

RESEARCH-MODULE

1. Let's allow **Mk 1,1** ... to challenge us

- Personally ...
 - As a community ...
 - As Congregation ...
-

2. Let's listen to the Synod:

" ... Changing societies and cultures call us to something new: to live our communitarian experience of faith in a renewed way and to proclaim it through an evangelisation «new in its ardour, in its methods, in its expressions» ..."

(From the concluding message)

- (a) **According to us, which are "the changing societies cultures of today" to which the synod fathers are referring? ... Try and discuss in community or in groups of sisters-lay friends.**
- (b) **What does it mean : "to live in a renewed way our communitarian experience of faith" ? ... Let's discuss it.**
- (c) **Starting from our charism, what does it mean "to live the announcement in a renewed way"? ... How does the new evangelisation challenge us as sisters of charity?**



Sisters of charity of Saint Jeanne Antide Thouret

SPIRITUAL BOOKLETS

"THE POWER OF THE WORD"

③

*"In the sacred pages
there is the blaze of salvation"¹*



"JESUS CHRIST, GOSPEL OF GOD FOR MAN "

Professing our faith, today

(cf. Mk 1,1)

YEAR 2012

¹ Saint Jerome (Ep 18,6, CSEL54,81)

Introduction



This third booklet, entitled "*Jesus Christ, God's Gospel for man*", comes out in a plain version and therefore it won't be printed.

On one hand, it's a continuation of the first two and on the other it assumes a goal and a form entirely inked to *the Year of Faith*, which the Church is called to live in a special manner during this span of time between the 11th October 2012 (50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican Council II and the 20th of the publication of the Catholic Church Catechism), and the 24th November 2013 (Solemnity of Christ the King).

Like the other two booklets, it's target is to understand the Word, this time narrated by the evangelist **Mark** in barely one verse : **1,1**.

Just one verse! Not an ordinary one, but the one that opens Mark's entire Gospel and all the New Testament. It's a strategic verse containing as we shall see, not just a title but a *profession of faith*: that of the emerging christian community of Rome; a community born in diaspora, in the heart of the pagan Empire during the time of persecutions and decadence. Hence, a faith tested by fire!

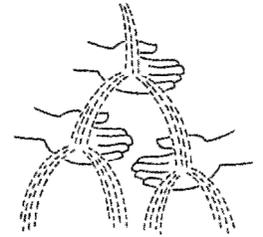
Our approach will obviously be only to understand what the evangelist is writing and who is the evangelist in question. In reality, a veritable lectio itinerary needs to go further: understanding in order to interiorise; interiorising in order to pray; praying in order to decide; deciding in order to act ... That's all!

Therefore the most significant part of the booklet overlaps a big section of lectio: reading of the context, contents, style, literary genre ... The rest, namely the following stages belong to the

Does this apply to the shrine of our life? Does the same thing happen in our religious houses? In our families? ... Perhaps, like Bartimeus are we also "*begging the meaning of existence*"? ... Perhaps we too need a new encounter with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God (cf. Mk 1,1)?



Do we perhaps need to update our life's agenda and that of our community-apostolic projects concerning that appointment of Sychar towards which the Chapter has already oriented us ? Do we still thirst that water ... To what extent? ...



15. *May we be guided by Mary, woman of faith and star of evangelisation! Let's journey with Jeanne Antide and with all our saints, who have constantly filled that amphora from the well of God's Word, the Eucharist, the diaconia of charity ...*



money but gratuity. Not the omnipotence of the empires and powers but the secrecy of the beatitudes, etc.

13. *A concern ...*

Thus, while reading and meditating Mark and taking in consideration Samaritan woman's itinerary, *my certitude* becomes more clear: Jesus is the salvation! He is the light! But paradoxically, this certitude becomes even challenging : Is Jesus my salvation? Is he my light?

He is the most beautiful news, the Gospel of the gospels! But is He my most beautiful news? Is He my Gospel?

My-our Rule of Life repeats throughout many pages almost like a mantra: "*Our life is Christ*"¹¹ ... *But is my-our life truly Christ?*

Yes, this certitude is even my concern! It's a concern for myself, for my Congregation; for our lay-friends ... *Is Christ our salvation? Is he our light?*

Which place does faith and trust in him occupy in our life, in our choices and in our institutions? Is He truly the *origins* of our happiness? *The cornerstone of our certitudes? The milestone of our journey?*

14. Pope Benedict XVI, in his homily at the concluding mass of the Synod, as he commented the experience of the blind man Bartimeus he projected it on today's situation and stated that "*the light of faith has grown dim*" and that "*God is no longer considered relevant for their lives*" everywhere and especially in the so called places of ancient evangelization.

assimilation that we are ready to carry out both individually and as a community ... without the help of any booklet, but within the perimeter of the Holy Spirit who creates and re-creates everything !

We don't learn how to do the *lectio*, but while doing it we learn to live it. There isn't a prior technique; there is an "utterly human" method, granted by God's Spirit if only we look for it with the heart. He is the Master of this school of the Word.

Therefore, having understood what Mark relates in this inaudible text (the booklet's task ends here), we will spontaneously ask ourselves: *What does this Word tell me ?... And which answer do I give to this Word? ... Which conversion of lifestyle, of mentality, of relationships is it demanding from me ? ... Here I am Lord!*

When we welcome the Word with a simple heart, it not only ushers us into the concrete life of the primordial christian community, but it even prepares us to understand our context, our life situation, that of the world, of the Church ... of our same Congregation.

I bid all those who approach this booklet to understand deeply and patiently the suggested contents and then accept the challenge of the subsequent **reflection-module**.

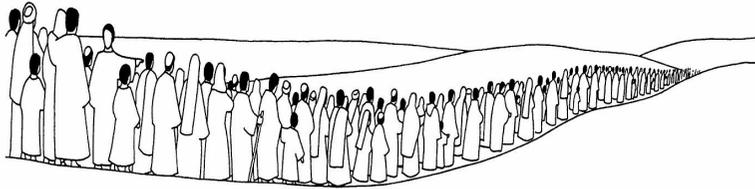
Those who have the patience to go through it all, as they get along with the reading, they will experience a feeling of familiarity with the pages in question. They will surely conclude that the text contains many repetitions. But we hope that the repetitions serve as a tool for a better understanding in view of an authentic itinerary to encounter the Word.



Sr Nunzia De Gori – sdc

¹¹ Cf. RoL : 2.1.1; 2.1.2; 2.1.3; 2.2.1; 2.2.2

*The profession of faith
of the primordial christian community*

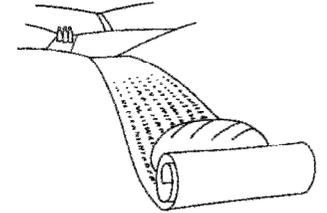


« **Beginning of the
Gospel of Jesus Christ
Son of God** »

Mk 1,1

being distinguished as masters, they were first distinguished as witnesses ... Peter and Paul, like the Samaritan woman !

10. In reality, whatever Peter and Paul had heard, seen, touched and contemplated in Palestine ... now, in Rome, they entrust it, transmit it and announce it with their life. A transformed and enamoured life fully oriented towards the Person of Christ who is no longer present in the flesh, but alive and true in the *community of the believers* who break the bread in his name, live the "diaconia" in charity especially at the service of the poor brothers, share and celebrate the Word.



