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Study Questions for the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*

The Gospel of St. Mark

Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch

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THE GOSPEL OF SAINT MARK

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:4 Word Study: Repentance.** What does the Greek word *metanoia* mean? What does the New Testament use it to mean? If *metanoia* is a gradual process, how is it manifested?
2. **1:11.** What Old Testament passages does the Father's announcement that Jesus is "my beloved Son" echo? What do they say about Jesus' identity?
3. **1:12–13.** Though Mark provides few details of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness, what is the importance of some of the details he does provide, such as the presence of wild beasts, the leading into the desert by the Spirit, and the length of time spent there?
4. **1:44.** What is the reasoning behind Jesus' strategy of warning demons and men to keep silent about his identity?

For application

1. **1:6, 12–13.** Both John the Baptist and Jesus follow practices of self-discipline for religious reasons. What self-disciplinary practices do you use for religious (not health or other personal) reasons? How have they influenced your own "change of heart" (repentance)?
2. **1:7.** John the Baptist admits that he is not worthy to do even menial tasks for the Messiah. How does humility (the knowledge that you are not worthy of God) differ from feelings that you have no self-worth (self-loathing)? How does true humility enhance your self-worth in God's sight?
3. **1:20.** Zebedee's sons immediately left their father and his business to follow Jesus. How radical is your own response to his call? How rapid is it?
4. **1:35.** Jesus gets up well before daylight to pray in a remote spot. What do you imagine that the Son of God prayed about, and how might he have prayed? How frequently do you pray, and when, and where? What do you do when you pray?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:15–28.** This chapter outlines three controversies between the Pharisees and Jesus. What were they?
2. **Topical Essay: Who Are the Pharisees?** How does understanding the background of the Pharisees' quest for personal holiness cast the clashes between them and Jesus in a whole new light? What were the Pharisees trying to accomplish as opposed to what Jesus was trying to accomplish? In the end, if Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees had little to do with disagreements over the Law, what did it have to do with?
3. **2:19.** Why is it inappropriate for Jesus' disciples to fast when the bridegroom is among them? Why do Christians fast before Communion?
4. **2:26.** Why does Jesus "mistakenly" refer to Abiathar as high priest in David's reign,

when the high priest at the time was actually Ahimelech? What is the significance of Abiathar?

For application

1. **2:5.** Jesus responds to the faith of the paralytic's friends by forgiving the sick man's sins. As you reflect on your own life, how does sin tend to paralyze you spiritually? How does forgiveness of sin heal that paralysis?
2. **2:17.** Jesus has not come to call the righteous but sinners. In your heart of hearts, to which of the two classes do you think you belong? Do you really look on yourself as a sinner or as someone who is good?
3. **2:27.** What is your attitude toward the requirement to attend Mass on Sunday? What about the Church's prohibition of servile work? Do you see these requirements and prohibitions as making you fit the Sabbath or as a way of making the Sabbath for you?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:14.** What is the significance of the number of apostles Jesus appointed?
2. **3:22.** Who is Beelzebul to the scribes? Why did the scribes accuse Jesus of casting demons out by the power of Beelzebul?
3. **3:29.** If all sin can be forgiven in principle, why does Jesus refer to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as an eternal sin? What sin in the Old Testament prefigures this sin?
4. **3:35.** What is the criterion Jesus gives for being his brother, sister, or mother? What then is his attitude to his biological mother, who has accompanied those relatives desirous of seizing him (v. 22)?

For application

1. **3:5.** What makes Jesus angry in this passage? What is there about your own life that might provoke this sort of anger in him?
2. **3:19b–21.** Why did Jesus' relatives think he was "beside himself"? Have you ever been criticized for "being too religious", or have you yourself criticized others for that? If either is the case, what do you think is the problem?
3. **3:24–27.** Who is the "strong man" in verse 27? If a "strong man" has gained a foothold in some area of your life, how can you bind him?
4. **3:31–34.** If you want to be a kinsman of Jesus, what will it take for you to be accepted as one?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:2.** How do Jesus' parables both conceal and reveal his message?
2. **4:11.** Why does Jesus explain the parables to his disciples but not to anyone else? According to the Second Vatican Council, what is Jesus ensuring in this way?
3. **4:30–32.** What does Jesus intend the parable of the Mustard Seed to depict? From what Old Testament imagery is his imagery drawn?

