk into this room tonight. Give us ears to hear your call the way four fishermen heard it, and hearts willing to leave the nets we grip. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Tell us about a time you had to drop everything, no notice, no preparation. What made you willing to do it?
2. When you hear the word "repent," what tone of voice do you imagine? Where do you think that tone came from?

Leader bridge: Tonight covers roughly one day and its aftermath, and Mark narrates it at a sprint. Count how many times you hear the word "immediately." And watch for something strange: Jesus keeps telling people, and other things, to be quiet.

Build (55 minutes)

Read Mark 1:14-45 aloud, once through. Then work through the questions.

1. **Verse 15 is the whole sermon: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." Four clauses. Take them one at a time: what is each one actually claiming or demanding?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

"The time is fulfilled": *kairos*, the appointed hour; all the promises we traced last week are coming due. "The kingdom of God is at hand": not a place or a feeling but God's own reign breaking in, and it is "at hand" because the King is standing in front of you. "Repent" (*metanoete*): literally a change of mind and direction, a whole reoriented life, and the verb form implies keep on repenting, ongoing conversion, not a single moment (CCC 1427-1429). "Believe in the gospel": entrust yourself to the good news, not merely agree with it. The Church puts this exact sentence on our foreheads with ashes every Lent because it is the doorway sentence of the Christian life.

2. **DISCOVERY: someone look up Daniel 2:44 (and, if time, glance at Daniel 7:13-14). When a first-century Jew heard "the kingdom of God is at hand," what story did those words belong to?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Daniel's. God promises to set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, which breaks the empires of the world in pieces and grows to fill the whole earth. The kingdom is concrete, historical, and unstoppable, a stone that becomes a mountain. Jesus is not announcing a new private spirituality; he is announcing that Daniel's promised reign has arrived, and, as we will see all study, that it arrives in a way no one expects: hidden, small, and crowned with thorns.

3. **Look at the call of the four fishermen (1:16-20). DISCOVERY: someone look up 1 Kings 19:19-21, Elijah's call of Elisha. Compare the two scenes. What is Mark showing us about Jesus by the difference?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Elisha asks leave to kiss his father and mother goodbye, and Elijah grants it; even the greatest prophetic call in the Old Testament allows a farewell. The fishermen get no farewell scene: they leave nets, boat, hired servants, and father "immediately." The One calling here outranks Elijah. Only God's own call has this kind of absolute claim. Notice too what he calls them to: "I will make you become fishers of men." He does not merely recruit them for tasks; he promises to remake what they are. And notice that his first act after announcing the kingdom is to gather a visible community around himself. The kingdom, from minute one, has people in it, together.

4. **In the synagogue (1:21-28), the demon shouts the truth: "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." Jesus' response: "Be silent." At 1:34 he again "would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him." Why on earth would Jesus silence true statements about himself? Let the group build theories; do not resolve this.**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Do not give a final answer; the Gospel itself withholds one for now. Affirm good partial theories: testimony from demons is the wrong witness (truth from a hostile mouth corrupts); shouted titles without understanding would ignite political messianic fever; Jesus insists on being known through his whole story, not through headlines. Tell the group to keep a running list every week of who is told to be quiet, and to remember their sealed guesses. The question of how Jesus can rightly be known is becoming the plot of the book.

5. **Simon's mother-in-law (1:29-31): Jesus takes her by the hand, lifts her up, the fever leaves, "and she served them." Small scene; what is the pattern in it?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Grace, then response. He touches, lifts, heals; she serves. Mark's word for her serving (*diekonei*) is the root of our word deacon, and it is the same word Jesus will use of himself later in the Gospel: the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve. The first healed person in Mark responds to being raised by becoming a servant, the whole Christian life in one verse. Healed people serve; it is what healing is for.

6. **At 1:35, after the most successful day imaginable, Jesus rises "a great while before day" and goes to a lonely place to pray, and then walks away from a town full of people still asking for him (1:37-38). What do those two choices teach?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

First: if the eternal Son, in his humanity, needed to begin the day in solitary prayer with the Father, our claim that we are too busy collapses. His prayer is real prayer, and it is also our school (CCC 2602). St. Augustine says Christ prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Second: Jesus' agenda is set in prayer, not by demand. The crowd wants more of yesterday; the Father sends him to the next towns, "for that is why I came out." Popularity is not mission. That discernment happened before dawn, alone with the Father.

7. **The leper (1:40-45). First, DISCOVERY: someone read Leviticus 13:45-46 aloud, what was this man's daily life? Then look closely at Mark: what does the leper ask, and what does Jesus do before he says anything?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The leper's life: torn clothes, covered lips, crying "Unclean" at anyone who approached, dwelling alone outside the camp, a living death, cut off from family, synagogue, and Temple. He does not even ask to be healed; he asks to be made *clean*, restored to God and community. And before Jesus says a word, Mark gives us the shock: "he stretched out his hand and touched him." Nobody touched lepers; touch transmitted uncleanness. But with Jesus the current runs backward: holiness flows out and heals. He could have healed with a word from a distance; he chose touch, because this man's disease was isolation, and the healing had to begin with contact.

8. **DISCOVERY: someone look up 2 Kings 5:1-7, the king of Israel's reaction when asked to cure Naaman's leprosy. In light of that, what is Mark quietly claiming when Jesus says "I will; be clean"?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The king of Israel tears his clothes: "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?" In Israel's memory, cleansing leprosy belongs to God alone; even Elisha only relays instructions and credits God. Jesus does not relay or pray aloud or invoke a higher name. He wills it: "I will; be clean." The verse-1 claim keeps cashing out in the narrative: the LORD whose way was prepared is walking around Galilee doing the things only the LORD does.

