

Wednesday 16th December, 2009.

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, 'The time has come' He said. "The time has come." Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Mark.

"The time has come," – for what? For battle. "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." Let the battle begin. This battle, and the Kingdom of God, are central themes in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's is a fast moving text – no birth narrative, no manger or shepherds or wise men – straight in. It's written to persecuted Christians in Rome in about 65AD, to those themselves in the midst of the battle. In Mark there are no long teaching passages as in Matthew, but a display of the sheer force and courage of Christ in His actions, as He puts Himself at the service of the sick, the hurt, the broken, the lost, folk like you and I, and sacrifices Himself for the them and, by this, conquers people's hearts and lives for God – from whom? From the enemy. The enemy is mentioned straightaway almost – in verse thirteen only of the first chapter. It's not Herod, or Caesar, or Pontius Pilate, or Caiaphas, but Satan. The others are merely pawns about whom Satan cares nothing – like you and me. For him, we're pawns only, idiots, mere mechanisms by which he can promote chaos, sorrow and noise, within ourselves and within the lives of others if we let him. He is our enemy.

The real battle in Mark is with the Devil. As St. Peter puts it in his first letter *"Be*

sober, be vigilant, for the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.” He wants my heart, my mind, and my body with its lips and ears and eyes and tongue, and hands and feet and arms, all at his service. He seeks only to spread chaos and to do damage, and as in John the Baptist’s case, to imprison, to silence, and eventually to murder the good. He wants you, solely for that purpose. That’s the bad news. The good news is – so does Christ, and the really good news is that no matter how badly Satan wants us, and he does, Christ wants us infinitely more. It isn’t a 50–50 gamble now who wins this battle. The really good news of the gospel texts is that the battle is already won by Christ’s gift of Himself on the cross, absorbing and annihilating in Himself the worst that Satan can do, and in His rising out from it robbing him of any ultimate victory. The ultimate victory belongs to Christ. The real point is, am I going to associate my life, immerse my life, in this victory or not; because I can choose. The battle has been decisively and conclusively won, but the truth of that must extend to me, to my life, to the basics of my everyday life, to what I say, think, and do, and through me to others, that’s my choice. This is precisely what the sacraments do for us, and tonight we are going to celebrate the sacrament specifically associated with this battle. The sacraments immerse us in Christ and in His victory. In them we meet Him.

Jesus saw in John’s arrest and murder not simply the vengeance of Herod’s wife, but the hatred of the one behind her actions. Jesus knew that He Himself was the real enemy of the one he had just dismissed in the desert and who was now after Him with a vengeance. The vengeance of Herodias was a mere cover for the hatred of Satan.

Remember two weeks ago I was speaking to you about chronos and kairos, chronos being ordinary time, clock time so to speak, and kairos being significant time, the time for change, for decision. Suffering, hardship, and grief, can bring us to a kairos moment. The news of John’s arrest must have hurt Jesus. It brought Him to announce the moment of engagement in the battle. What matters here regarding

this battle, is not simply that He engaged, but that He sought to engage others with Him. In Mark's text, just after announcing that the time has come, Jesus calls others to be with Him to be sent by Him. *"The Kingdom is near....."* He asks others to join Him in announcing this. How? By their lives. How by their lives? *"Repent and believe in the gospel,"* Jesus teaches us to engage with Himself in the battle against all that is evil. As we say in the prayer He gave us '.....deliver us from evil.'

And that is why it is good to reflect on the first words of Mark this evening as we celebrate together the sacrament of reconciliation. Two thoughts I would like to leave you with as we prepare to do this. Firstly, in our darkest moments, when everything seems to have gone wrong and shouldn't be as it is, when we've acted, spoken or thought sinfully, in other words when we've forgotten which side of the battle we're on and neglected the teaching of Jesus, precisely then we are open to hearing those words: *"The time has come."* We are here now because we sense in our conscience that the good in us has been arrested. *"The time has come."* Now Jesus calls us back by name. He knows that we've been conned, arrested by some foreign power who seeks to imprison us and injure us, and murder the good within us, so He proclaims within us: *"The time has come, the Kingdom is near."* He says to us now: *"I am in your midst, a mighty warrior you have nothing more to fear."* He tells us we are destined by Him to have a greater more loving heart. He wants for us a deeper more secure spirit, a braver and more generous life – *"Repent and believe it,"* He says.

The second thing I want to mention is that I cannot believe in Him, in what He believes about me, without repentance. It can't take a deep root in me without repentance. And to repent is to make a specific declaration about which side of the battle I am on, for as He Himself has said, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."* You cannot negotiate with Satan – you will lose. He will entangle us little by little, persuading us that our misdemeanours are as innocent and as harmless and as inconsequential as only he

can persuade us they are – not worth mentioning, as long as in the end our loyalty remains divided, because then, through us, his hatred for Christ and His Kingdom can continue, never mind how small, it's there and it's there because we have let it be. He loves secrecy, he works in the dark. But the moment you kneel, the moment you open your heart and confess, the moment you seek forgiveness you claim for yourself a power and a freedom over which he has no dominion, you claim your own place in the Kingdom which he cannot take from you; you claim Christ's victory. The benefits of this sacrament are enormous. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation especially:

(a) You meet Christ face to face. He presides at every sacrament; it's Him you come to.

(b) You already are carrying Him in your heart; there is no need to fear. Remember Zephaniah's words last Sunday. *"The Lord is in your midst, a mighty warrior; you have no more evil to fear."* Otherwise you couldn't be repentant.

(c) By confessing your sins you are making a clear, fundamental, decision to fight with Him against evil in yourself and in the world. The problems aren't simply over there, in the Middle East, or in other people or wherever, because the world is in me too. The problems over there are in here also. Therefore if I acknowledge them in myself then their healing in me really does bring peace to others. By dealing with myself, with Christ, I can get a handle, no matter how small, on what troubles the world. You receive the victory for yourself, but for others also.

(d) Through this sacrament you bring greater peace and harmony to all your relationships and are a fresh agent therefore of peace in the world.

(e) After going to confession, and receiving His absolution, you are like a clean bright sword in the hands of Christ, freshly drawn from its scabbard to slay the evil one.

Do any of Satan's lies that our sins don't really matter, even remotely compare with what Christ promises He can do with those who turn to Him in repentance? *"All the angels rejoice over one who returns,"* Jesus says. It must be pretty important then mustn't it? They know the battle of course, the angels, they know the enemy. They know the consequences of listening to Satan and they know what it cost to defeat him, and what that victory offers. They encourage us now to share in this victory that Christ has one, uniquely, for each one of us.

The Blessed Sacrament will now be brought to the altar, and during the period of adoration there will be the opportunity for individual confession..... With Fr. Piotr and myself there will be the opportunity for confession both in English and in Polish.

Jeśli mozesz mówić tylko po polsku wtedy oczywiście dla Polaków będzie okazji dla spowiedzi z Ojcem Piotrem i ze mną. Będziemy wolni dla spowiedzi po angielsku i po polsku też.