

IMMEDIATELY

Gospel of Mark is the 21st Century Gospel: that's why I've entitled this reflection, 'Immediately'.

1. **When I see my three-year old grandson opening his presents, I know what 'immediately' means. Tearing away at the paper, revealing the glory of each and every present.**
2. We're the generation of the 'instant results'...the generation of 'the happening moment'...we go where there's action, and where there's a crowd.
3. That can be a trap. Coz the crowd can hide a multitude of sins, muddy the waters, create a reality that's fake...fake in the sense that it builds up expectations that are unrealistic, expectations that are doomed to be disappointed. For what Jesus is doing can so easily be misunderstood. That's why we need to get our mind set right.
4. In the Old Testament: only 4 times. In the NT 79 times. 'Euthys': the gospel of 'euthys'... 'make the way straight'...level ground straightforward...on the same level playing field... 'preparation'...preparing the way of God...internal preparation...cf., Etty and the internal rubbish, the white noise that needs to be silenced so God's voice can be heard...'And when Jesus came out of the water, immediately (euthys) he Jesus saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.'" (Mark 1: 18). But these 'immediate' moments aren't understood immediately. We have to prepare for them. We need to get things straight in our mind if we are to understand and know how to make sense of things when God does act, when the curtain is torn away and we see things as they are.
5. Because these sort of healings don't happen all of the time, and that 'immediate' experience doesn't happen every day. But when it does happen we need to be ready.
6. We forget about the twelve years of haemorrhaging this dear woman, had to endure. The pain of that unexpected tragedy. The anguish of being isolated from her community, the shame.
7. We easily forget that not every 'little daughter' is spared at the point of death. Note everyone is rescued. My mother died at age twenty-one. My father tells me that the last words she spoke were: "I don't want to die."
8. How then are we understand to Jesus' healing ministry? How do we understand 'immediately'? How do we interpret those healings, when they don't happen here and now: what then? Is it because we don't have enough faith? Is it because we have done something wrong and God's ears are blocked to our cries for help?
9. What about the young child who can't speak for itself? Who dies without ever having a chance to fulfil its potential? That surely gives

protest atheism and its objections to the very idea of the existence of God some credibility. Cf., the man who said he would tear up any letter I sent him into a thousand pieces if I ever tried to explain his 33 year old daughter's premature death from cancer.

10. How do we deal with things when they go wrong? How do we behave? How do we think and act in times of crisis, in times when things go against us?
11. When Jesus hung on the cross, some jeered and mocked: 'Physician heal yourself!' Here was the man who could heal others, save others, but couldn't even either heal or save himself.
12. If Jesus were here this morning how would he explain these things, these hard, these harsh realities to us?
13. This morning, I want to introduce to you a law, principles that might help us. They're called the foundational principles of the **Law of Three**.
14. **Basically they mean this. In every new situation that arises, there are three forces at work—(a) the affirming force: or the force that works for us and with us; (b) the denying force, or the force that works against us (c) and thirdly, a reconciling force that finally, eventually works with us and for us once *again*.**
15. **These three forces don't work separately. They work together, and they are always at work around us; and as they coalesce in this way: they produce a fourth and new dimension. *Affirming* (yielding) *denying* (resisting) and *reconciling* (peace giving) are not fixed points, or permanent attributes. They are moveable, fluid: they can and do shift and must be understood and applied within the exact terms of the situation as it happens.**
16. **So when troubles come, when the impasse, the wall descends and seems to block our way, when the complicating situations, the adverse circumstances break in upon us, we need to know that in that moment solutions are curled inside the very circumstances that confront us and we must learn to spot them as soon as they present themselves. **These solutions or the solution, are enfolded in the third principle, the reconciling principle the peaceful zone (the eye of the storm if you like)** which is always present in every situation, but generally hidden and which when it unfurls, opens up to our understanding, it reveals a whole new "field" of possibilities, a way out if you will (an exodus) **which becomes the fourth force.****
17. So let's put it all together, now and apply these principles to our two stories.
18. **Firstly, there are the positive moments of calm and peace, of well being of good times, times like those glorious sunny days when time stands still and everything seems to fall into our lap, and all**

that is favourable to us affirms everything we do and say. Secondly, suddenly, unexpectedly, (immediately) the sky darkens and a dark ill wind seems to come from nowhere, blows hard against us. Everything seems to be going wrong. People and circumstances seem to be working against us.