11. Therefore those christians, ready to receive martyrdom and true martyrs (!), learn the unprecedented novelty of the Gospel simply from the way of living and behaving of Peter and Paul and of the other first anonymous disciples of the first hour ... It's precisely their faith that urges them to believe, is communicated to them and converts them. It's somehow like the Samaritan woman with her fellow citizens.

12. They learn from Peter and Paul that Christ alone is the salvation from sin and from evil ... He, the light in the darkness! Born in poverty, dead on the cross, risen on the third day. He, who came in the world as



the least among the least, has changed the way of looking at life, history, morals, the future, the economy, power, worship etc ... And he taught that it's not power that saves but service. Not vengeance but forgiveness. Not slavery but freedom. Not

of grace, we can still say “this is the moment”... Even the Church repeats it to us. *This is the hour!* For us and for our brothers and sisters to whom the charism sends us.

7. In the first verse which opens the New Testament, it is said without the risk of misunderstanding, that *only Jesus Christ, as Son of God, is the origins, the foundation and the life of the cosmos' history*. Not a Powerful (alter Augustus) and victorious Christ (alter Consul), but the humble Christ of the cross. Alternative! Therefore, starting from this statement of the evangelist Mark while having in front of my heart's eyes that empty amphora to which the synod refers, I would like to share with you *a certitude and a concern*, which inhabit me after having read, meditated and prayed this very beautiful and shocking text found at the beginning of the first Gospel.

8. *A certitude ...*
 Mark's gospel doesn't emerge theoretically nor is it the first principle of a philosophical theory. It's a narrated witness. It's a photographed experience on the “pagan and secularised” roads of dominant Rome. The author isn't stating an abstract truth but he is simply recording an event. He says whatever he is seeing!

9. And what does Mark see? He sees men and women and perhaps even old and young persons in the narrow Roman roads carrying out very simple crafts expressing at most a lower middle class, but who surely don't threaten the central power and ready to undergo martyrdom ... not to defend an idea, a philosophy or a religion made of idols and rites, but to witness *their personal faith* in a “person”: *the Person of Christ*. They learn to know this person through the catechesis of Peter and Paul who before

A preamble

The first time you approach the Gospel of Mark, you cannot imagine that this Gospel was written in a highly critical, hostile and unwelcoming context for the emerging christian message, namely Nero's Rome. It's overwhelming!

In that epoch, Rome was the military and powerful Capital whom everybody feared throughout the world, but in its interior dwelt the utmost decadence regarding morals and customs. The fire, about which history, literature, art and recently even the cinema have mentioned down the centuries, before being an architectural disaster (10 on 14 districts were destroyed), it was a social, moral and economic disaster. Vice and paganism had already burnt Rome before it was actually burnt by fire. And Nero personified it.

Therefore, between the year 60-70 A.C. , precisely in Rome, there began to develop one of the christian communities, spiritually more convinced and morally stronger, but outside the Hebrew tradition. These christians hailed from paganism and not from the Torah. They were even evangelised by Peter and Paul!

Therefore, a strong and courageous Christianity was putting its roots in the small streets and suburbs of the Capital, consisting of craftsmen and small traders, and even within some good middle-class families.

Thus a community of faith began to emerge, gathered in the Name of Jesus. Its presence gave rise to a critical conscience within an immoral society. No words, but only an honest life: faith against vice; faith as an alternative to the customs' obscenity.

Such a community caused fear. Those in power were threatened,

not because they were politically weak but because of their moral fragility. The immoral behaviour had far-back taken the place of the gods' worship.

Mark was in Rome, during those years ... Those in authority tried to wipe out a bothering community not for what it did or said, but for its lifestyle. Thus, martyrdom within the emerging Church became the most habitual form of witnessing. In the generalised disaster, the small and emerging christian community, guided by Peter and Paul, ripened an always more living faith, made up of persecutions and very often of martyrdom.

In this context and climate Mark gathers the testimony of faith of his persecuted brothers and sisters ... and in collaboration with God- first -Author, he writes his Gospel: the first text of the New Testament.

Let's follow it ...



many wells offer themselves to quench humanity's thirst ... We must orient our search well ... Like Jesus at the well of Sychar, the Church also feels obliged to sit beside today's men and women ... She wants to render the Lord present in their lives so that they could encounter him because he alone is the water that give true and eternal life . Only Jesus can read the depths of our heart and reveal the truth about ourselves: «He told me everything I have done », the woman confesses to her fellow citizens. This word of proclamation is united to the question that opens up to faith : «Could he possibly be the Messiah?» – it shows that whoever receives new life from encountering Jesus cannot but proclaim truth and hope to others. The sinner who was converted becomes a messenger of salvation and leads the whole city to Jesus ...».

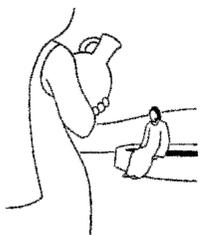


5. *Dearest sisters ... dearest friends,* I think that this focusing on the Sychar's event is very close to the spiritual experience that the Congregation is living in these post-chapter years. We too, daughters and lay-friends of Jeanne Antide, ask ourselves whether our amphora is empty or not, in this transition of our history ... The Year of faith which the Pope strongly desired for the entire Church, is also for us an occasion to an essential, dynamic and vital journey in line with conversion. The chapter experience led us to Sychar ... Maybe it asks us to pass again through Sychar ... and not for a transient stop!
6. Already during the chapter preparation, we had clearly stated that *«this world in which we live leads us to check our faith. And that it's indeed the time to be "together" prophets and saints!»* ... And we then already took as our model, the experience of the Samaritan woman: *"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming and now is !" (Jn 4,21.23)* ... Yes, just after two years of that journey

Dearest sisters ... dearest friends!

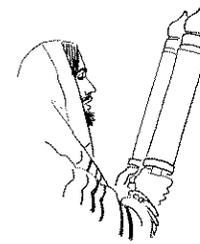
*"It's not the Gospel that changes.
But we who start to understand it better"¹⁰*

1. The synod for the new evangelisation has ended some days ago. The synod fathers presented to the Pope their 58 propositions (suggestions), which as usual will timely take in consideration. Therefore, let's wait for this document which will surely be a precious tool for the whole Church in this most uncertain time in the faith domain, but so rich in spiritual challenges and opportunities.
2. But I would like to draw your attention on the bishops' final message which in its first part tackles the encounter at the well between Jesus and the Samaritan woman as a model of the situation of modern man. I am struck by this reference since it's harmonised with the spirit of our general chapter.
3. Thus at the end of this lectio itinerary, based on the first short verse of Mark's gospel, I would suggest anew this entire first part of the synod message, because in it seems to appear all the chapter trend elaborated more than 2 years ago by our Congregation.
4. **Let's listen to the bishops ...**



« There is no man or woman who, in one's life, would not find oneself like the woman of Samaria beside a well with an empty bucket, with the hope of finding the fulfilment of the heart's most profound desire, that which alone could give full meaning to existence. Today,

¹⁰ Pope John XXIII



The personage Mark and his Gospel : a still open pipeline !

