

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B) 02/08/2015

Dave and Nadine are at the airport in Orlando, Florida, awaiting their flight. They're dressed in heavy boots, parkas, scarfs, mittens, as they prepare to head home to the Canadian winter. An older American couple standing nearby is intrigued by their manner of dress. The wife says to her husband, *'Look at that couple. I wonder what their destination is.'*

He replies, *'How would I know?'*

She counters, *'You could go and ask them.'*

He says, *'You're the one who wants to know, you go ask them.'*

She decides to do just that and walks over to the couple and asks, *'Excuse me, I've noticed the way you're dressed and I wonder you're going?'*

Dave replies, *'Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.'*

The woman returns to her husband who asks her, *'So, where are they going?'*

She replies, *'I don't know. They don't speak English.'*

People grow accustomed to using language that they understand, but others sometimes struggle to understand. This happens in families, in organizations, in specific fields of study, and in church. When this happens, it isn't unusual for us to also say, *'They don't speak English.'*

Mark does something similar in today's gospel story. Jesus, we are told, encounters great resistance from the church leaders. They don't appear to be able to understand the language that Jesus is using. So Mark tells us that Jesus *'[leaves] the synagogue....'* He, in this way, points to a new - yet very old - way by which God relates with us.

The **synagogue** - like our **church** - is the ordinary center of **teaching**. It is where people go to be with **God**. The **rites** and **rituals** associated with the **synagogue**, however, take on a **life of their own** and - with no **ill intention** - begin to **limit God's accessibility**.

Jesus, the gospel writer tells us, offers us **something different**. He tells us and acts out for us (by healing, for instance) that **God is always accessible**, wherever we are, and is not confined and limited to the established places of worship.

The **gospel** writer goes further. He writes, '**Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.**' He doesn't say that **Jesus** went to the official place of prayer: the **synagogue**. Rather, he says, '**he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.**'

When we **confine and limit God** to this place, we tend to **prevent** ourselves from knowing **God 99%** of the time! We tend to **undermine** knowing **God** around our dining room tables. We tend to be **blinded** and **can't see God** in ourselves and other people no matter what our or their life situation.

Jesus encourages us to **practice a willingness** to have our horizons **expanded**. He shows us the way by **praying in a deserted place**, by **relating and healing people in their homes** and **at their places of work**. It might initially feel **unsafe**, but in the end such a **practice** will teach us to know **God** in **many more and diverse** situations and people.