

Weekend of January 30 & 31, 2021

Come follow me ... and bring hope to the world

When people are in the grip of forces that seem to be beyond their control, they can easily spiral into depression. Many of us know first-hand from our recent experience what it is like to be in the grip of seemingly uncontrollable forces. It could be the corona virus, or the struggle with work and money, or being the object of prejudice and exclusion, or suffering a loss of a loved one accompanied by profound grief. Whatever might be the cause, the result is very much the same – a draining of spirit and hope.

In today's Gospel, Jesus meets a man who has an unclean spirit. We are not quite sure in context what that unclean spirit might have been, perhaps the oppression of the devil, our adversary? Perhaps some form of emotional or mental illness? Perhaps the burden of a consuming addiction? Whatever that unclean spirit was, it held this poor man down and drained him of hope.

Jesus intervened and expelled the unclean spirit. That man was freed. And the Gospel says that all were amazed. They were amazed that Jesus had broken a cycle of despair, that he had infused new hope, that he enabled someone to go forward with life.

As we move through Saint Mark's Gospel this year, we should be aware that it is a Gospel of discipleship. It is meant especially for those who want to follow Jesus. The Gospel teaches us exactly how to follow him. Today's selection tells us to go and meet him and he will free us from what binds us and pour new hope into our hearts. At the same time, that gift of hope for the followers of Jesus is not destined to be their personal possession.

Once they know his hope, they must bring it to the world. All disciples of Jesus are also his missionaries in the world.

Missionary-disciples bring hope through their words, through their service to others and through their personal witness.

Next week, we will conduct our Commitment Weekend for the Annual Catholic Appeal.

This year's theme perfectly mirrors what we have been considering. It is: *Come, follow me ... and bring hope to the world*. We can take up the mission to bring hope to the world through the Appeal. Our financial support, our prayerful support and our direct involvement in the Church's outreach in parishes, education, religious and ministerial formation, initiatives for justice, peace and respect for life—all these bring hope into our troubled world. There are envelopes and brochures available in the back of the church for you to take on your way out.

Across the next week, reflect, pray and ask yourself question about the meaning of following Jesus and how, in a very specific way, you can bring his hope to the world.

Consider what you might contribute from your time, talent and treasure to infuse hope in others. In this way, you will answer that invitation to follow him and share his gift of hope in the world.

The Eucharist we are about to celebrate is the anchor of our hope with its source in the death and resurrection of the Lord.

The Eucharist is also our point of departure for returning to the world with our mission to bring hope. Let us praise and thank God for his gifts and ask him to fulfill what he entrusts to us.