

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight,
O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the
Holy Spirit. AMEN.

[I Samuel 8:4-20; 11:14-15 -II Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1-Mark 3:20-35]

Today's gospel talks about family. So no better way to start than a story of 3 nervous expectant fathers in a maternity waiting room before men were able to be in the delivery room with their wives. Finally a nurse comes into the room and says to the first man - Congratulations! You're the father of twins! His shocked response was, "What a coincidence! I play ball for the Minnesota Twins!

Then the nurse came back a second time and addressed a second man: Congratulations to you. You are the father of triplets! Boy, he said, that's also a coincidence. I work for the 3-M company.

Then the third man jumps up and says, I'm getting out of here. I work for 7-Up!

James McBride is a black man. When he was a little boy, he and his brothers and sisters were the only ones in their neighborhood with a mother who was white. He tells her story in his biography of her called, *The Color of Water*. Ruth McBride had grown up as the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish rabbi in a small southern town. She went to live with relatives in New York City when she was a young woman. She fell in love with a black man, and after a time, she married him. By marrying him, she not only joined her life to his, but also joined her life to his family.

Their children couldn't understand why she was different - different than other mothers. For one thing, she could hardly cook at all. And even though she loved music, she couldn't or wouldn't sing - like the other mothers did in church. Ruth McBride refused to explain herself, even to her children. When questioned about the difference between her skin and the complexions of her children, she told them that her skin was no color - the "color of water".

She didn't tell stories about her early childhood; she made no visits to the home she grew up in. She didn't talk about her parents or her heritage. If people were puzzled about her, they were free to indulge in whatever speculations they would like. A white woman married to a black man.

As we see in the Gospel reading for today from Mark, Jesus offered little

information about his identity to those who had become curious about him. One of the things this passage does is to emphasize that Jesus was someone who had a family. This was important to the very early years of the Church because some people were saying that He was not fully human - and thus didn't need a family. But he did have a family and as he began his ministry, this family began to question his sanity.

Once his ministry had begun, Jesus developed a reputation as a healer. People also said that he was a good teacher - though many things he taught did not resonate well with the religious authorities. He often failed to conform to certain respected and usual religious customs. Though He claimed to respect his own Jewish tradition, he wasn't confined by it. He pushed its boundaries in ways that delighted some and made others furious. It's no wonder that as word got around, people began to speculate about who this guy was.

The religious authorities couldn't quite figure out what he was up to. While his relatives were beginning to think that he might be crazy, religious authorities made it very clear that they thought he was possessed by demons. More specifically, by Beelzebub, a Canaanite deity. The title "Beelzebub" itself means "lord of the flies". Those who said that he was possessed by Beelzebub, meant that Jesus was in league with the evil one, the devil. A pretty awful thing to say about anyone.

So here we have two opinions for those who had anything to say about Jesus. He might have been either crazy or he might have been possessed by the evil one. And ever since, through the centuries, He has been the target of speculation.

Like James McBride's mother, who said that her skin was the "color of water", Jesus showed no interest in always wrapping things up for people in a neat package. They could speculate all they wanted. But he went about doing what he was called to do. He went about doing good.

He did however, respond to the charge that he was possessed by demons. He couldn't let that accusation stand. He asked, rightly, "How can Satan cast out Satan? In other words, "If I'm in league with the devil, how do you account for the fact that I've been chasing the devil, disarming the devil, getting rid of him? Of course, using their argument against them infuriated the religious establishment even more.

From that time to this, Jesus has been liberating people from the grip of forces that twist and disfigure their lives. And in those days those forces were often

identified with Satan.

Wherever Jesus went there were people who were afflicted by chronic illness: blindness, deafness or other diseases which caused people to keep their distance. In each case, Jesus reached out to set right what had gone wrong. In compassion he freed people from the grip of what seemed to be overpowering forces.

For some of those who watched Jesus closely there was no doubt that he was in league with the "lord of the flies". That's why Jesus said -- "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they might utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin". Jesus was responding to those who were saying that He had an unclean spirit, that indeed he was not from God.

Some- fundamentalist Christians, often live in fear that a slip of the tongue may cause them to be guilty of a sin against the Holy Spirit. But a slip of the tongue is not what Jesus is talking about. What he means is that when people call "demonic" what is in fact holy, they are blaspheming the Holy Spirit and thus God Himself. A sinful, wicked thing indeed.

Martin Luther King was a man who had dreams. He dreamt of a world devoid of hatred and prejudice, where people of every color and race, could sit down at table together; could go to school together, could go to church together; could be Christians together. Family for him involved all of God's people, simply because we are all children of God.

So today, as we do in a limited way because of the Corona virus epidemic, we come together around God's Holy Table, by either being here in Church or virtually by the miracle of the internet. And in this Eucharist, this Mass, we join with all those other Christians - of all sorts and sizes and shapes and colors - and we are family. And as family, we encounter God here in this Sacrament of bread and wine and hopefully in each other.

But just being here is only part of the story. It is not enough. What is important is that we take this encounter with God with us when we leave this holy Eucharist. And when we do leave, each of us in our own way, by the way we live our lives as faithful Christians can bring the God we encountered here to those whose lives we touch. And in doing so, it will make all the difference in this world of ours.

INNOM ...

AMEN