4. **4:35–41.** Why were the disciples “filled with awe” at Jesus’ calming of the raging sea? What is the Old Testament background of this incident?

For application

1. **4:9.** How good are your spiritual ears? How do you hear the word of God? How do you know that you are hearing Jesus correctly?
2. **4:12.** How do you understand Jesus’ use of irony in this passage? When you hear and understand what God is telling you, what kinds of changes in your life does his word entail? Does your understanding cause you to want to change or to ignore the message because you might need to change?
3. **4:13.** Jesus asks his disciples how they will understand any parable if they do not understand the parable of the Sower. As you listen to God’s word for your life, what are the benchmarks you use for understanding? Where are you most likely to misunderstand?
4. **4:24–25.** How does this “use it or lose it” spiritual principle apply to your life?

Chapter 5

For understanding

1. **5:9.** Why is the name “Legion” significant for the spiritual state of the Gerasene demoniac? On an allegorical level, what does the demoniac represent?
2. **5:13.** How is the fate of the swine in the Gerasene incident like that of Pharaoh’s army in Ex 14:26–28?
3. **5:21–43.** How are the two miracle stories in this passage linked?
4. **5:25.** Aside from the medical difficulties, what were the legal consequences of the woman’s flow of blood? How does Jesus remove the problem?

For application

1. **5:15.** What do you think made the citizens of Gerasa afraid when they saw the former demoniac clothed and in his right mind? What has God done in your life or that of your family that has inspired a similar fear?
2. **5:18–19.** Why do you think Jesus refused to let the healed demoniac accompany him? Have you ever felt a desire to serve God that God did not seem to let you exercise? What came of it?
3. **5:25–28.** What attitude to Jesus’ power does the woman with the flow of blood have, despite her experience with doctors? What can that attitude teach you about faith?
4. **5:36.** What does Jesus “ignore” in this passage? (Compare this approach with what he does in v. 40.) What does he tell the dead girl’s father? What might God advise you to ignore in order to exercise faith?

Chapter 6

For understanding

1. **6:7–13.** According to St. Gregory the Great, what is the significance of sending the disciples out in pairs? What are the “twin precepts of charity”?
2. **6:23.** In what sense is the oath of Herod Antipas the mirror opposite of a similar scene in Esther 5:8, 7:1?

3. **6:35–44.** How does the miracle of the loaves look both backward and forward? What other passage in Mark uses the same sequence of verbs to describe Jesus' actions?
4. **6:41.** What is the significance of Jesus giving the multiplied loaves to the apostles to distribute?

For application

1. **6:1–6.** How does envy impede faith? Why does your envy at others' success keep Jesus from answering your prayers?
2. **6:30–32.** When was the last time you made a retreat? Why might Jesus invite you to make a retreat?
3. **6:34.** What was Jesus' reaction when he saw that his plans to take the apostles to a lonely spot for a rest were ruined by the crowds? What would be your reaction under similar circumstances? What does Jesus teach you here?
4. **6:50–51.** What does Jesus tell his disciples when they see him walking on the water? What does he do, and what happens next? What does Jesus say and do when the winds of contrary events rise in your life?

Chapter 7

For understanding

1. **7:11.** Why does Jesus condemn the contemporary practice of declaring one's personal possessions *Corban*, or dedicated to God?
2. **7:19.** In what two ways does Jesus set aside the distinctions between clean and unclean? What effect does his pronouncement have on the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians?
3. **7:21.** Why does Jesus place the source of defilement within the *heart* of a person rather than, say, the imagination?
4. **7:27.** Why does Jesus say that the children must be fed before the dogs when the Tyrian woman requests that he heal her daughter? What does the term "dog" indicate in this passage? What does the woman's reply reveal about her?

