

Saint Mark the Evangelist – 2010  
Sermon – Christ Church Parish  
Father Michael Erickson  
John 15:1-7

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”

Today, we remember the life and ministry of Saint Mark the Evangelist; and, in so doing, we are reminded of our own, unique calling as Christians in the world, to proclaim boldly in word and deed the good news of Our Lord Jesus Christ. When in every facet of our lives we invite our fellow men to know and to love God in the Risen Christ, we are evangelists of that Gospel, the good news by which eternal life triumphs in this world over the despair of sin. It is only then, when we act in this world from a total, abiding love toward God and our neighbors, in the manner that Christ Jesus has shown for us, that we have faith. Stated in another way, to have faith in Christ Jesus is to be acting faithfully in line with His example: to maintain fidelity to truth, even if necessary unto death; to show compassion for the sick and wayward, even if unpopular among our peers; and, in all things, to evangelize that the Kingdom of God is at hand, even as the world remains mired in the sordid, futile rebellion of Adam against our Heavenly Father.

If, in the private recesses of our minds, we are inclined to believe in Christ Jesus, but refuse for whatever reason to proclaim this saving Gospel in the world, then regardless of what we may think of ourselves, of our intentions, and of our basic goodness, indeed we do not have faith in Him. Faith in Christ Jesus is real, only when it is blossoming outward, reaching its petals forward as an expression of inviting love; when it is staid, or lacking courage, or set aside as no more than the comforting sentiments of one's private conscience, then it is simply an opinion. Like the branch that no longer abides in its vine, an opinion remains forever susceptible to the seductive winds of the moment, a tumbling stick in the vineyard only for a short while, until it is replaced with something altogether different. Also, when we think further on the matter, we see that a man

who has no more than a soft opinion of Christ Jesus in fact cannot be said even to have that much. Everything about Christ Jesus, from His life in the virgin womb to His resurrection in the unused tomb, from His gradual unveiling of His Messianic role to His bold proclaiming of the Gospel in His corpse on the cross, from His total faith in His Father to His visceral Cry of Dereliction, demands a response, not just once but at every moment of our lives: either an act of love in abiding with Him, or an act of betrayal in rejecting Him for this world. He gives no other choice, no easy out: either He is the Incarnate God, for whom we are called to be evangelists in a world that despises God and His disciples, or He is a vicious fraud, a megalomaniac whose claims of divinity must invalidate even His most poetic charges.

Saint Mark the Evangelist made his choice for Christ Jesus, the Incarnate God, in every step that he took along the missionary route that he shared with Saint Paul, in every service that he provided for Saint Peter, and in every word that he wrote in his Gospel. He had no opinion of Christ Jesus; rather, he cherished a most fruitful faith in Him, a faith abiding as a branch upon the vine. His faith is then and now nourished, emboldened, by the love that is God Himself, a love expressed for him and for all of us as the husbandman who fathers the true vine and the vine who blossoms an abundance of fruit for his husbandman. This is a most dynamic love: it tills; it toils; and, in the fullness of time, it bears fruit. A faith that abides in that love cannot but be active, pure in intention, confident in action, yet like fruit ripening in a garden, also beautifully subtle in its outward expression and patient in awaiting the final harvest. In exhibiting these traits, in the fullness of his life, Saint Mark evangelized the good news; and, as we encounter him in his Gospel, and the communion of the Saints in the celebration of the Mass, he evangelizes for us even now. He continues faithfully to be a voice for Christ Jesus, to choose Him over the petty sentiments of this world; and, in so doing, his particular branch blossoms forever more, his petals find no end in their unfolding toward the light of God. This is a great image. It is also one for which, like Saint Mark, we are each invited and to which, as evangelists, acting in faith, we must invite others.