9. **Jesus sends the cleansed man to the priest "and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people" (1:44). Why does the divine healer bother with the priestly ritual of Leviticus 14, and does anything in Catholic life rhyme with this?**

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Jesus honors the economy he himself established: healing verified and celebrated publicly through priestly ministry, restoring the man not just biologically but socially and liturgically. He is no enemy of mediation; he works through it. Catholics will rightly hear a rhyme with the Sacrament of Penance: Christ heals, and Christ wills that his healing pass through the Church's priestly ministry, where it is spoken aloud into human ears. Be precise here: this scene is a resonance and a pattern, not the institution of the sacrament; the Lord institutes that ministry explicitly when he breathes on the apostles in John 20:21-23, which we will meet head-on next week. Note also the sad irony of verse 45: the one man told to speak (to the priest) instead talks freely to everyone else, and Jesus can no longer enter towns openly. Disobedient publicity costs the mission.

Dig Deeper

A few early manuscripts of 1:41 read "moved with anger" instead of "moved with pity," and scholars debate which Mark wrote. Our RSV2CE reads "moved with pity," with the majority of witnesses. Nothing doctrinal hangs on it, and the two readings converge on one truth: Jesus is not neutral before human misery. Whether it stirs his compassion or his righteous anger at what disease and death have done to God's creatures, it *moves* him, and he acts. In the true humanity of the Son, God has a human heart that is genuinely moved; the divine nature does not undergo change, but neither is our God the serene, indifferent deity of the philosophers.

10. **STEELMAN, build it strong before you answer it. Notice something unsettling: the most theologically accurate voices in Mark so far are demons. "I know who you are, the Holy One of**

God." Perfectly true. Now, many of our Protestant friends rightly cherish the truth that we are saved by faith. Build their best case: Scripture says "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31); Jesus himself says "repent, and believe" (1:15); and thoughtful Protestants are careful to say saving faith is not mere intellectual assent but personal trust. State that case as strongly as you can. Then ask: what do the demons of Mark 1 contribute to this conversation, and where does James 2:19 land?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Honor the steelman: our Protestant friends are right that salvation is by grace through faith, right that faith must be personal trust and not bare assent, and Catholics agree with both statements without reservation (see CCC 1814-1816). Now the demons: they possess flawless theological information, and they are not saved. James 2:19 makes the point with a smirk: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder." So correct belief, even correct belief plus strong feeling (shuddering!), is not yet saving faith. What is missing? Love, and the obedience love produces. The Catholic tradition, echoed by the Catechism (CCC 1814-1816), speaks of justifying faith as faith formed by charity, "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6), a faith that entrusts, follows, and obeys, like four fishermen dropping nets. The real difference with our thoughtful Protestant friends is narrower than the slogans suggest, and worth stating at full strength: they speak of faith as the sole instrument receiving Christ's imputed righteousness, with obedience as its necessary and inseparable fruit; the Catholic teaching is that in justification God truly infuses righteousness, so that charity belongs to living faith's very form. A real difference, honestly held on both sides, and far from either cartoon. Mark's first chapter stages the question perfectly: the demons know; the fishermen follow. Only one of those is living, saving faith.

Send (15 minutes)

1. What net is Jesus asking you to leave, not necessarily a job, but a habit, a grudge, a comfort, a plan you grip too tightly? What would "immediately" look like for you this week?
2. The leper asked to be made clean, not just cured. Is there a part of your life where you have settled for managing symptoms when Christ is offering restoration? What would it cost to ask him for the whole thing?

Live It This Week

- Claim your own 1:35: pick one morning this week to rise fifteen minutes early and pray before you speak to anyone or touch your phone. Just you, the Father, and tomorrow's Gospel passage.
- Pray Mark 1:15 as a nightly examen: Where did I hear the King today? Where do I need to turn (repent)? Where do I need to trust (believe)?
- The leper was healed by touch. Make contact this week with one person who is isolated, a text is fine, a visit is better.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord Jesus, you stretched out your hand and touched what everyone else avoided. Touch what is unclean in us. Teach us to pray before dawn, to follow before we feel ready, and to trust that your call is worth every net we leave behind. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (Together: one Our Father.)

Scripture Memory Verse

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15, RSV2CE)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Primary text: Mark 1:14-45

Every passage used this session, in order:

- Mark 1:14-15 (the kingdom proclamation)
- Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:13-14 (the kingdom background)
- Mark 1:16-20 (call of the four)
- 1 Kings 19:19-21 (Elijah calls Elisha)
- Mark 1:21-28 (synagogue exorcism; first silence command)
- Mark 1:29-31 (Simon's mother-in-law)
- Mark 1:32-34 (evening healings; demons silenced)
- Mark 1:35-39 (prayer before dawn; mission over popularity)
- Mark 1:40-45 (the leper)
- Leviticus 13:45-46 (the leper's exclusion)
- Leviticus 14 (priestly verification of cleansing, background)
- 2 Kings 5:1-7 (Naaman; only God cleanses leprosy)
- John 20:21-23 (leader background; institution of the ministry of forgiveness, previewed for Session 3)
- Acts 16:31; James 2:19; Galatians 5:6 (steelman chain)
- CCC 541-543, 1427-1429, 1503-1505, 1814-1816, 2602
- Memory verse: Mark 1:15