

January 29, 2012 – Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Sister Mary Reese, MM, Maryknoll, NY

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20; Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 7-9; First Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

Here in the first chapter of Mark, we meet Jesus as an adult. Jesus has begun his ministry with his baptism by John, his cousin. We even hear a voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as the Beloved Son pleasing to his Father. At the beginning of an important phase of a committed person's life, there is often a desire to have a period of preparation, a special time to get ready. Thus, Jesus was led out into the desert to fast and pray. Forty days he spent preparing for this ministry he was beginning in response to the call by his Father.

After 40 days he was ready for his new life. He needed helpers. As he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee he saw fishermen tending their nets. He called to them: "Come with me and I will make you fishers of men." We are told they left their nets and followed this man, Jesus. Do you see great mystery in this act? Had they already heard something about this man? What magnet drew them to follow him?

As they followed Jesus they were led into the synagogue, where Jesus taught. All the people were amazed at his teaching – as were the disciples who had just been called to follow him. And then another great event happened. In the temple was a man with an unclean spirit who cried out to Jesus, pleading to be cured and freed of this torment. The compassionate Jesus, the Holy One of God, cured him. And again the people, as well as the disciples were amazed. Don't you think the disciples were puzzled, as well as excited to be in the company of this man who was teaching a new way and doing such amazing and wonderful things?

At this time the disciples could sing Psalm 95 that we pray in this liturgy. They could sing joyfully and cry out to the Creator at the great things created. How are we responding to this great gift of creation and to the Good News of Jesus? I was in ministry in Tanzania for many years. I witnessed in the people of Tanzania a lively faith in God. For them God is the Holy One, a God who created all things and a God who is present at all times. God is everywhere. God controls all that happens. God gives to each one life and daily needs. To express their belief many belong to a believing community. They gather in prayer as a community to express their belief, to show gratitude and to seek wisdom for the future.

The Tanzanians are people who like to go to church, who find meaning in gathering in prayer with their fellow Christians and people of other beliefs. And it is not uncommon for groups to start their own church because they like to participate, be leaders and share their faith. They live as small Christian communities, meet weekly to pray, share and discuss the gospel readings and join with their community in service, such as visiting the sick, comforting someone who has just lost a loved one, taking food or other needs to a poor family, fixing a damaged house, plowing a field, etc. Living their faith is a very important part of their life. Am I as aware of living my faith each day – bringing my faith with me as I go about my routine?

Living in such an environment for several years has done much to strengthen my faith. Tanzanians have made me aware of the little we need to live. Running water was not common so that I became very much aware of the great gift of water and the great scarcity in many parts of the world. I saw the beauty and expansiveness of the sky with no tall buildings to hide it and

no pollution to cloud it. The stars at night were so near and clear. They filled the sky like diamonds. I became very much more aware of God's beautiful creation. As I read the many articles telling of the violence being done to our creation, as I see the many programs on television showing the destruction, as I experience the many catastrophes we are having, it saddens me to see so much beauty destroyed in our wonderful world.

Can we be called once again as were the disciples, to look more closely at this man Jesus, to look at his ways, his compassion and concern for others? Can we look more closely at the great gift of faith that is ours? Can we be more involved with the Christian community where we find nourishment and where we can nourish others? Can we examine how we respond to God's gift of creation and try more urgently to protect it?

As we begin this new year of 2012, let us take a few moments to think how Jesus is calling us to follow him in our busy lives. Let us ask him to help us respond as he did with compassion, love and service so that people can continue to be drawn to him and follow him.

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