

“What do you want from Jesus?” Mark 1:29-39

And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

What do you want from Jesus? What do we as a congregation want from Jesus? This is not a small question. Not at all. Because how we answer this question determines a lot.

For example, it determines how we understand what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a congregation, what to say and what to do, when we try to bring others to Jesus, etc.

But we also need to remember this, – whatever we want from Jesus, whatever we hope for, what He has prepared for you is much, much more. For He is who He is, true man, yes, but also true God.

It is He, through whom everything was created that there is. It is in Him, that everything still holds together. And now it is Him, who has gone to prepare a place for you, and we cannot even imagine what a place it will be.

Actually, we can a little bit. For He has revealed what it will be like through His servant John: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth [...] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God [...] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev 21:1-5)

Besides, our God really wants you to be there and to enjoy everything that He has prepared. He wants it so much, that He was ready to sacrifice His own life, to suffer terrible death, so that only He could have you with Him. Whatever we want from Jesus, whatever we hope for, the reality of our life with our God will be much more beautiful.

In our today's Gospel reading, and in every Gospel account that describes Jesus' ministry, we can distinguish two kinds of activities. One is healing and casting out demons, the other was preaching and teaching.

Let's reflect a little bit on these two, and let's see what Jesus' take on these two was, and how His disciples and the people thought about them. It should help us to clarify what we should be expecting from our Lord Jesus.

Let's take the healing and casting out demons part first. We can see it in all four Gospel accounts that Jesus cared for people, that He tried to help them as much as He could. That often He spent hours and hours healing the sick, until He Himself was totally exhausted.

What was people's reaction? They really appreciated it. They really wanted to be healed, to get well. We can see from the testimonies in the Gospels, that there were thousands and thousands who streamed to Jesus, they wanted to be healed, they wanted to be freed from demon possession.

And what about the disciples of Jesus? We can see it even in our today's reading. They were quick to learn, – whenever their Master heals and casts out demons, people gather in great crowds.

So, what should they do? They need to focus on what brings people in. This is, why Peter and others went looking for Jesus. Mark, the author of this account, even uses the expression “they hunted Him”.

“Everyone is looking for you.” Let's go, so many have come to you. They want what you can give them. They want to be healed, they want to be well. The disciples were not stupid, they saw what worked well, and they wanted to build on that. Makes perfect sense, right?

The same is true today. People want to go where they can receive what they want. And what they want are often the same things. They want to be healed, they want to get well, they want to have good lives.

And if you can offer these things, if you can at least persuade people that in your congregation they will find these things, they will come. Look at all the largest congregations that gather thousands and thousands.

What do they preach? What do they offer? What is their focus? Giving people what they want. We can easily fall into this trap. The disciples, the apostles did. So many have fallen for this idea. Just give people what they want.

Give them what is important for their lives today, and they will come. It is rather safe a recipe, it works. And don't burden them with what they don't want to hear. Thus, many of these preachers of well-being avoid talking about sin, about repentance, about taking your cross and following Jesus, lest they scare people away. And... they gather great crowds.

Let me ask you, – are all these things needed, like healing and casting out demons, or we could generalize saying, – caring for your neighbor? What is the answer? Of course, yes. This is what the 5th Commandment teaches us.

To care for our neighbors in all their physical needs. This is what Jesus did. According to His abilities. This is what we all are called to do, to care for our neighbors, to serve them according to our abilities.

This isn't anything particularly Christian. All people are created to care for one another, and you don't need to be a Christian to do it. It is simple human. This is what we as a congregation also do, we pray for healing and for spiritual well-being of our brothers and sisters and of all people.

It is interesting, but according to a high standing official in Pentecostal church, it is among us, that is, in sacramental churches where most healings take place. And it makes perfect sense, for that is in the Sacrament, where we receive the very body and blood of the Holy God, where He shares with us His holiness, for He is the very source of all life and health and well-being, of all good things.

Except, we don't make a big deal about the cases of healing. It is not our focus. Why? For it wasn't Jesus' focus either. What did He reply to Peter, when Peter together with others 'hunted' Him down? "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Let's talk about this other part of Jesus ministry, – preaching and teaching. That was clear that when it came to healing and casting out demons, these activities gathered great crowds. What about preaching and teaching?

We can see a different picture. Suddenly Jesus wasn't giving people what they wanted, but what they needed. What was their reaction? John describes in His Gospel account one of these occasions where great crowds followed Jesus, and then He begun to teach them.

As Jesus was teaching them, not only people who came for healing, but even many of His disciples one after another left Him. Some said: "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" (John 6:60)

This is how majority reacted to Jesus' teaching. Too hard. Pastors hear it from time to time as well. Too hard, too heavy... who can listen to it? Too much about Jesus, too little about us. Why wouldn't we give people what they want, why wouldn't we preach and teach about what people want? Then they would come... more would come.

Those who wanted to hear what Jesus was teaching always were few, much less that the great crowds that wanted to get well. The same has been true throughout the history, and the same is true today.

There are these words of Jesus that help us to understand a lot. He said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44) It is meaningless at best, to try to attract people giving or promising or teaching them what they want. This is not why we are here.

Jesus was very clear about His mission. He had come to preach the Good News. He has brought us the words of eternal life. This is what the Church is about. The Good News from God Himself. To heal, or to pray for healing, these are

good things, we need to do it, sure. But we also know what happened with those many thousands whom Jesus healed, and what will happen with those who are healed thanks to our prayers. At the end, they all die.

That's right. But only those few who listen to Jesus' message, who gladly receive the words of eternal life, will live again in new, resurrected bodies with our Lord forever.

Those were few. Even today we still are a little flock. Jesus Himself asked His disciples: "Do you want to leave me too?" And what did they say? "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)

Brothers and sisters, we are blessed beyond measure, and we should be grateful, for we are here, we haven't left. Because we know that 'You, Jesus, have the words of eternal life.' The Triune God still gathers His chosen people, He still speaks to us His words of forgiveness and reconciliation.

He still speaks to us His words of love and acceptance, He still tells us what He has done for us and what He has prepared for us, He still send His Spirit, our Helper, into our hearts, and He still feeds us with His holy meal, He gives us to eat and to drink forgiveness and eternal life. Right here.

This is the place and the setting where we receive the words of eternal life. And we are here. Remember, "no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." You are here, which means – the Father is drawing you to Him.

You are not here because you chose Jesus, but because He has chosen you. And what blows our minds away, – He has chosen you before the creation of the world. The Father knew that He will call you through Jesus.

And now Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you in His Father house. These are the things that we shall hope for, nothing less. In Jesus' own words: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all the [other] things will be added to you." (Mat 6:33)

So, what do we want from Jesus? Our God is kind and patient to remind us where our focus, where our hope should be. What He desires to give you, what He has prepared for you, what awaits you is much greater that we can imagine.

I pray today that we all long in our hearts for what Jesus wants for us. I pray that we do not forget why we are here, – we are not here to please people giving or telling them what they want, but what they truly need.

We are here to share with them this wonderful hope and to help them to see the greatness of the promises that are given to all who remain with Jesus in His community of saints. The day will come, and it is not far from us, when these wonderful promises will become our reality. Forever. Let's stay with Jesus. Amen.