

I think this is the passage of scripture – outside of daily prayer – that I hear most often. It is almost always used when children are baptised. And always I am struck by the beauty of the words, and how empowering they are – even for us. For in Christ, through baptism, we become children of God, members of the Body of Christ, and we too are beloved of God. We are not worthy – like John we are not worthy to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals, but this is the Lord who kneels down to wash our feet. We are beloved.

There are two moments in Mark's Gospel when we are told of a voice that speaks from heaven.

The first is the one we hear today – at Jesus' baptism; the second is at the transfiguration. Two very different moments. The first is at the very start of Jesus' public life and ministry. The second marks the end of the beginning, and the beginning of the end, in a sense – it comes at the threshold of Mark's account of Jesus' Passion and Death.

At the first – the Baptism – the voice speaks from heaven to Jesus.

At the second – the transfiguration – the voice from heaven speaks to us.

In the first the voice speaks beautiful words to Jesus: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

With those words ringing in Jesus' ears Mark next tells us that Jesus leaves John and the Jordan and goes into the wilderness. And the next words he hears are from the tempter Satan.

Jesus overcomes Satan and then returns to his people to share beautiful words with them. The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.

Mark does not tell us of how Jesus vanquished Satan. Just that he does. Mark is doubtful about dwelling on the glory of what Jesus achieves. It is enough that he does it. Mark is cautious because he knows – through St Peter his teacher – how easy it is to get puffed up by associating ourselves with the success that we are ill prepared for dealing with the struggles that also come when we live faithfully, close to Jesus.

Mark was disciple of Peter, and Peter made sure that Mark passed on to us accounts of Peter's own struggles, indeed failings, because we need to be prepared for these, to be honest and realistic about

our struggles and failings. So they will not lead us to despair, but lead us to the Lord. Again and again we need to be led to the Lord. To listen to him and learn from him.

In that story of the Transfiguration, the voice from heaven speaks again – this time not to Jesus but to the disciples, and to all disciples always.

And the voice says of Jesus: 'This is my Son, listen to him,' In Mark's Gospel so often the disciples fail to listen to him. And so with us, maybe. So we are reminded. The one who encouraged and supported Jesus at his baptism for what lies ahead also encourages and supports us for what lies ahead. And we can be sure what lies ahead for us in the next months is going to be tough. 'This is my Son, listen to him,'

In two weeks time it may be that there will be a tightening of lockdown and we cannot come to Mass. But if we can, please bring a bible. That Sunday is the Sunday of the Word proposed by Pope Francis for the Church to keep every year, to acknowledge the importance of scripture.

In 2 weeks time bring the book of scripture from which you most regularly read – so it might be a bible, or it might be a Sunday Missal, or even your mobile phone. From whatever you most regularly read Scripture – and there will be a special blessing of that book or phone or whatever; **and most of all a blessing of you**. A blessing, a prayer that all of us might receive a fresh opening of heart and mind so that we all of us may still more deeply obey the Father and listen to Jesus: Jesus who will never be separated from us - whatever the level of lockdown - for in his eyes, and in his Father's eyes, **we** are truly beloved, truly favoured.

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