For application

1. **7:6–7.** How much of your prayer during the liturgy amounts to little more than lip service? How do you cope with distractions during Mass? What do you bring to the liturgy so as to draw your heart near to God?
2. **7:9–13.** How well do you obey the command to honor your parents? What do you do to show them honor? What practices (habits, family or social customs, religious duties, reactions to past events, or character traits) have impeded your duty to your parents?
3. **7:15–23.** Where is Jesus placing the responsibility for being clean—on the circumstances or on you? What events in your life might illustrate how things that come out of you make you clean or unclean?
4. **7:33.** Why do you think Jesus took the man aside to heal him in private? How has Jesus dealt privately with you (rather than treating you as part of a group)?

Chapter 8

For understanding

1. **8:6.** What is the significance of the Greek word used to translate “give thanks” in this verse?
2. **8:19–21.** What is the most probable view of the symbolism that underlies the two miracles of the loaves and the number of baskets collected in each?
3. **8:22–26.** Why does Jesus heal the blind man in stages? How does St. Jerome view the meaning of this passage?
4. **8:34.** How graphic is Jesus’ use of imagery here to his audience? What does the image of “taking up one’s cross” communicate to them?

For application

1. **8:17–18.** How have you failed to perceive or closed your mind to understanding what God is doing in your life? How have you heard Jesus’ correction, and what have you done about it?
2. **8:26.** Compare the location of this miracle (Bethsaida) with what Jesus said about the town in Mt 11:21 and Lk 10:13. Why do you think that Jesus told the blind man, now healed, not to go into the village? How might Jesus want to separate you from your surroundings, and why?
3. **8:33.** Why would Jesus rebuke Peter upon seeing his (Jesus’) disciples? How might your attitudes toward the ways God acts affect others?
4. **8:35.** In your experience, how can a person who wants to save his life actually lose it? How can a person who loses his life for the sake of Jesus actually save it? What do the verbs “saving” and “losing” mean in these paradoxes?

Chapter 9

For understanding

1. **9:1.** What did Jesus mean by saying that some among his hearers would not taste death before the coming of the kingdom of God? When will the coming of the kingdom be complete?
2. **9:11.** On what is the expectation of the “second coming” of Elijah based? What is the Old Testament context for the promise of Elijah’s return?
3. **9:42–48.** Why does Jesus use hyperbole in connection with his remarks on avoiding sin? How does St. John Chrysostom view the meaning of these verses?
4. **9:43. Word Study: Hell.** Why does Jesus associate hell with Gehenna? What had happened there before Jesus’ time? What was Gehenna used for in Jesus’ day? What other scriptural passages underscore the horrifying nature of hell?

For application

1. **9:22–23.** How do you betray your lack of faith in God’s power in your life?
2. **9:26–27.** What pattern of healing do you see in this passage? How might it apply to your life?
3. **9:35–37.** What does it mean for you to be “first of all” by being the “last of all”? In whose name must the little child be received? What kind of person would that “little child” be in your life?
4. **9:42–48.** What is your besetting weakness, the area where you are most likely to

sin? What have you done to correct it? How do your efforts compare with the solutions Jesus suggests?

Chapter 10

For understanding

1. **10:6.** According to the passages in Genesis to which Jesus alludes, what are three characteristics of the marital bond? Why can it not be broken by any civil or religious authority?
2. **10:14.** What is the connection between Jesus' blessing of the children and the prohibition of divorce in vv. 11–12?
3. **10:38.** What is the "baptism" James and John are to be baptized with? What forms did that baptism take in their lives?
4. **10:45. Word Study: Ransom.** How is the concept of a ransom connected with family relations in the Old Testament? How does God in the Old Testament fulfill that family obligation? How does Jesus fulfill it in the New Testament?

