

Mark's gospel is intense. It spends no words on Jesus as a baby in Bethlehem or as a 12 year old AWOL child in Jerusalem. The baptism with which this gospel begins moves quickly into public ministry. From the exorcism in the synagogue, focus shifts to Peter's ill mother in law. "Immediately" Jesus takes her hand and heals her. His fame builds quickly and by nightfall, all of the sick and possessed people in city of Capernaum people are brought to Jesus.

Finally night comes and rest. As the disciples sleep in, Jesus slips away by himself to a deserted place in order to pray. Peter and the others hunt for Jesus and are amazed to find him alone. "Everyone is looking for you," they fairly scream, "come back into town." He amazes them again by insisting that they move on to other towns where he may do what it is he came to do.

Andy Warhol famously said that all of us get 15 minutes of fame. Whether that fame comes at work, school, among friends or in headlines, each of us knows a time when others recognize the gifts we have. Fame is enticing but it comes at a price. When people recognize your gifts they also present you with new expectations. If you do something well, people expect that you will continue to do it more or better.

This morning's gospel lesson gives us insight into how Jesus handled the fame that people gave him during his public ministry, and how we may handle whatever fame comes to us. Jesus was never pulled into the subtle trap that fame offers. He kept his focus on who he was and what it was that he was to do.

Jesus is a good role model because we live in a world addicted to fame. Headlines said that Tom Brady might be the best football quarterback of all time. No

pressure there! Actors and actresses in Hollywood will do most anything for a moment of fame. We watch television shows like “American Idol” and “Dancing with the Stars”, as people chase the elusive thing called fame. We are fascinated with famous people and anoint them with power and privilege. Fame invites you to begin believing that you are different, better, and entitled.

With fame comes the pressure to hold onto it. Like a gerbil running in an exercise wheel, we try to keep up with what others assume we can do and will do, but we get nowhere. The headlines are filled with people who lost their “fame” because those who once exalted them became those who judged them; the word of praise is always followed by the critical eye. During the Roman Empire, conquering generals paraded through cheering crowds. One slave stood behind the general in his chariot whispering, “Fame is fleeting”.

Each of us painfully learns how fragile fame is. Someone else is promoted in the job, someone else is the star of the team; the focus is on someone else.

How then do we accept recognition for our gifts, using them in honest service to those around us, without being caught in its expectations? We remember what Jesus did but even more learn to trust his leading in life.

He was clear about who he was and his mission of incarnating the kingdom of God; enabling people to know and share God’s love. He served by healing and feeding often saying, “Don’t tell anyone about this”.

He refused to be squeezed into the mold the world created for him. He kept his focus by trusting God, slipping away to think and to pray. Whatever challenges life brought or whatever fame was offered, Jesus stayed focused even to the cross where

his life was offered in love for us. When we were baptized in His name, we received the identity “Child of God”; not because of gifts we have or things we do. Unlike the fame of a fickle world, this “fame” stays forever.

When we begin each day then remembering our baptism, when we publicly worship in church, or silently pray in our bedroom, we are reconnected to the very heart of God. This reminds us that our identity is not found in what we do but in whose we are. We will never be satisfied in trying to live up to others’ expectations but we can find peace believing that in Christ Jesus, we are loved.

When you are clear about that love, then you can offer who and what you are to the people God places in your life. You can smile graciously when someone recognizes what you are doing - even if you are a Lutheran - and keep your heart open to see who else you might serve with Christ’s love. You can be grateful for who God has made you to be, without insisting the world praise you for it! Let us live because of Jesus, thankfully, humbly and compassionately!

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