A vacuum to be filled

1. One has to wait for the transition between the 7th and the 8th century A.C. to have the first true commentary to Mark's gospel carried out by the Benedictine monk Beda the Venerable². He was the only Father of the Church to dedicate works in commentary form to this gospel. It's very striking, especially because during the first centuries of Christian history, all the fathers had entirely or partially commented the whole Gospel of Matthew or Luke or John. Instead there was absolute silence on Mark. Why? The most common and logic theory is linked to the fact that in ancient times and for numerous centuries, (until almost our days!), Mark's Gospel was considered as an antecedent or a sort of synthesis preceding Matthew's gospel. A sort of compendium. Therefore, most probably it appeared simpler and even more pleasing and more enriching to explore, interpret and therefore comment Matthew's whole Gospel, rather than "its summary" only.
2. Thus, there is a lack of a strong and direct patristic source on Mark's text : the shortest of the four Gospels and the least commented since antiquity. If we want, this explains the reason why a great interest has been focused on it. It's enough to go in any Christian, catholic or non-catholic bookshop, in the west as in the east, in the north as in the south

² Born in England in 672, Beda the Venerable will be the spiritual heritage of Gregory the Great.

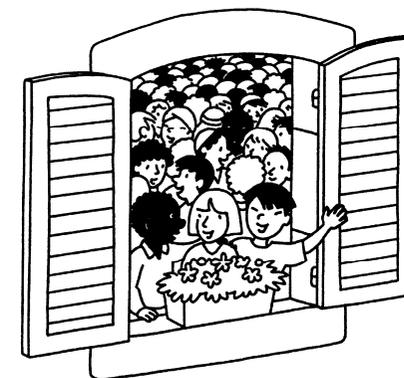
of the world, to verify how many texts belonging to “Mark”, which are both scientifically and spiritually important, are today in display in numerous parts of the world. There is a sort of deep desire to fill a vacuum.

Who is Mark and for whom does he write? ...

3. *But who is Mark?* Almost certainly a disciple of the first hour, a native of Palestine, who received a Hebrew formation and has therefore acquired an old-testamentary sensibility and tradition. As a missionary in Rome it seems that he wrote for the christians in Rome, therefore for those who were not at all bound to the Mosaic law. They were thus ignorant of Scriptures and had become Christians through Peter’s and surely even Paul’s preaching. Very often, these christians came from paganism, from the gods’ religion and perhaps even from Agnosticism ... Thus, Mark’s recipients weren’t always “pious Israelites”, circumcised, descendants of Moses or spiritual sons of the Patriarchs and the Prophets. Most of them were lay by culture and born in pagan Rome.
4. Thus, Mark’s gospel can be defined as a profoundly “lay” Gospel ... a “Roman” Gospel³. It is very important to keep this in mind to understand properly what and how he is narrating. Because, it’s a different thing to speak to circumcised-disciples, who are interiorly awaiting the Messiah with their source of spirituality and knowledge in the old Scriptures than to speak to converted christians, lay-pagans who were shocked by Peter’s preaching. The same thing with the kerygma. The language is fully different.

³ A Gospel that emerged in the heart of the Empire

Professing our faith today



As we know, Mark was an utterly sensitive observer of his christian brothers' sufferings, who were often sent to the scaffold: the cross on the imperial roads or the wild animals in the recreation arenas. When the first persecutions of the faithful in Christ and followers of Peter and Paul broke out, he was in Rome.

Therefore in that profession of faith of the emerging Christian community in a pagan land, which all the attentive observers of his narration acknowledge as the most beautiful and true one, i.e. "*beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God*" in it, he recounts all the Golgotha experience to comfort and to encourage his persecuted brothers.

Rejoice, here is the good news: The one, who on the cross and in his utterly human suffering revealed himself as the Son of God, namely, Jesus the Christ, He and only He is the New Man of human history, the cornerstone of the world's history, the milestone of his people in pilgrimage : the Church!

He is the Life, He is the Truth, He is the Way!

Yesterday, today, always!



Therefore it is Mark who invents the "gospel-genre". Besides, his text is the result of two encountering traditions : the Hebrew style of its origins and the Roman style of the recipients.

5. It seems important to highlight another thing: *the date of its composition*. The debates are numerous but almost all scholars today maintain unanimously that the composition date is deemed around the year 64 A. C. or however not after the year 70. We are dealing with the time linked with the persecutions. Therefore the recipients are the persecuted christians: christians who faced martyrdom or who witnessed their brothers' martyrdom. The gospel is therefore for the times of trial and persecution ... times of upheaval, "apocalyptic times". The year 64 marks the burning of Rome by Nero and the year 70 marks the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by Titus. Two big signs are ruined: the empire and the temple. The political and the religious power. In chapter 13, called the "small apocalypse, we find the background's setting. Mark elevates it as a sign of the human and even of the cosmos history : a new history for a new humanity, accomplished and rendered visible in the "*archè-Cristo*"⁴.
6. *Who are therefore the recipients of Mark's Gospel?* Directly, his brothers who were persecuted because of their faith: the martyrs for Christ. Indirectly, humankind of all times who journeys on the difficult path of trial and persecution: the men and women who occupy the last place in history but are the first in the new model of humanity. Therefore Mark writes to the new converts in Christ, those who through

⁴ Cf. Note n.7

baptism are just beginning to taste the joy of a new life: life created through faith. It's therefore a Gospel that accompanies the times of trial, supports the persecuted, opens the eyes of the blind of Jericho of all times. It isn't a Gospel for the pious Israelite who prays three times daily and accomplishes all the purifications demanded by the law, but for an *ordinary centurion*, a pagan who had the privilege to glimpse in the crucified man, suffocating under the weight of his body crushed by the nails of the cross, the Son of God, God himself (Mk 15,39). God, who cries out to give life⁵ like a woman in child-bed, precisely on the cross, in the torture of his shattered body, hears the cry of life brought forth through his same body.

7. In Mark's Gospel one seems to discover his human path and an answer to his questions ... An "alongside gospel" during the moment of struggle and contradiction ... Mark's most attentive experts point out that if we want to define this Gospel, we can easily say that it deals with the narration of the Lord's passion and death, preceded by a long introduction.

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four gospels, but proportionally, the passion's narration occupies the longest space. Given the context in which it emerges, we can soon guess why ...



⁵ The strong cry of the Crucifix!

abandon his children, but he looks for them, redeems them across the blood of Christ: born in poverty among the poor, weak among the weak, son among the sons. The Son who will return in glory, Lord of the cosmos and of history, because everything will be recapitulated in Him (cf. Eph 1,3-12).

The utterly short verse that opens Mark's Gospel seems to contain this and introduces the entire New Testament:

Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In one of these passages of our reflection we were saying that Mark's Gospel is primarily the narration of the passion and death of the Lord Jesus, preceded by a long introduction. The first short verse summarises and anticipates it.

Likewise, the recalling of the martyrs' experience, who, in the profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, recalled *the mother* of all experiences of martyrdom: that of Christ, *of the Son of God*, hanging precisely on the cross from where he doesn't only pronounce words of forgiveness, as we will see in the other evangelists, but also utterly human words of participation in the human life and suffering. Man among men, crucified among other crucified men. Up there, he fundamentally reveals himself as the human son of God. "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*": it's the son's cry, who in the moment of trial, doesn't feel, or hear or touch the beloved Father, whom he however desires to have near: *Where are you God, in the hour of your children's suffering ... of your Son's suffering?* ... Sure, the Father wasn't absent on the cross as one day on the Jordan bank: «*You are my beloved Son in whom I am pleased* » (Mk 1,11; cf. 9,7). *I am with you on the Golgotha, in Jerusalem. I am with you on every Golgotha of history and of the world.*

« *Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)* »

And so? ... What is written in the first verse of Mark's Gospel if not only that Jesus Christ, the Son of God who revealed himself on the cross, is the beautiful news? the most beautiful of all news?