19. It's then, precisely then, that we need to keep our eyes and ears open. We need to scan the unpromising grim horizon for clues, for what is happening here.
20. For the father of the little girl Jairus: everything in his life had gone well...his daughter was his pride and joy. And then this black cloud breaks in upon him...she is unwell. It's then, immediately, he thinks of Jesus: this Jesus that he had noticed over a long time. Something about him, the way he taught in the synagogue, the way he spoke, the way he carried himself, the way he looked at him, the way he seemed to listen to his inner thoughts. That's where he needs to go. There, he thinks, is his exodus his way out.
21. 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?' ³⁶ But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, '**Do not fear, only believe.**' ³⁷ **He allowed no one to follow him except** Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the house of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ When he had entered, he said to them, '**Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.**' ⁴⁰ **And they laughed at him.** Then he **put them all outside**, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' ⁴² And **immediately** the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. ⁴³ He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.
22. **And then there was the woman with the issue of blood...**
23. **So many years of happiness, of connection with family and community and then *this*...in the midst of this hopelessness, this thought this third force presents itself to her...will he, this Jesus be like all the other disappointments? The other doctors who failed her? But then strong inside her is this insane thought: he can, he will do this things that no one else can do...**
24. **And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him.** ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ **She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse.** ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' ²⁹ **Immediately** her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰ **Immediately** aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' ³¹ And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' ³² He looked all round to see who had done it. ³³ But the woman, knowing what had happened to her,

came **in fear and trembling**, fell down before him, and **told him the whole truth**.³⁴ He said to her, 'Daughter, **your faith** has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'³⁵

25. Now let's apply this to...

- (a) **The paschal mystery:**
 - (b) **principle 1: affirming:** Jesus the human teacher of the path of love, the healer
 - (c) **principle 2: denying:** the crucifixion and the forces of hatred driving it
 - (d) **principle 3: reconciling:** the principle of self-emptying, *kenotic love* willingly engaged, and out of this the remarkable thing: a new life, resurrection life is born, miraculously cf., Harry Potter who gives himself for his community, the chosen one..
 - (e) so this **principle 3: the new arising** which is known as the **kingdom of God**, but which I like to call, **God's action zone** which may or may not appear, be apparent and be visible in the midst of human cruelty and brokenness, but is never absent somehow. It's called the 'mind of Christ'
11. The mind that (a) doesn't *prejudge*, doesn't *resist*, but sets its sights *higher, beyond* "winners and losers", *beyond* 'good and evil' (b) and instead strives in all situations to align its heart and mind with the third/fourth force...
12. This **third force** is not easy to attune to, because our usual **consciousness, awareness** is skewed toward the binary, towards "*either/or*." Instead of "**both/and**" the mind that **lives beyond the opposites, sees the whole picture of everything at once**
13. *Recognises and consciously mediates* the **third force** which we now name as **a unitive or nondual consciousness**, otherwise known as **'the mind of Christ.'** We see the whole picture.
14. Consistent **contemplative practice** will develop this **alert and flexible presence of mind that can midwife the third force.**
15. There is a time coming when the Cathedral will be full, teeming with people. What then? When revival, the awakening comes... will we be ready? When we have to meet the vast challenges of our time: environmental, economic, political—will we be prepared?
16. We have to train ourselves to see and hear with this mindset, this mind of Christ. **Let's now look at the same thing from a slightly different angle.**

17. Karl Barth, the greatest of the 20th century's Protestant theologians in vol. 4 of his *Church Dogmatics* writes of the Father sending his Son into the world in these words: "The Way of the Son into the Far Country". The Son goes into exile, just like the Prodigal Son in the parable; and just as the Prodigal Son is immersed in debauchery and every kind of sinful excess, so also is God's Son immersed in sin: the sin of the world. He is humiliated – the Lord becomes a servant (remember how the Prodigal Son has to work with pigs in a pagan, non-Jewish land) - but the Son of Man is then

exalted. AND THIS IS THE PRINCIPLE OF THE THIRD AND FOURTH FORCE: The experience of exile is at the same time the moment of salvation.

