

Historic Commentary

(Fifth Sunday in Epiphany - Year B)



The Liturgy Letter

Commentary on Mark 1:29-39 from Selected Church Fathers

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on Mark 1](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the patristics and others.

[Jerome](#): Can you imagine Jesus standing before your bed and you continue sleeping? It is absurd that you would remain in bed in his presence. Where is Jesus? He is already here offering himself to us. "In the middle," he says, "among you he stands, whom you do not recognize." "The kingdom of God is in your midst." Faith beholds Jesus among us. If we are unable to seize his hand, let us prostrate ourselves at his feet. If we are unable to reach his head, let us wash his feet with our tears. Our repentance is the perfume of the Savior. See how costly is the compassion of the Savior. Our sins give off a terrible odor; they are rottenness. Nevertheless, if we repent of our sins, they will be transformed into perfume by the Lord. Therefore, let us ask the Lord to grasp our hand. "And at once," he says, "the fever left her." Immediately as her hand is grasped, the fever flees.

[Origen](#): Jesus prayed and did not pray in vain, since he received what he asked for in prayer when he might have done so without prayer. If so, who among us would neglect to pray? Mark says that "in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed." And Luke says, "He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray,' " and elsewhere, "And all night he continued in prayer to God." And John records his prayer, saying, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.' " The same Evangelist writes that the Lord said that he knew "you hear me always." All this shows that the one who prays always is always heard.

[Origen](#): And why did he touch him, since the law forbade the touching of a leper? He touched him to show that "all things are clean to the clean." Because the filth that is in one person does not adhere to others, nor does external uncleanness defile the clean of heart. So he touches him in his untouchability, that he might instruct us in humility; that he might teach us that we should despise no one, or abhor them, or regard them as pitiable, because of some wound of their body or some blemish for which they might be called to render an account.... So, stretching forth his hand to touch, the leprosy immediately departs. The hand of the Lord is found to have touched not a leper, but a

body made clean! Let us consider here, beloved, if there be anyone here that has the taint of leprosy in his soul, or the contamination of guilt in his heart? If he has, instantly adoring God, let him say: “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

Chrysostom: He did not simply say, “I will, be cleansed,” but he also “extended his hand, and touched him”—an act we do well to analyze. If he cleansed him merely by willing it and by speaking it, why did he also add the touch of his hand? For no other reason, it seems to me, than that he might signify by this that he is not under the hand of the law, but the law is in his hands. Hence to the pure in heart, from now on, nothing is impure. ... He touched the leper to signify that he heals not as servant but as Lord. For the leprosy did not defile his hand, but his holy hand cleansed the leprous body.

Ephrem the Syrian: “ ‘If you are willing, you can cleanse me.’ So he stretched out his hand.” In this stretching out of his hand he seemed to be abrogating the law. For [it is written] in the law that whoever approaches a leper becomes impure.... He showed that nature was good in that he repaired its defect. Because he sent him to the priests, he thereby upheld the priesthood. He also ordered him to make an offering for his cleansing. did he not thus uphold the law, as Moses had commanded? There were many prescriptions concerning leprosy. But they were unable to procure any benefit. Then the Messiah came, and, with his word, bestowed healing and abolished these many precepts which the law had reckoned should exist for leprosy.

Venerable Bede: In the performance of this miracle Jesus requested silence. Yet it did not remain concealed in silence for long. So it is with the called people of God—while following his precepts and example, they may prefer their responsible actions to remain unspoken, yet for the benefit of others providence may allow them to become known contrary to their own wishes.

Mark 1:34. He did not permit the devils to speak. There might be two reasons why he did not permit them: a general reason, because the time of the full revelation was not yet come; and a special reason, which we hinted at a little ago, that he refused to have, as heralds and witnesses of his divinity, those whose praise could have no other effect than to soil and injure his character. This latter reason is undoubtedly true: for he must have known, that the prince of death, and his agents, are in a state of irreconcilable enmity with the Author of eternal salvation and life.

Matthew 8:18 And when Jesus had seen great multitudes about him. Matthew, I have no doubt, touches briefly what the others explain in a more ample and copious narrative. The other two state a circumstance, which is not noticed by Matthew that Christ withdrew privately, for the sake of retirement, into a desert place, before it was daylight. Mark afterwards says, that Peter informed him, all seek, thee; and Luke says, that multitudes came to that place. Again, Matthew says, that he passed over to the other side, while the other two say, that he passed through all Galilee, to preach in every place. But the other side, or, the farther bank, (τὸ πέραν,) does not, I think, denote what was strictly the opposite side, but refers to that curvature of the lake, which was below Capernaum. In this way, he crossed over to another part of the lake, and yet did not go out of Galilee.

Mark 1:38. For on this account I came out. Luke 4:43. For on this account am I sent. These words deserve our attention: for they contain a declaration of his earnest desire to fulfill his office. But it will perhaps be asked, is it better that the ministers of the Gospel should run here and there, to give only a slight and partial taste of it in each place, or that they should remain, and instruct perfectly the hearers whom they have once obtained? I reply. The design of Christ, which is here mentioned, was agreeable to the injunction and call of the Father, and was founded on the best reasons. For it was necessary that Christ should travel, within a short period, throughout Judea, to awaken the minds of men, on all sides, as if by the sound of a trumpet, to hear the Gospel. But on this subject we must treat more fully under another passage.