

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Genesis 3: 9-15

Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

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Astrophysics tells us that the kind of matter of which the stars and planets are made – the kind of matter we can see and touch – makes up just five percent of the universe. Twenty-five percent of the universe is made up of dark matter. The remaining seventy percent is dark energy. No one knows what dark matter and dark energy are. Neither has ever been detected, let alone explained. Yet only by positing their existence can the math describing the way the universe behaves be made to work. So, the *seen* makes sense only in light of the unseen. What we can see is merely froth on the surface of what we cannot see.

These scientific claims are brought to mind by a passage in our first reading from 2 Corinthians, in which Paul proclaims, “We look not to what is *seen* but to what is *unseen*; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.” Let’s use Paul’s words about the relative value of the seen and unseen as a lens through which to interpret today’s Gospel.

Our Gospel reading is taken from the third chapter of Mark. A crowd has gathered around Jesus. Among the crowd are scribes who are desperate to explain away the miracles Jesus has been performing. They shout out, “‘He is possessed by Beelzebul,’ and ‘By the prince of demons he drives out demons.’” They make these charges against Jesus based on what they see before them. Lacking access to the big picture provided by faith in Jesus, they see only an ordinary man doing extraordinary things. Eager to account for what they see

without disturbing their pre-existing beliefs, they accuse our Lord of having “an unclean spirit.” In making this particular charge against Jesus, their blindness to the unseen has led the scribes perilously close to uttering the worst kind of blasphemy.

The spirit that Jesus has is the *Holy* Spirit. The love between the Father and the Son is perfect – so perfect that it *is* a person, the Holy Spirit, with whom it can be shared. The Holy Spirit, then, is the perfect love between the Father and the Son – the love that moves the sun and the other stars. In their blindness to the unseen, the scribes have called that spirit “unclean,” and Jesus has to warn them about the danger of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. It’s a textbook instance of “they know not what they do.” Clearly, basing our judgments on the seen to the exclusion of the unseen is misleading and dangerous.

Later in the Gospel passage, our Lord’s family appears on the fringe of the crowd. When he’s told of their arrival, he asks, “Who are my mother and brothers?” At the level of what is seen, the answer is obvious: “Those people over there.” But the eyes of faith reveal an even more profound relationship that is otherwise unseen: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” Here again, the unseen is crucial.

Both of these instances support St. Paul’s assertion that focusing on the seen to the exclusion of the unseen blinds us to what is eternal. If we are to cope adequately with the world around us, we need to see it with the eyes of faith. Only then will our understanding penetrate appearances sufficiently to grasp the truth. The patterns in the froth of the latte don’t tell us what’s under the foam.