

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 3:20-35

Jesus came to the house with his disciples; and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

REFLECTION 1: "FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES"

Hannah Jones is a widow living out her life in a town in the Midlands in England. In the 1980s her only daughter Emma was sexually assaulted and murdered. Emma's partially covered body was discovered after a search in scrubland and the assailant was eventually apprehended, found guilty and imprisoned for life. Hannah however, could not find it in her heart to forgive the one who slayed her only child. Her heart was filled with hatred for the man. Those who knew Hannah well noticed that her character and personality were gradually being destroyed. The once bubbly, cheerful personality was now introverted and seething with loathing and venom. One morning as Hannah was waiting to hear the morning news, she chanced to hear 'Thought for the Day' where the speaker spoke of Jesus' forgiveness from the cross. She thought a lot about it. Passing by a bookstore that afternoon there were bibles displayed in the window and in spite of her feelings, she went in and purchased a copy. That night she wrote a note of forgiveness on the fly-leaf of the Bible and posted it the next day to the murderer of her daughter.

That action changed not only Hannah's life, but the life of the prisoner as well. The prisoner who was previously sullen and bitter, sent word to Hannah that she had opened the door to a new world for him. Her forgiveness made him realise, for the first time since the crime, that God would forgive him if he asked. Before he received her note, he had all but despaired that God would ever forgive him. He had even contemplated committing suicide in his prison cell. Hannah's note made him understand that if she could forgive him, then God would forgive him also. I think the story dramatises an important point found in today's reading the sinfulness present in our world.

Crimes like murder remind us that Satan is still very active in our world, just as he was in Jesus' time. It makes us ask the question; if Jesus established God's kingdom on earth, then why is Satan's kingdom, with all its evil, still present in our world? The answer is that God's kingdom has indeed been established on earth, but the sad fact is that Satan's Kingdom has not yet been extinguished on Earth.

In other words, the coming of God's kingdom on earth is not an instant happening, but rather, a gradual process. It is not a one-time event, but an ongoing movement. That is why we still pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come". The kingdom of God is like a plant - it is alive and growing, but it has not

yet borne its intended fruit and until it does, evil will always be with us. The kingdom of Satan has not yet come to an end - it is only under sentence of death.

When Jesus spoke of a sin against the Holy Spirit that could not be forgiven in today's Gospel, he was speaking of those who despaired of being forgiven by God. That prisoner was on the verge of convincing himself that God couldn't, and wouldn't, forgive his terrible crime. It was into this plight that he was rapidly slipping. Thanks to Hannah's own forgiveness, the situation was reversed in time.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", we might very well ask ourselves what we are doing in our daily lives about forgiveness? I think that today's readings are inviting us not merely to pray the words of the Our Father, but also to live them out like Hannah in our daily lives. It may take time, as it took a while for Hannah. Today for us may well be the time to begin; "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us".

Through a sincere prayer for forgiveness it is God himself who, through his Holy Spirit, changes our hearts - we have only to trust him that he will do it and he will.