For application

1. **10:1–12.** How might it be "hardness of heart" to use religious regulations to advance your own desires? How does the issue of divorce illustrate hardness of heart? How does acceptance of God's plan remove hardness of heart?
2. **10:22–27.** How many "possessions" do you have? How do they affect your relationship to Jesus? How dismayed are you when he asks you to give them up?
3. **10:35–40.** How does Jesus answer the prayer of his own disciples here? What can you learn about your own prayer when God's answer seems to be No?
4. **10:47.** What can you learn about prayer from the attitude and approach of the blind man Bartimaeus?

Chapter 11

For understanding

1. **11:8–10.** What three details surrounding the triumphal entry into Jerusalem recall Psalm 118?
2. **11:13.** Why does Jesus curse a fig tree when it is not even the season for figs?
3. **11:15.** What is the problem Jesus finds with the merchants in the court of the Gentiles, since selling sacrificial animals there is admittedly a service to pilgrims?
4. **11:17.** To which two passages from the Old Testament does Jesus' statement refer? How are both passages ultimately fulfilled?

For application

1. **11:1–6.** What is the most difficult or embarrassing thing Jesus has asked you to do? How have you responded to his request? What has been the outcome?
2. **11:9–10.** What echoes of the Mass do you find in these verses? If the word "Hosannah" is Hebrew for "Lord, save", would you have chosen that expression if you had been in the crowd celebrating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? If not, what would you have shouted, and why?
3. **11:16.** What personal baggage do you "carry through the Temple area" when you

- come into it? Why do you think Jesus might forbid you to carry such baggage there?
4. **11:21–22ff.** Why do you think Jesus exhorts his disciples to “have faith in God” when Peter points out that the tree Jesus cursed has withered? Given the symbolism of the fig tree and Jesus’ cursing of it, what is the connection with a living faith?

Chapter 12

For understanding

1. **12:1–9.** What two main points is the parable of the Wicked Tenants making? What do some of the details of the parable represent in the Jerusalem of Jesus’ day?
2. **Topical Essay: Who Are the Sadducees?** How did the Sadducees originate? With what were they most closely associated? From what factors does the controversy surrounding the Sadducees come?
3. **12:26.** How does Jesus use Scripture to discuss the resurrection of the dead with the Sadducees? How can the text Jesus alludes to be considered a proof-text for them?
4. **12:36.** Using Psalm 110, Jesus asks the Pharisees how the Messiah, recognized by them to be the son of David, can be David’s superior. From both the context of the psalm and theological reflection, how can the question Jesus asks be answered?

For application

1. **12:17.** What in your life belongs to “Caesar” (the state, your career, your secular or social commitments), and what belongs to God? In terms of the time you spend on each, how much of your life actually is given to God?
2. **12:26–27.** If God is the God not of the dead but of the living, what do you honestly believe about the fates of those you know who have died? What is your real opinion of what happens to you when you die? How does that compare with Church belief?
3. **12:34.** What do you think Jesus meant by telling the scribe that he was “not far” from the kingdom of heaven? Was Jesus commenting on his understanding of theology or his faith? What would he say of yours?
4. **12:41–44.** What is your approach to supporting the Church financially? What can you learn from Jesus’ observation about the poor woman’s contribution?

Chapter 13

For understanding

1. **13:14.** What is the “desolating sacrilege”? To what historical event does the expression refer?
2. **13:24–25.** How are we to understand Jesus’ warnings about cosmic disturbances if the dramatic events he describes are not to be taken literally?
3. **13:30.** If the cosmic disturbances in vv. 24–25 are not to be taken literally, how do we understand Jesus’ reference to “this generation”?
4. **13:35.** What are three levels of meaning to Jesus’ command to be watchful?

