

Take-Home Sheet | Session 9

Listen to Him (Mark 9)

A Ransom for Many: A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Mark

What We Found

"And after six days", Mark's rare time-stamp opened a new Sinai: the cloud covered the mountain six days in Exodus 24, and on this mountain the Son stood transfigured, garments whiter than any fuller on earth could bleach, a glory the Church confesses as his own, where Moses' shone reflected and, as St. Paul reads it, fading (2 Corinthians 3). Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, stood talking with him, and when Peter proposed three booths, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, as though the three stood on a level, the cloud of glory answered: "This is my beloved Son; LISTEN TO HIM", the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15 pointed, with Moses himself as witness, at Jesus. At the baptism the voice spoke TO Jesus; on the mountain it spoke to US. And coming down, a thread snapped taut: "tell no one what you have seen, UNTIL the Son of Man should have risen from the dead." For the first time, the silence has an expiration date, and it is the Resurrection.

In the valley: nine disciples defeated, a boy convulsed, and a father who prayed the most honest prayer in Scripture, "I believe; help my unbelief!", and Jesus counted it as faith and healed his son. Some battles, he told them privately, are won only by prayer. Then, walking to Jerusalem behind a man predicting his own death, the Twelve argued about who was the greatest, and Jesus set a child in their midst: greatness is measured at the bottom: last of all, servant of all, welcoming one such child in his name, and in the child, the One who sent him. And he warned, with hyperbole only love could sharpen, that sin can cost everything: hell is real: not God's cruelty but definitive self-exclusion freely chosen (CCC 1033), the door, as Christian writers have put it, locked from the inside, warned against by the most loving voice that ever spoke.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Leo the Great (Sermon 51, on the Transfiguration)

The great purpose of the Transfiguration was to remove the scandal of the cross from the disciples' hearts: the excellence of his hidden dignity was revealed in advance so that the humiliation of his freely chosen Passion would not shake their faith. They were shown the glory once, so they could survive watching it veiled.

Voices of the Church: St. John Henry Newman (Apologia Pro Vita Sua)

"Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt." As his maxim is commonly unpacked, a difficulty is a question still being worked; a doubt, a verdict already rendered. The father who cried "I believe; help my unbelief!" was a believer with difficulties who brought them to exactly the right place, and Christ counted his prayer as faith.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew, Homily 58)

Christ installed the child's condition, free of the love of rank, simply receiving, as the entrance requirement of the kingdom. The itch to be greatest breeds division among Christians, and its one cure is the deliberate choice of the lowest place, after the pattern of the Master.

Live It This Week

- Make "I believe; help my unbelief!" your morning prayer for seven days, especially on the days you least feel like praying it.
- Listen to him, mechanically: pick one Gospel command you have been treating as optional and obey it this week, as your response to the Father's one instruction.
- Take the lowest place once, deliberately and secretly, and offer it for the person in your life most obsessed with rank (it may be you).

Scripture Memory Verse

"I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24, RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Mark 10. This study takes its title from one verse in this chapter; see if you can find it.

Catechism References

CCC 516, 554-556, 1033-1037, 2610