

We are helped (Mr1:12-15)

* Friends, when you listen to or read my sermons, you might have a feeling that I missed something important you would like to hear. So, you should know that the richness of the meaning from any text I am going to preach can not be exhausted in a sermon as long as 15 minutes. Next, you noticed my writings usually carry one topic, a few thesis- antithesis and their supporting ideas, plus the introduction and conclusion. According the old Lutheran tradition, a sermon should carry a Christ-centered message. And last of all, when you read my sermons I plea to you to focus on the God's breathed-Word as the primary thing, and then, on my English. Certainly with God's help we can do many things including English, self-control and self-evaluation. So, I cry to the Lord for help. Dear Heavenly Father, through your Son Jesus Christ You promised us help in time of need. O Lord, have mercy on me; please make my sermons meaningful and improve my English. I also pray for your people in attendance. Have mercy on them in all areas of their spiritual needs. Thank you Father. Amen.

* In fact, today's Gospel reading is short compared with other Sunday readings. On account of Jesus' temptations Mark speaks briefly. It says, "He was in the wilderness forty days, enduring temptations from Satan. He was with wild animals, and angels were ministering to his needs," (v.13). Mark doesn't provide information, as, for example is found in Matthew or Luke. Mark doesn't tell about the time of temptations or what kind of temptations they were. The second paragraph of our text is also short; it tells a little about the ministering of the Gospel. "The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news," (v.15). But in spite of its shortness this text is very informative. Reflecting on this statement, Shakespeare's Hamlet says, "Brevity is the soul of wit."

* According Mark, after baptizing, the Holy Spirit forcefully led Jesus into the wilderness. The original language of this Gospel says that the Spirit literally expelled Jesus into this land. For 40 days and nights he remained in the desolate land without food. The sky was his shelter and the rocky ground was his bed. Sometimes the roar of a lion awoke him at night or a harmless asp ran across his steps when he went down to a creek. The scorching heat from sun at afternoon and cold breath from crystal sky at the night deeply

discomforted him. He was like a scapegoat punished for the transgressions of the people of Israel. And really he was the One, the Messiah, who carried sins of the entire world, (1Jn 2:2).

* Have you ever asked yourselves, “Why did the Father lead Jesus to suffer in the wilderness?” Probably, in order to demonstrate Jesus’ deity over flesh and devil.” Or the wilderness experiences were necessary in order to shape his character, faith and confidence. These ideas are worthy to preach. But I want to launch for you something special, something you might have never heard. So, let’s start.

* M. Luther says that our theology is the theology of the Cross. He says, the hidden God became knowledgeable through his suffering and death on the Cross. By the way; what is the cross? I am pretty sure many of you right away imagine a wood construction on which the Romans punished criminals and rebels, like the one on which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. The cross also might be perceived as a heavy burden of circumstance or affliction. Therefore the cross is always associated with suffering and death. Once Jesus said to his disciples, “...whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me,” (Mat 10:38).

When Jesus used this picture of his followers taking up their crosses to follow him, the disciples knew what he meant. First, the Jews had become familiar with crucifixion since the days of Antiochus Epiphanes when 800 Pharisees were crucified. Second, it was the custom for the condemned person to carry his own cross. The early Church understood the cross as one’s willingness to publicly identify himself with Christ and to be willing to face even suffering and death for his sake. The historical record of the first centuries says that thousands who carried their crosses desired more to die instead of deny.

* We are living in the country of religious freedom; we may not be afraid of persecution. It seems the phrase, “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me,” doesn’t have sense for Americans. Nevertheless, the meaning of the cross in (Lk 9:23) expands beyond crucifixion. This text says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me.” There is no mistake in translation. Thus KJV, RSV, Phillips, NEB translations speak like that: ‘take up his cross daily,’ ‘take up his cross every day,’ ‘take up his cross day after day.’ In the light of this revelation we should accept the idea of the cross neither more nor less than to live by serving the Lord’s purposes for all our lives.

When we were identified with Christ in our baptism, then, his physical body became ours, his Tempter and oppressors also became ours. That's why grief, torment and pain continue. Spiritual trials, struggle of conscience, sorrows and anguish continue.

* Now thinking back to Mark, we see Jesus leading by the Spirit -- not to die but to win the battle against the flesh, beasts, and Satan. Christ did it perfectly! Christ did it for us! Nobody except Jesus could pass the 40 day's trial that can be called *the Cross of the Wilderness*. Moreover, nobody, except Jesus, could win the battle against flesh, Satan and 'beasts' on the second cross of the Calvary. We believe that in virtue of our identification with Christ's suffering -- his resurrection will be ours as well. "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too," (2Co 1:5).

* As the disciples of Jesus Christ we are called to take up our crosses personally. The Scripture doesn't teach that Jesus took our crosses. Of course he took, but our transgressions, not our crosses. We shouldn't fail to understand this truth! The disciples continue the battle against their sinful flesh, the Tempter and ungodly people as a mark of bearing their daily cross. The major point is that we are not alone in this battle; Jesus helps us carry our crosses in many ways. The Father's Spirit leads us through the wilderness of this world to celebrate with Him the glory to the world to come. He helps us to win the battle against the flesh, Satan and oppressors. Christ's love was poured out in our hearts so abundantly that with confidence we can say, "... that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord," (Rom 8:39). Amen