

**Reflection on the Gospel-10th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
(Mark 3:20-35)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Name calling is an age old device used to discredit enemies. Politicians are adept at finding labels with which to discredit their opponents. Sometimes the labels stick and often have the effect of destroying good people. In today's gospel, Jesus is subjected to the worst of all imaginable taunts or labels: he is said to be possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. The story belongs within a trajectory of growing hostility towards him from the authorities.

Mark has presented Jesus as the Christ or Messiah, as God's Son who is authorised to usher in God's empire of reconciliation and peace. Jesus is the "stronger one" (1:7) who will destroy the powers of evil. He invites others to join him in his mission of healing, of proclaiming God's reign and of driving out demons. Those on the edge of Palestinian society flock to him for healing. The religious authorities, on the other hand, find themselves challenged, even threatened, by Jesus' growing popularity and his perceived challenge to their strict interpretation of aspects of the Mosaic Law. Such practices as dining with those considered to be "sinners" and permitting his hungry disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath, for instance, are met with hostile responses from the religious authorities.

For Jesus, always the faithful Jew, the Law was established for humans, not humans for the Law and he is not afraid to say so. Early in his ministry, opposition has built to a point that traditional enemies, the Pharisees and the Herodians, join forces to find a way of destroying him. The surprise is that members of Jesus' biological family now get involved in the attempts to put a halt to his mission, even if their motives differ from those of the Jerusalem "scribes" who bring the charge of demon-possession. One factor to consider is that the family's honour is at stake. Another factor is the family's concern that Jesus and his disciples were failing to take care of themselves. The demands were such that "they could not even eat". Even if well-motivated, they want "to seize him" because they consider him to be "out of his mind". Jesus' biological family thus falls into the trap of taking responsibility for him instead of supporting him to pursue his dream.

Mark often places a story within a story. In this instance, the story within is the challenge from the scribes and of Jesus' powerful counter-challenge. The outer frame consists of the efforts of Jesus' biological family to save their honour by saving him from a crazy lifestyle and by his redefining of his "family" as those "who do the will of God". This complex story invites us to refrain from labelling those who threaten our status or authority. They may just happen to be agents of God's transforming grace for us and for our world