

EP THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. 27 MARK 6:1-29

Jesus and the Disciples returned to Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, about 20 miles from Capernaum. We would think that the people of Nazareth — a town so insignificant that St. Nathan'a-el asked when he first heard of Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" — would be thrilled that one of their people had "made good," and was empowered by God to teach and work miracles. Instead, the Nazarenes distrusted Jesus precisely because of His background. The people were jealous: they couldn't accept Jesus' power and authority because they resented the fact that someone they knew had this power, but they did not.

Unfortunately for the Nazarenes, their distrust prevented Jesus from working the same sorts of miracles that He worked elsewhere. Jesus could have healed the sick Nazarenes — as God, He could heal them regardless of whether they wanted to be healed—but He wouldn't force His healing upon them when they refused to accept Him as the healer. According to Abba Chaermeon, one of the Desert Fathers, "The bounty of God is actually curtailed temporarily according to the receptivity of our faith."

The Gospel accounts of Jesus sending the twelve Disciples out to evangelize and heal (Matthew 10:5-11:1; Luke 9:1-6) give different descriptions of what the Disciples were allowed to take with them, but they all have one thing in common: the Disciples were to "travel light," taking neither money nor food with them. St. John Chrysostom, in his commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, explains that Jesus "was answering many good purposes; first setting His disciples above suspicion; secondly, freeing them from

all care, so that they might give all their leisure to the word; thirdly, teaching them His own power."

Notice what Jesus commissioned and empowered the Disciples to do: exorcise demons (vs. 7), preach the Kingdom of God so that people would repent (vs. 12; see 1:14-15), and heal the sick (vs. 13). This is the same ministry in which they saw Christ engage: a ministry of restoring humanity to God.

When we look at the circumstances of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, we are shocked by the disgusting details: a fearless prophet is killed by a vicious ruler to fulfill the promise he made to his shameless daughter (in Jewish culture, only a woman with low morals would have danced to entertain partygoers) at the request of his wife (whom he stole from his brother). It is easy for us to read this story and ask, "Where is God in this injustice?" St. John Chrysostom answers this question: "Do not say, 'Why was John allowed to die?' For what occurred was not a death, but a crown, not an end, but the beginning of a greater life. Learn to think and live like a Christian. You will not only remain unharmed by these events, but will reap the greatest benefits."

On August 29th the Church celebrates the Beheading of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John. Orthodox Christians fast on this day to remind us that our lifestyle is different than that of Herod. Many Orthodox Christians also do not use plates on this day (because St. John's head was served on a platter), or eat food cut with a knife (because a sharp instrument was used to behead him).

A QUICK TIP FOR YOUR LIFE

HONOR JESUS

Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." Do you honor Christ?

We saw in Mark 2 that the Church is the bride of Christ. You are also a son or daughter of God. Furthermore, Jesus promises to make His home in every person who loves Him.

Since you are all these things, you need to ask yourself: Do I honor Jesus, do I love and respect Him, or do I live in ways that do not show Him the honor He deserves?

What can you do today to bring honor to Jesus?