The only and unique beautiful news that announces life, as the *archè* (the big-bang) of creation. It's the only and unique news that supports faith solidly, therefore truth, like the cornerstone which supports the majestic building. The only and unique news that shows us the way and the direction *like the milestone* on the ways of the Empire.

The Gospel of Jesus-Christ is all this. And it's not written by Mark the scholar but is narrated by Mark the *witness*!

I repeat, all this wasn't a sterile statement demonstrating a beginning, but the martyrs' creed: the *shemà* of the emerging Christian community: their "announcement" on the way of the holocaust, that of yesterday and today ... in Rome and everywhere!

Brother, be not afraid while going up to the cross: if he came for the first time through his birth, he will not abandon you because he will return. And he isn't one of the many emperors with whom history abounds; he isn't even one of the many conquerors who have disseminated the ways of the world with pain and death ... He is the humble lamb who preceded you to the cross and who now goes up there with you, in you. He, the Son of man-Son of God ! This is the good news, the Gospel: not a far-off god like the Roman gods; nor a despot-god like the emperors, nor an oppressing-god like the conquering generals ...

A Crucified-God, Power of God-Love, who from the top of the cross utters words of forgiveness, of eternal life and of peace for the entire cosmos. Words of love! He, the Son of God who doesn't

THE NARRATION: MK 1,1

« *Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)* »



An announcement, a title or ... other?

We are in what the exegetics call Mark's "prologue". The style is plain, essential, direct. A few words: *seven* in the original Greek text (including the parenthesis). We aren't dealing with a sentence or a fulfilled thought, because there is no verb, action. Instead it seems a sort of a heading, a title. But if we go deeper, if we give a closer look at its vocabulary, at the literary context in which it is inserted and take the author in consideration (Mark, a Hebrew by birth and of Roman adoption), then we can realise to be in front of a thoroughly richer text than the one which at first sight seems to have a completely new, innovative and original style.

It's Mark's typical style, which seems to be the fruit of the two encountering cultures : on one hand Jewish and old-testamentary; Roman and pagan on the other.

Thus, what at first sight resembles a title, in reality is an announcement, a kerygma or *a profession of faith* ... The good news of the gospel narrated in the following 16 chapters, is anticipated here in this verse "dense" in mystery and evidence.

As if the evangelist, after having written the whole gospel for his community, he then wanted to summarise it in this previous formula which could be easily memorised, individually recited and proclaimed by the community, in the liturgical assemblies and in all those places where the community used to assemble.

1. The style

« *Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)* »

A half-way expression between the profession of faith and the announcement. A sort of **creed**, similar to the “*shemà, Israel*”; a sort of **announcement** similar to the “*Roman notice*”.

“*Shemà Israel*”



The “*shemà*” was the creed of Israel; it was recited three times daily, everywhere, by everybody ... in the secrecy of a room as well as on the square in front of the temple. By the pious Israelite as by the big priest. In Jerusalem as in the far-off lands. Muttered between the lips like a short prayer, proclaimed to the sound of the trumpets as if it were the last announcement of the end of the world. The *shemà* was the prayer that gave one a feeling of being a son of Israel up to the joints of his bones and heir of the wandering Jew. It was the identity creed of a people to bring back the missing ones, to make the distant feel close and to render an exiled generation in mutual communication : “*Shemà Israel ...*”⁴Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is only one: ⁵You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength” (Dt. 6,4-5).

The Roman announcement



In the Roman culture the “*announcement*” was a sort of notice, a brief notification, essential and easy to memorise. A message destined to everybody: citizens and subjects; free and slaves. It was entrusted to the Empire’s promoters who carried it everywhere, in the West as in the East, in the cities’ forums as in the crossroads of the main roads : the Appia, the Aurelia, the Emilia, etc.⁶. It contained an information or an order or both.

⁶ We know how important were the streets for the Romans ... It is said that the Empire, besides being an enormous field of peoples and cultures, it was also a dense network of roads, side streets and highways.

Christ, Son of God, is the *milestone* for their journey, the beacon, the point of reference without which it was impossible to have any bearing: the first and unique reference “*mile*”.

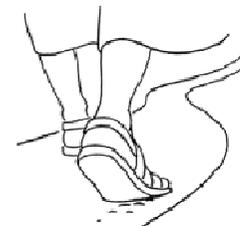


The Gospel isn’t only the beginning, foundation and cornerstone, but even the milestone, that is: road, orientation and journey. If Christ is at the origins of your existence, if He is the cornerstone of your life, He is also the bearing of your journey, not only, but He is your same journey, your way.

Therefore...

By simply using the expression “*Initium*”, Mark is telling his tried and persecuted brothers in faith, that without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, son of God, we would be blind and would still grope in confusion and in the darkness of sin. With him the road is indicated. We know where to go! Because He is *the life* (the archè), He is *the truth* (the cornerstone), He is *the way* (the milestone).

Will not even John say the same thing some decades later, using categories of Greek philosophy? He will say that Christ is the way, the truth and the life (cf. Jn 14,6) ?



So far, therefore, the word “**Initium**”!



counted The traveller used to find them, one after the other, mile after mile, almost as street companions ... always there, always near, always a point of reference. A sort of navigator; the essential indications were engraved on the stone: the distance from Rome, the name of the road, the name of the consul who constructed it.

The “*miliarium aureum*”, built especially under Augustus in the year 20 A.C. at the Roman Forum, was the first *milestone*, the *Initium*, from where all the roads symbolically started. In every part of the empire, every milestone indicated the distance from this symbolic place.

The christians of the small and yet persecuted community of Rome knew about the milestone. It was enough to take a few miles’ distance from the Capital to find already one, two or perhaps more ... placed there on the side of the road, high and solemn to show you the way, the journey.

Mark, and even Peter and Paul, who reached the heart of the Empire *Rome (!)* from the East, had encountered many milestones during their journeys. They knew what a precious service they rendered to the traveller, especially when the latter was a foreigner and alien to those roads and regions. Thus the milestones were real beacons and strategic points of reference. They oriented, indicated and guided the traveller. They offered him security and certainty about his distance from Rome ... how much he still had to cover to arrive or how far he went astray ... Therefore *the Initium* represented both the arrival but also the departure mile. It was the first and the last.

Thus, Mark, drawing from the roman culture inhaled by the christians who hailed directly from the pagan and lay tradition, across the word “*Initium*”, announces that the Gospel of Jesus

It was proclaimed in Latin or compiled in Greek, published in Hebrew or translated in Syrian, in Egyptian, in Chaldean and in Hebrew. The notice was the most universal announcement in existence : everybody had to know ! Whether written or heard, it contained the message of the Sublime; the Emperor was therefore a sacred word that should be neither dispersed nor suppressed ... It was one of his wishes or information: every man in the empire had to know ... in Rome and everywhere.

◇ ◇ ◇

Thus, similar to the shemà and with the style of the announcement, Mark writes ...



« *Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)* »

It’s a short and direct text and easy to memorise, which could be recited secretly in the heart but even proclaimed loudly till the four ends of the Earth, like the “*shemà, Israel*”. A sort of “a rosary” to repeat while going up for martyrdom or while observing from a distance the brothers ascending the way of the cross.