For application

1. **13:5–7.** What events or persons exist in the modern world that can deceive Jesus’

disciples regarding “the end”? What effect, if any, have they had on your own view of God’s plan?

2. **13:13.** How hard is it for you to live your faith in your present circumstances? What does “persevering to the end” mean for you at this point in your life?
3. **13:32–37.** The need for watchfulness is greatest when the environment seems friendly but only gradually becomes hostile to faith, hope, or love—rather like boiling the proverbial frog by slowly turning up the heat. How has your social or religious environment worsened in ways that you may not have noticed? How have you been affected by the changes? What need of watchfulness do you see?

Chapter 14

For understanding

1. **14:22.** How does Jesus identify the unleavened bread of the Passover feast with his own flesh? What is the symbolism of breaking the unleavened bread?
2. **14:24.** What is the significance of the phrase “blood of the Covenant” that Jesus uses when he blesses the chalice of wine?
3. **14:55.** What was the origin and primary role of the Sanhedrin? Who belonged to it? Under Roman rule, what could the Sanhedrin do? What could it not do?
4. **14:61. Word Study: Christ.** Why was the expected deliverer called an “anointed one”? What ministries was the Messiah supposed to have? What are some of the Old Testament references to the roles and fate of the Messiah?

For application

1. **14:7–9.** How important is it for you to minister to Jesus, according to this passage? Why do you think Jesus said that the woman’s action would be told wherever the gospel is preached? What does her action teach you?
2. **14:32–42.** Have you ever faced a serious trial that you knew you could not avoid? What was it? How did you approach it? How similar was your approach to that of Jesus in the garden?
3. **14:38.** Even though the spirit of the apostles is “willing” (refer to v. 31), how did their weakness show itself? What are some examples in your own life of a similar willingness combined with similar weakness? What did you learn from it?
4. **14:66–72.** How do you respond to your failure to live up to your own expectations for holiness? What do you imagine God’s attitude toward you is at those times? (What is it, really, regardless of how badly you feel about it?)

Chapter 15

For understanding

1. **15:11.** What is the irony in Barabbas’ name? How does that contrast with the identity of Jesus?
2. **15:24.** Where did the practice of crucifixion come from? What caused death for a crucified person? What parallels did the early Christians see between the Crucifixion of Jesus and the fate of Adam?
3. **15:38.** What is the significance of the veil of the Temple? Why is its rending from top to bottom significant in view of the Jewish understanding of what the Temple stood

for?

4. **15:39.** Why is the centurion's confession about Jesus the high point of Mark's Gospel?

For application

1. **15:10.** Mark says that the Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to Pilate "out of envy". Why would Mark choose that word rather than a more typical one, such as *malice*?
2. **15:33.** Read Wis 17 in connection with this passage. What might the darkness indicate? Why would episodes of sin in your life be described as "dark"?
3. **15:34.** Why do you think Jesus quotes Psalm 22? When you read the psalm, what do you notice about the way it ends? What might the ending suggest to you?

Chapter 16

For understanding

1. **16:6.** How do the Scripture passages listed in the note for this verse show that the Resurrection is a work of the Trinity?
2. **16:7.** What are two reasons Peter is singled out in this passage?
3. **16:9–20.** What is unusual about these verses in terms of the ancient manuscripts? Why does the Church regard them as part of inspired Scripture?
4. **16:15–16.** How does Mark's account of the great commission tell the apostles to spread the gospel?

For application

1. **16:6–8.** Why did the women not obey the "young man"? What about that experience would make them want to keep things quiet?
2. **16:11, 13.** According to the Catechism (CCC 643), the disciples' reaction of unbelief helps validate the historical nature of Jesus' Resurrection. How? What can you cite from your own experience that would explain how unbelief might confirm the truth of a claim?
3. **16:17–18, 20.** How does your experience of the Christian life square with the experience of the charisms mentioned here? If you have these charisms, or know of someone who does, what should these "signs" point to in your/their life?