18. **When I visited the terminally ill refugees in Johannesburg, South Africa recently, Father Aloysius reflects,** with a Jesuit Refugee Service nurse, my experience was not that of a priest going in to bring God and consolation to the refugees: I walked into the small, inadequate rooms in crumbling high rises, and what I found was God waiting there for me. Not a God of power and consolation, but a God in covenant with his exiled people, hungry, sick, naked, dying, and utterly dependent on the kindness of strangers.
19. **St Francis' story about the wolf. We need to face our fears and embrace them. The wolf became the guardian of the town, after St Francis lectured him on being so fierce and disruptive!**
20. Stories of human disorientation Pope Francis visited refugees in Lampedusa in 2013, soon after his election, and celebrated a Mass during which he mused on two questions that God poses directly to men in Scripture. The first question is directed at the first man, hiding in guilt and shame: "Adam, where are you?" The second is asked of the first murderer: "Cain, where is your brother?"
21. **The theologian, Anna Rowlands, describes Francis's interpretation of these two stories as "stories of human disorientation": the primordial signs of an ongoing human tendency, i.e. that we lose our place in creation, and that we lose our orientation towards our creator. We have a tendency, in other words, to be displaced. For Francis, our basic disorientation today is that we are, ironically, settled. In other words, we refuse to see, we refuse to acknowledge, our essential nature as a people who are wandering, people in movement, people who are exiles on a journey. We become settled in what Francis calls a culture of wellbeing: "I'm all right, mate" we might say here in Australia. We become settled to the point that we are indifferent towards others. We become accustomed to, inured to, the sufferings of others. Francis recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan, and describes the response of the culture of wellbeing: "We look upon the brother half dead by the roadside, perhaps we think 'poor guy', and we continue on our way; it's none of our business, and we feel fine with this."**
22. Note how Francis chooses **two questions where the ones addressed by God are called by name: Adam, Cain.** He is trying to say here that **the unsettled, the displaced, the ones who no longer are able to orient themselves to a direction, to a lodestar, are people with an identity, with names, with faces. We cannot be indifferent to the face of the other, a face that always poses a challenge and a question, as Emmanuel Levinas insists.** It is said that at a **Headmasters' conference this Benedictine was the final speaker. Others had been saying in so many ways that at their school they prepared boys for life: at Eton, they prepared the boys for government; at Westminster, for the armed forces; at Winchester, for the life of scholarship. The legend is that Dom Paul then piped up: "At Ampleforth, on the contrary, our mission is to prepare boys for death."**
23. Pope Francis, in his encyclical about the environment, *Laudato Si'*, says that the task of Catholic Social Teaching is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity; "rather it is to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering, and thus to discover what each of us can do about it." This is one of his most difficult teachings: that the Social Teaching of the Church should lead us towards a willingness to suffer as a form of solidarity. The culture of wellbeing protects us against the sufferings

of others; Catholic social ethics seeks ways to take the suffering of others into our own lives. Jesus is not *like* one of the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, the thirsty; he *is* one of them, he is *all* of them. **Solidarity is really just recognition: the shocking realisation that one's settled state is an illusion** - This is why I refuse to allow the use of the term "refugee crisis" when speaking or writing about the millions of Syrians displaced by that country's seven-year old conflict, or about the tens of thousands of sub-Saharan Africans braving the deadly waters of the Mediterranean to find better lives in Europe. **We are not faced with a refugee crisis, but a crisis of solidarity. Our wellbeing will not allow us to share in the suffering of the men, women, and children who, if we allow them too close, will remind us of our own vulnerability and contingency.** One of the volunteer teachers at the JRS school in Dzaleka Refugee Camp in Malawi, a young American named Garrett Berghof, recently wrote an article in the *Tablet* where he asks,

24. "What differentiates me from these people? Why do I deserve such freedom, while life gives others such limited opportunities?" **The internalisation of contingency, vulnerability, and unsettledness, does not result in a negative outcome. It creates a THIRD and FOURTH force: the conditions for solidarity, and of self-giving.** Do we dare take up the challenge of Pope Francis, and turn the suffering of the world into our own, and through that discover what reserves of skill, ingenuity, creativity, and energy we have within ourselves to do something about it?
25. **George Eliot, writing of Dorothea at the end of *Middlemarch*,** says something that is both beautiful and true: "But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."
26. **Even the pagan Greek writer knew it:**
27. "And even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." (*Agammemnon*, Aeschylus)
28. Lord, in our pain teach us to take on the mind of Christ: where in our despair, even against our will, we might humbly gratefully receive that wisdom, that wonderful grace of God. Amen.