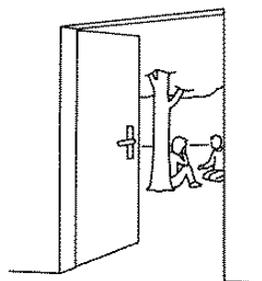
« *Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God)* »

Muttered between the lips by the pious disciple who went up to be tortured on the cross, while remaining soundly enchained and bound to his brothers of faith and martyrdom, the **utterly short text** that Mark puts at the beginning of his Gospel is destined, *like the Roman announcement*, to reach the four ends of the Earth.

2. The contents

What does this utterly short and yet deep text mean? ... It's what we will try to understand while drawing closer to the meaning of every word contained in it. Patiently and attentively, humbly and with a bit of curiosity. With the attitude of those who are aware to be in front of a text, which is Word of God ! An inspired Word. A Word that the human-author-Mark, the first among the evangelists, writes precisely in a specific geographical context (Rome) and with an entirely new style (the gospel-genre).

As it was hinted before, it's important to remember that this verse doesn't only open Mark's Gospel, but the entire New Testament. It seems to function as a heading to the whole christian message. And like every introductory text, it was probably written at the end, with his mentality and eyes open upon the whole evangelical message and on the first Christian community, in diaspora in Rome, in the heart of the Empire.



Mk 1,1: an entrance door

Although structurally brief, the text contains an "essence" of meaning and values. Having emerged in a context of persecution, it appears to have been recited by the martyrs and the christian community who gathered closely around

it as *their personal profession of faith: the good news*, not only for us but for the whole universe and for all times, consists in the fact

across its institutions (law courts and govern-ships), its commerce and troops. Therefore the roads were immediately the big asset of conquest and communication; of promptness and prevention. Thus, year after year, project after project, investment after investment, a dense radial network continued to spread from the Capital till the far ends of the Empire, hence connecting every land rapidly, directly and continuously.

Thus the roads acquired a fundamental importance for Rome which permitted the control of the conquered and adjoining territories. While the Empire continued to extend, they gradually became all the more necessary to displace the big crowds and to facilitate a rapid arrival to the suppliers. The speed of the intervention permitted by the roads was already a deterrent in itself, to avoid the breaking of eventual revolts against the central power.

Thus, somehow out of necessity or out of virtue, the Romans became experts in streets' construction and developed that incredible road-network which is still evident today both in the west as in the east. And throughout the day the traffic never stopped. Night and day, morning and evening the troops moved along, the wagons creaked under the weight of foodstuffs while the immense prisoners' caravans shifted from one place to the other.

Therefore along the utterly long roads, whose horizon was invisible to the naked eye and through which not even the horse in spite of his speed could run across entirely, one used to place a *milestone* at every mile on the side: a sort of column marking the distance from Rome in miles⁹. How many milestones were there? One, two, hundred? Many, plenty, they couldn't be

⁹ A roman mile was equivalent to about 1.480 km

in Rome, famous for its splendour and monuments, transmits the expression “*Initium*” and even the image of the cornerstone.

If at a first level “the *Initium*” evokes the origins, creation and life, at a second level it evokes the foundation and the stability of the stone that holds all the construction: the stone-truth!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God, is the beginning and the foundation of the cosmos, of history and of man’s heart. He is the beginning and the foundation of the new building: the Church, stable presence of the Risen Lord who was martyred on the paths of the Empire. He is the beginning and the foundation of the new humanity who emerged from the martyrs’ blood, but receives a permanent energy from the blood of the first martyr, Christ, whose blood flowed from his pierced side and became an everlasting source of grace and life.

Therefore : the good news is that Jesus, the Son of God, is life and truth!

Is it an assertion of the term beginning? A definition? No! *It’s an experience on the Roman paths of martyrdom ... a witnessed and experienced faith.*

At a third level :

Beginning, means Milestone

The reference is also to the first milestone, *the Initium*. What does it mean? We must not forget that the streets were the big secret on which the strength and the power of the Roman Empire relied. In fact, at the dawn of its power, Rome had understood properly that in order to conquer and dominate the world and above all to keep it constantly under pressure, it was necessary to be omnipresent



that *Jesus, the Christ-Son of God, is the beginning, the foundation and the way: l’archè!*⁷

Just as it appears to us, it resembles a title and maybe it is , but the elaboration of its context belongs to the persecuted community. Seven words in all, structured and composed in Greek, hence rendered easy to memorise, they bring forth a “revolution” because of its contents and language.

Someone says that this text alone, relates all the New Testament. In seven words coined from scratch – *nobody had ever written them before him* – Mark opens a cycle and invents a literary genre which we precisely call “**gospel**”.

And down the years, we have used it so abundantly that when we simply pronounce the word “gospel” we immediately recall Jesus’ life narrated by the four evangelists. Sure, this is the gospel, but not only. And Mark is the first one to make us understand it.

Besides being a big scholar and simple in his style, Mark was skilfully enthusiastic about the encounter and the dialogue between the cultures: that of the ancient wisdom which he had learnt at the school of the law and the prophets in his native land, and that of the pagan wisdom which he had learnt to know and to appreciate during his years in Rome with Peter and perhaps also with Paul.

Determined to write artistically the Christian community’s experience, he will be capable to narrate the faith experience of this emerging community composed mainly of christians, sons

⁷ The word “archè”, translated “beginning” by all the modern languages, is in reality a very dynamic and explosive expression. Today it would correspond better to “**big-bang**”, referring to the moment of birth, to the propulsive spark of the whole universe, to the “beginning” which contains everything in it regarding time and space ... therefore Christ, big-bang of the New World, of the New humanity, Beginning of every Future!

and daughters of pagan Rome who were often persecuted and then martyred. These Christians never had the knowledge and the faith experience of Israel. They were the so called "Gentiles" or converted to Christ without being beforehand Jews, sons of Abraham and Moses and heirs of the enslaved people in Egypt.

Therefore, little by little, across this text which is the entrance door to the New Testament, we now approach its contents ... And with the heart open to the Spirit we become harmonised with the martyrs' faith who are our ancestors and models of fidelity to Christ. Let's do it with humility, simplicity and silence ... as we allow them to proclaim this magnificent *neo-shemà*. Precisely the martyrs who were the first "promoters" of Christ's faith. Such faith, is written with blood and reserved in this text in Greek for the future generations; not the Greek of the wise and the learned but the Greek of everyday life, or rather the common Greek, spoken by everybody: citizens and slaves, men and women, Romans and colonists, in the west as in the east; in the public forum as at home ... in the heart of the Empire as in its suburbs: in Rome as in Jerusalem. If one desired to survive throughout the vast Empire, he was obliged to know this language. As it is today with English !

This too, if you want, was a revolution, because the New Testament doesn't open with the Romans' Latin or with the Jews' Hebrew, but with the Greek of the koinè: precisely, with the language of universal communication. And the first verse of Mark's Gospel which we will try to understand is already the sign of this revolution.



Thus, even the Christians called to martyrdom could rely on the cornerstone which rendered stable and beautiful the building of their faith: Christ-rock (cf. 1Cor 10,4); Christ-cornerstone (cf. Acts 4,11).

Didn't Paul write this to the wavering Christians of Ephesus, precisely in Rome, while keeping in mind the majesty and the beauty of the imperial palaces ? "... So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone; in whom the whole building, fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit " (Eph 2,19-22).

As a matter of fact, Peter and Paul, in harmony with their fathers' tradition and with the prophetic language of Isaiah, who had identified the secret of the temple's stability, in the invisible presence of the *cornerstone* (cf. Is 28,16), indicate precisely in Christ, the true cornerstone on which the new temple rests, the new building, the Church.

