

Weekly Gospel Readings

The 3rd Sunday of Mesore

Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

On this Sunday (08/27/23), the third Sunday of Mesore, the Church reads from [Mark 3:22-35](#). This reading unfolds shortly after Christ had performed remarkable signs and wonders. While performing miracles, the Scribes and Pharisees level various accusations against Him, including the claim that He was possessed by Beelzebub.

Hilary of Poitiers observes that “the Pharisees' jealousy escalated.” When they faced Christ's remarkable deeds that surpassed human limitations, they avoided admitting His divine nature by “committing a greater wickedness of treachery.” They were unable to attribute His works to a man, so “they refused to confess them of God, and claimed that all of his power against demons was from Beelzebub, the prince of demons.” This illustrates to us that the nature of jealousy blinds us from God's goodness and the inherent goodness He has instilled in others.

In response, Jesus employs parables to explain to the Pharisees that He cannot be possessed. He presents the analogy that a divided house cannot stand, and Satan, divided against himself, would be brought to destruction. This concept holds spiritual significance. Just as a house refers to a dwelling, our bodies, referred to as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" ([1 Cor 6:19](#)) by St Paul, must remain undivided in their love. Jesus underscores this by emphasizing the impossibility of serving two masters since “you will either hate the one and love the other” ([Mt 6:24](#)). St Augustine further explains that while one may not hate God, disregarding Him and presuming on His goodness constitutes a danger we must avoid.

Jesus then explains that “no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.” ([Mk 3:27](#)). Our Lord Christ here is proclaiming His authority as a conqueror over the devil. St. Cyril the Great interprets this verse, stating that the term "strong man" refers to Satan, while his "house" symbolizes his dominion on earth. The "property" within this analogy represents those following Satan's lead. In parallel comparison, just as the Saints are referred to as "sanctified vessels and consecrated garments," the ones following the devil can be termed "the devil's vessels and attire," as they “partake of his evil and guile.”

Turning to the topic of forgiveness, Jesus then proclaims that all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This verse is often misconstrued but can be clarified by the Church Fathers, who explain that while blaspheming against the Holy Spirit is forgivable, persistence in unrepentant sin is not.

At the end of the passage, the multitude informs Jesus that His mother and brothers are outside looking for Him. His response, however, is somewhat confusing, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, this is My brother, and sister, and mother” ([Mk 3:34-35](#)). Nevertheless, many Church Fathers explain this verse to mean that we can be like "mothers," “brothers,” and “sisters” to Jesus through preaching Him. St John Chrysostom notes that Jesus is presenting a new concept of relating to Him, not through physical relationship by flesh and blood, but rather by doing the will of God, His Father.

May we learn to hate unrepentance and jealousy, love God wholeheartedly, fill ourselves with the presence of God, and preach Jesus as that is His will.

Sources:

- Bible, English Standard Version
- Hilary, and Daniel H. Williams. Commentary on Matthew. Catholic University of America Press, 2013.
- Schaff, Philip. NPNF1-06. St. Augustine: Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels. Christian Classics Ethereal Library
- Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty Commentary on Mark