

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Mark 3:20-35

The kids, 8 to 11 years old, are playing baseball, and the coach is getting frustrated. At one point during a game, he says to one of his young players, "Do you understand what cooperation is? What a team is?"

The little boy nods in the affirmative. "Do you understand that what matters is not whether we win or lose, but that we do it together as a team?" Once again, the kid nods. Yes, he understands.

"So," the coach continues, "when a strike is called, or you're out at first, you don't argue or curse or attack the umpire. Do you understand all that?"

Again, the little boy nods. "Good," says the coach. "Now go over there and explain it to your parents."

To dream the impossible dream! Reading the Gospels, one might well conclude that to be a follower of Jesus Christ is to pursue the impossible dream.

The Author Lewis Carroll's masterpiece, "Through the Looking Glass," includes the following exchange between Alice and the Queen:

"I can't believe that!" says Alice.

"Can't you?" the Queen replies in a tone dripping with pity. "Try again, draw a deep breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughs. "There's no use trying," she says. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," says the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner, morning, noon and night, Jesus calls His followers to pursue His vision of the way things ought to be.

And they who answer His call, soon begin to wonder if they're pursuing the impossible dream. In any case, they soon discover that following Jesus is a risky business -- as we can plainly see in today's Gospel Lesson.

Although it is still early in Jesus' public ministry, nevertheless the things He is saying and doing already are rankling the Religious Establishment.

In general, the crowds Jesus is attracting are impressed with His power to heal and to "cast out devils." But the religious authorities see Him as a dangerous non-conformist, a potential threat to their authority.

They seem convinced that Jesus' power comes from the "Evil One." The Scribes from Jerusalem are saying, "Beelzebub is in Him. It is through the prince of devils that He casts devils out".

Moreover, when Jesus' own relatives hear of the things He is saying and doing, they think He has gone bananas. As the Gospel writer puts it, "... they set out to take charge of Him, convinced He was out of His mind."

If this seems a bit weird, try making a list of some of the risks Jesus asks us to take in our relationships with others. Then show it to some people who know you well, even some close relatives.

Tell them you are going to live in this manner. For example, tell them you are going to strictly follow Jesus' instruction for achieving greatness:

"... anyone who wants to become great among you, must be your servant," Jesus says to His disciples, "and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all".

And don't be surprised if they seem convinced that you have gone bananas, that you are out of your mind.

Some popular preachers today seem to be saying that we need only to "think positively" or to have some kind of traumatic religious experience, and everything will be fine and dandy, and we can let the rest of the world go by.

Some popular "self-help" authors seem to be saying that we need to become hard-nosed "realists." They tell us to set aside our dreams and abandon our visions in order to come to terms with the "real world."

But it so happens that their "real world" mentality has led us into quagmires of wars and social injustice and fierce competitiveness.

The Biblical truth is this: "Where there is no vision the people perish." There is a great vision, a mystical vision that informs and shapes our engagement with the world as a Christian people.

We gather together around the Table of the Lord. We come to the mountaintop. We experience the Lord's Presence in our midst. But He is not here to tell us that everything is right with the world and we do well to conform to its standards.

Rather, He invites us to partake in the Mystery of the Cross. He invites us to follow Him and accept the consequences -- even at the risk of convincing others that we are "out of our minds."

He recruits us for the purpose of revealing His vision of a "new heaven and a new earth".

Because we have been to the mountaintop and we have seen the vision of all things new in Jesus Christ, we must "stand firm in the Lord," St. Paul tells us.

Stand firm against the proposition that "everything will be all right if only you think everything is all right."

Stand firm against the proposition that the highest goal in life is the satisfaction of all your natural hungers.

Stand firm against the proposition that your day begins and ends with looking out for "Number One."

A wise physician once said, "I have been practicing Medicine for thirty years, and I have prescribed many things. But in the long run, I have learned that for most of the ills of the human creature, the best medicine is patient understanding of another's problems."

When someone asked him, "What if that doesn't work?" he replied, "Double the dose!"

As St. Paul has prescribed, "Put on love!" And if that doesn't work, "Double the dose!" And even if it seems to others that you're out of your mind, the peace of Christ will reign in your hearts!

Dream the impossible dream. Amen.