Christ, an everlasting, stable and eternal stone which scandalises and stumbles those who would like to remove it. However, it's impossible to remove it after the experience of that Friday on the Golgotha and of the empty tomb on Easter morning!

It's impossible because "***this Jesus - the Christ of Good Friday and Easter morning - is the stone which was regarded as worthless by you, the builders, which has become the head of the corner*** (Acts 4,11; cf. 1Pt 2,7).

Thus, Mark, taking in consideration the background of Israel's faith, inspired by the teaching and the witnessing of Peter and Paul, but inspired even by the numerous cornerstones scattered

Mark had probably read some of the two apostles' writings which circulated among the brothers and the sisters in faith and treasured like precious pearls by the community. They used them in their always more hidden but always more attended liturgies as viaticum for their faith in time of trial.

Meanwhile in Rome, monuments made of solid stone and precious marble were being raised in every corner of this portentous and splendid Capital. Therefore, how could Peter and Paul encourage their brothers without using at least once, the image of these unrestrained beauties and these majestic and solid stones, to make them understand how more true and more lasting is their Lord's beauty?

They were indeed striking monuments! Soaring into the almost always clear sky of the seven hills' city, they seemed to challenge the empyrean and compete with the gods' Olympian due to the rarity of their "embroidered marble", but especially for the solidity, the resistance and their stability. What rendered them so if not the secret of the *corner stone, the foundation stone*, the one that assured the height, the stability and the duration down the years? They were high and beautiful because of their depth and solidity. Resting upon the cornerstone, they would always resemble the house built on the rock which neither the rain, nor the rising streams, nor the strong winds could beat against it (cf. Mt 7,25).

Those monuments - *arches, columns, palaces, but even amphitheatres, bridges, aqueducts etc...* - standing there, solid and stable, in the forums and along the imperial roads are silent and yet eloquent witnesses of Rome's splendour and power. Their stability was grounded in the cornerstone that assured balance and duration.

2.1 The text

« Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Son of God) »

*Seven words of spoken Greek,
grouped together in 3 units:*



- (1) **Gospel ...**
- (2) **Jesus Christ (Son of God) ...**
- (3) **Beginning ...**



The first unit of the christian profession of faith consists in the word "gospel", which appears here for the first time in the vocabulary and in the language of the emerging Christian community.

1ST « GOSPEL » ...

"The most beautiful of all news!"

For us, christians of the 21st century, it concerns a used, abused and consumed word... And if we are asked what it means, we are there ready to answer without hesitation, that the word "gospel" means "good news". *The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God.*

Sure, the *gospel* is this: the striking narration of his earthly life, of his passing among mankind "curing and doing good", as we find in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. At 10,38).

Gospel is also the narration of his passion, death, resurrection and of his ascension in heaven. It's the announcement of his return in the fullness of time when he will come to judge the living and the dead, and to establish God's Kingdom forever. Hence Gospel is the utterly beautiful news of salvation.

But, let's stop a little ... At least, let's ask ourselves from where did Mark draw this word, *identifying the christian faith* ... Let's ask ourselves what it actually meant in the place where it originated and was used.

We must not get tired to repeat that since it is Mark who opens the New Testament, he is the first one to use the word "gospel". Not only, being an utterly new word, he even introduces it to the neo-testamentary vocabulary.

In the Old Testament

If we dwell on the Hebrew tradition, we notice that the word "gospel" doesn't belong to the old texts. We find it again in its contents of "good news" only in some passages of the historical books: in the Second book of Samuel (cf. 2Sam 4,10; 18,20.22.25.27) and in the Second book of Kings (cf. 2Re 7,9); once also in Isaiah (cf. Is 52,7), who announces *the good news* brought on the mountains of the God's messenger. But besides these few hints, nothing else!

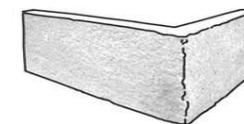
Being in the Old Testament, I dare say that we aren't really helped to understand the reason of the big success of the word "gospel", starting from Mark onwards ... It will recur *80 times* (!) throughout the New testament against the zero times in the Old. Not to mention that the four canonical writings attributed respectively to Mark, Matthew, Luke and John are precisely called "Gospels", as well as many other apocryphal writings

Strangely enough, it's the word used even by the evangelist John to open his Gospel, hence becoming the foundation of the prologue: "*In the beginning was the Word ...*".

The archè: *Where everything begins ... where everything originates*; that is the "time" and the "place", where God creates the world in its first cell and originality, in the Word's presence.

Therefore, the first meaning of the expression "Beginning", harmonises us in with creation, with the emerging of life. It's a direct call to life. The beautiful news is that Jesus, the Son of God, is our life!

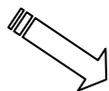
At a second level :



Beginning → corner-stone

He is referring to the *corner stone*, about which **Isaiah** had already spoken (cf. 28,16). Likewise **Paul** (cf. Rm 9,33; Eph 2,20) and **Peter** (cf. 1Pt 2,6-8) ... but also **Luke** (cf. Acts 4,11) and **Jesus** himself, as well as the three synoptic gospels testify it (Mt 21,42; Mc 12,10; Lk20,17) .

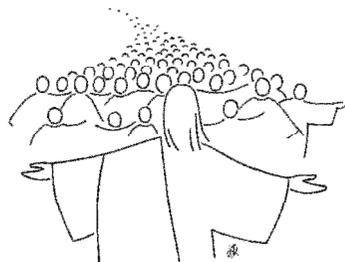
We know that Mark lives in Rome, in contact with Peter ... perhaps also with Paul. He himself speaks of their preaching. He knew well how much the two apostles, columns of the first Church, loved Christ. Seized and won by Christ, they became his most popular witnesses among their brothers in faith, namely, those Christians who accepted baptism and the first vocation to martyrdom.



But there is a **third unit** of the faith, professed by the primordial community that coincides with the expression **Initium** :

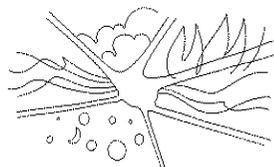
3RD «BEGINNING» ... «INITIUM»

“The most beautiful of all news, Jesus Christ-Son of God, is our life, our truth, our way”.



The word “**initium**”, which at first sight seems just a way to introduce a title, in reality, written in its original context, is a far richer and an innovative expression than what it appears. In fact, one can find again in it **three levels** of significance, precisely because, three were the Hebrew-Roman contexts in which it was used.

At a first level ...



Beginning → **Origins**

Mark is using the same first word of the Genesis: *archè*, in the beginning ... used by the sacred author to indicate the origins of the world and God’s creative action. Today we would call it the expression that announces the big-bang of the cosmos: *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Gen 1,1).

dealing with the life of our Lord Jesus: *Thomas’ gospel, James’ gospel, Philip’s gospel, etc.*

In the Roman culture

Being the first to use this word, Mark evidently didn’t mediate the word “gospel” from his fathers’ culture who had no knowledge of it but from the Roman pagan culture, where on the contrary it was used.

And why, precisely this word? What did it actually mean? Who used it? And if “gospel” meant “good news”, which was this “good news” within the pagan culture? Sure, it had to be “good news indeed” if Mark recurs to it in order to narrate the faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God !

Therefore, in the Roman culture, the word “*gospel*”, had a definite value, linked to *two figures*, both of them important within the imperial society:

Augustus, the sublime

- On one hand there was the figure of the Emperor Augustus, whose birth was “*the*” good news, awaited for centuries throughout the world and which his contemporary poets didn’t cease to celebrate⁸.

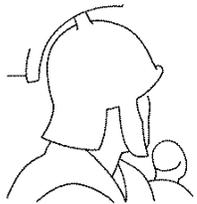


His birthday, which was proclaimed yearly by the promoters till the 4 ends of the Empire, immortalized in the imperial decrees and posted up along the roads and on the splendid monuments, was “*the*” good news, **the gospel** for whom everybody offered sacrifices to the gods who gave such a

⁸ Ex. The poet Virgil, who announces the birth of a saviour (puer), in his work the “Bucolique” (4th eclogue).

saviour to the world. His coming on earth coincided with the assertion of Rome's power, of its boundless imperial extension and with the victory of the so called "*pax romana*": namely, that long period of "calmness", imposed by the laws and by the widespread and oppressive presence of the unlimited Roman armies, everywhere in Rome and in the far east.

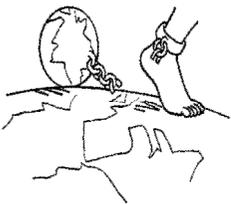
Therefore gospel was the memorial of this birth and the celebration of this "pax".



The victorious consul

• *On the other hand, there was the figure of the victorious consul; a sort of general-leader of all the Roman armies, whose return from the far-off wars, was the good news, the gospel to celebrate in Rome with jubilation, triumphal arches and offerings to the gods. With the return of the victorious-leader, they closed the doors of the temple of the double-faced god Giano, whose entrance remained open during the war and was closed, precisely in time of peace.*

The consuls who conquered new lands and amalgamated new nations to the Empire, entered Rome accompanied by unlimited multitudes of prisoners headed by their prisoner king. They went up to the Capitol by the consul in duty to be offered to the Emperor. The latter, will then offer them to the goddess-Rome, lady of the world !



The Father who didn't abandon his children during the history of the post-Eden, has finally redeemed them in the sacrifice of his Son. This includes the centurion, the contemplative-pagan of the cross! The soldier, who doesn't enjoy the scene from a distance, but who stops "as a neighbour" of the Crucifix! And he can understand, precisely because he is there beside him, in front of him!

All this is contained in the faith formula found in the first short verse of his gospel : the beautiful news is Jesus-Christ-Son-of-God: and if you want to know Him, you must stop "in front of the cross" ... But which cross today? That of our reminiscence? The wooden cross? Perhaps, but it's not enough...

Oh, you passer-by, pilgrim of times and history, pilgrim of the daily paths of suffering and dying, whether man or woman, stop in front of the cross, that of the memorial inside a church as that of history, along the paths of the world : to contemplate and to serve him. To contemplate him in the mystery of the Word and to serve him in the witness of the world's wounds. Stop in front of the Crucifix and the crucifixes! In front of the Son and the sons. Stop like the centurion ... like the good Samaritan!

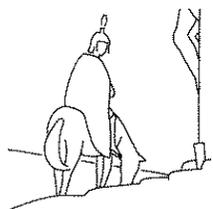
Thus so far, the meaning of the expression:
"Jesus Christ, Son of God"!



evangelist highlights twice Jesus' gesture: "*in a loud voice*" Jesus prays the Father with Psalm 22 (cf. 15,34); and "*in a loud voice*" Jesus breathed his last (cf. 15,37). In the first case, it's the cry of pain, of the lacerated body: "*My god, my God, why have you forsaken me?*". In the second case it's the cry of triumph: from him the creating Spirit is conferred.

It is, so to say, the powerful cry of life that emerges mysteriously from the event of the cross. To the "labour" pain which opens Jesus' body like the temple's veil, echoes the liberating cry of the Spirit who breaks in as "Lord of history" following Christ's death. The suffering of his body members, lacerated like the temple's curtain, foreshadows the birth of the new man. Therefore, on the cross, the "labour pains" of the New Creation are fulfilled. Thus, he breathes his last "*in a loud voice*" which isn't the last breath of dying but it's life that urges. The Spirit who drifted on the waters and was present in the moment of the first creation (cf. Gen 1,1b), doesn't fail to be present for the appointment of the New Creation, here on the Golgotha, where He reveals himself as the "Spirit of Christ" and reveals the "Son of God" to the centurion".

The centurion "was in front of him"



This man, an anonymous pagan, who uttered the highest proclamation of the believer's faith, is neither far nor absent, but is "*in front*" of the dying Christ. He is there, vis-à-vis the Crucifix. And precisely because he is in front of him he can look directly at him

and therefore recognise him: "*Indeed this man is the Son of God !*"

...

Salvation is fulfilled on the cross. The cry of the Crucified man announces that a new humanity is emerging: from the Son of God, emerges the son of the saved man, redeemed humanity!

Thanks to their victories, the Empire extended till the ends of the then known world. *Their return was a gospel, the good news that marked the beginning of a peaceful time!*

A birth and a return ... These two events were the announcement of a time of peace. They were the gospel celebrated by everybody: citizens and slaves, free men and foreigners of the diaspora. Such peace was due to the Emperor's wisdom and to the power of the faithful consul, servant of Rome. The birth of the first had brought peace on earth while the return of the other guaranteed times of stability and peace for the whole Empire.

Thus, Mark, mediating the word "gospel" from the Roman culture and on using it for the first time, he is precisely referring to the birth and the return of the Lord Jesus ... to the mystery of his incarnation and his redemption, which are at the origins of peace on earth, in the cosmos.

The word "gospel" includes all this ... from an ordinary, human and Roman word it becomes an extraordinary, divine word ... word of God!

So far, therefore, the word **"Gospel"!**





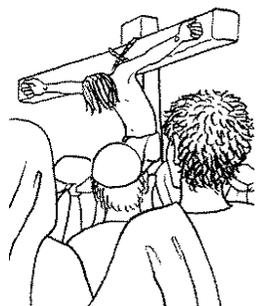
There is **a second unit**, which appears for the first time in the vocabulary and in the language of the emerging christian community.

The name is : **"Jesus Christ, the Son of God!"**

2ND « JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD. »

"The most beautiful of all news is the person of Jesus Christ - Son of God!"

It's the centre of the profession of the christian faith! This "Name", in front of which Paul will say, all beings, *in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld*, are called to bend the knee (cf. Phil 2,10), contains *a truth at two levels*:



- *First level: In whom do we believe?* In whom did we put our trust? Who is the true gospel? We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came into the world to save us; he gave his life for us on the cross, and for us he will return at the end of time. We have put our trust in Him. *He is true good news, the gospel for all times and places!*

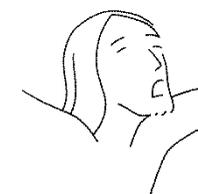
Mark compares and contrasts the Emperor Augustus and the powerful Consuls who together build the power of Rome and the consequent roman pax, with the humble carpenter of Nazareth, the human son of Mary. He is the Christ! God's Anointed, the Messiah, the Messenger ... the Son of Man, incarnation of the Son of God, who will return in glory in the fullness of time : King of the Universe.

Therefore, the gospel of peace brought forth by Augustus, with the victories of his consuls and with the peoples' conquering, will

between human history left on this side of the threshold and the divine mystery hidden beyond, in the *"Sancta Sanctorum"*, has no longer any meaning and is thus torn in two *"from top to bottom"*. On the Golgotha, God settled every division, every separation: he did it in his Son, revealed in all his divine and external splendour, in the crucified members of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, *the veil of the temple* opens, because henceforth God's *"face"* is no longer hidden (cf. Ex 33,20-23): his face shines on the face of the Crucifix. In Christ, who is God's definitive Temple and permanent Tent of Yahweh's Presence (cf. Heb 9,11ff), man has access to the Father, because as the author of the letter to the Hebrew puts it, he has acquired *"the confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body"* (Heb 10,19).

Therefore, as the tearing of the temple's curtain removed man's no-access to the Sancta Sanctorum, in the same manner, the lacerated body of Christ under the weight of the crucifixion tragedy, removed man's impossibility to have access to communion with God. Through the curtain, only the high priest could enter once yearly, on the day of expiation. Now, through Christ, everyone has access to the Father, who gave himself totally in the Son. *The Son of God opened for us the access to the Father, because he is the door* (cf. Jn 10, 7-9)

c) **"the loud shout"**



One notices that usually, those dying on the cross have no more energy to shout, as on the contrary does Jesus in his moment of "death", because they are generally worn out by progressive asphyxia. In Jesus' specific case, Mark's theological goal is clear: rather than the cry of the defeated, it's "the voice" of the winner, who returns ... the "consul" who goes back to the Kingdom of life, accompanied by the multitude of peoples, no longer prisoners of sin, but free citizens of God's kingdom.

It isn't literally a cry, but a "loud voice" just as the text says. The

with the doors closed, or on the river bank where they went to fish again ... Instead, the centurion recognizes him immediately, while he was dying, up there on the cross: *Indeed, this man is the Son of God ! Truly ... Namely: it's the truth! I assure you!*

When, according to the Jewish law, one had to swear, it was necessary on behalf of the individual to have at least on his side the presence of two witnesses, if he wanted to be believed. Therefore, the centurion who acknowledges and professes the Son of God in the dying Jesus, doesn't have two but three witnesses who confirmed his truth, three extraordinary phenomena: the *darkness*, which came down at midday over the whole earth. But when he dies at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, darkness disappears (cf. 15,33); **the veil of the Sanctuary**, untouchable and inaccessible, is torn in two, "*from top to bottom*" (cf. 15,38). **The loud cry**, unlikely for a person dying on the cross, is however possible for Jesus (cf.15,37).

a) **Darkness**

When Jesus dies, there is no darkness on earth, as we usually think, but the contrary: darkness makes space for light. The Dying man defeats the night. His death enlightens the world. It's the moment of the supreme truth, entrusted to a pagan's mouth: *That Crucifix is the Son of God ! ... In the Dying Man, is revealed the Living One ... In the man of the cross, is revealed the Lord of Life! Therefore it's meaningless for the earth to be dark: the death of the Son of God clears the darkness of sin and thus truth shines.* The ninth hour of the Golgotha becomes the "midday" of history. He is the light ... He is the Life !

b) **The veil of the sanctuary**

Even the temple cannot remain shrouded in mystery nor can it continue to mark the separation between God and man. *The veil*, which indicated the point of no return, the insurmountable limit

be superseded by the gospel of peace brought forth by Christ, the humble servant of Nazareth, not by submitting peoples but by liberating every man and every woman from sin and from every kind of evil. Simply because He is the gospel, or "our peace" (cf. Eph 2,14).

Thus, the beautiful news of christian faith is primarily the *birth of Jesus*, his coming in history, his incarnation. Beautiful news is Jesus! He is the true Sublime, the Sublime-Saviour.

- *Second level: Why is Christ the true gospel?* Simply because he is the Son of God! He isn't the parody of a god, as the human emperor could be, but God made Flesh. He is the true conqueror of history, not because he declares wars and conquers them, but because, through his incarnation, he brings forth peace and attains freedom. He doesn't submit the nations like the Emperor's consuls; but from many peoples, he forms one sole people, one sole family: God's family. Not enchained prisoners who go up to the Capitol, but men who are freed from the chains of sin, who go up with him to God's throne (cf. Eph 4,8).

Jesus, the Son of God

Thus, the Gospel is Jesus. And he is indeed the beautiful news, because he is the Son of God, God himself !

Jesus Christ isn't therefore a common man like Augustus, even though he is a powerful emperor. Jesus is the Son, who without losing his equality with the Father, he became equal to mankind. He is the Son of *the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, of Moses and of the prophets*. The Son of the only God of Israel, who loved us to the point of sending him to us for our salvation.

The God of the Exodus loved us so much to the point of giving us his Only Son who pitched his tent among us, becoming one of us so that we become like Him: sons of God!

Beautiful news is the one that reveals to us that Jesus Christ isn't a new human emperor, but the Son of God, who became Flesh, so that we become sons of God! And on the cross he rendered us sons. What a big vocation! What a big mystery!

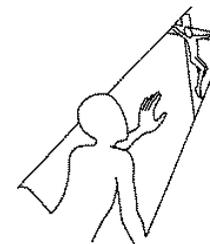
*And who assures us that Christ is the Son of God?
Who reveals it to us?*

- First and foremost, *the Father personally, God himself* reveals it to us ... there on the Jordan banks, when the man-Jesus presents himself to John to receive also the baptism of water like every son of Israel. He and those present saw the heavens open and a voice coming from heaven said : «*You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you* » (Mk 1,11). And the Father will reveal him to us again on the Transfiguration mountain when Jesus' most intimate three friends Peter, James and John, shrouded in the cloud's mystery will hear the direct voice of the Father: «*This is my beloved Son; listen to him!*» (Mk 9,7).

- God's "*non-sons*" namely the "*unclean spirits*" reveal him to us : «*You are the Son of God!*» (Mk 3,11) ... The sons of darkness, on seeing him "*healing and doing good*" understand that there is no more place for them on earth because the era of man's imprisonment is over; there will no more servants but friends, no more slaves but free men, no more orphans but sons ... The Son of God came to free humanity from every physical, moral, psychological and spiritual chain, from every spirit of slavery ... Therefore, wherever He passes there will be no more space for the spirit of evil and slavery (cf. Mk 5,2-13).



- He is revealed to us in the temple, the most sacred place of Israel's faith, not by a common Israelite, but by the most authoritative among the lawyers, that *big priest*, who without wanting will be the key-witness of Jesus' self-revelation: «*Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One ? ... Yes, I am!* » (cf. Mk 14,61-62 ff). And he was so scandalised that he tore his clothes as a sign of indignation and decided to make him die on the cross. Yes, because to proclaim yourself son of God, meant in Israel the lowest blasphemy pronounced by human history: man, a god?



- *The centurion* will finally reveal him to us, the pagan who will bring to fulfilment the passion and death of the Son of God: *This man was truly the Son of God!* ... What did the centurion see in a crucifix – *one among many, who in those days and years of "roman-pax" filled the imperial streets* – to acknowledge him as the "Son of God"?

Mark puts on a pagan's mouth the most revolutionary profession of faith that man could ever pronounce:

This Crucified Man and only He is the Son of God!

I repeat, what does he see in that dying man, to acknowledge him as the Son of God ? ...

The women, who on the Golgotha will take a distance from the sight of the crucifixion, will acknowledge him as the Son of God only on the third day after his death on encountering him Alive, in the garden where he was buried ... The disciples who weren't even present on the Golgotha will recognise him only eight days after when he will appear in the house where they were hidden