

St Mark
25/4/26

Marie Nooman Sabir is excoriating about this longer ending to St Mark's gospel which ironically, because it's not at all original to the gospel, we hear today on the Feast of St Mark. She has a lot to say on why it's so inappropriate not least from a female perspective but also because the exhortations to seek signs, the binary nature of belief - believe or be condemned - and the sudden shift to the Ascension without any further meeting in Galilee, all run contrary to the thrust and theology of the rest of the gospel. To take one example, in the original gospel the women are described at the end as fleeing from the tomb

'for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid',

which, as it stands, leaves the impression the women had simply given in to their human weakness when it could also be understood as a transformative religious experience, one of awe and ἔκστασις - that standing outside oneself, which indicates a meeting with the divine, not then our experience of God's absence but rather the overwhelming nature of being in the presence of something holy. Which is exactly the use of ἔκστασις elsewhere in Mark's Gospel and the reaction of the disciples at the stilling of the sea (4:41) and at the transfiguration (9:6).

This perhaps highlights the difficulty we all have in conveying what is essentially mystical in a language others can understand. The Good News is that this is an impossible task for humans but made possible for us in Christ. It is not only then a suffering we bring on ourselves when we try to describe this impossible experience to others but a suffering the experience itself necessarily entails - a passion we all have to undergo if we are to understand and to be misunderstood, as the women of the gospel so obviously were.

'Be calm but vigilant because your enemy, the devil, is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for someone to eat.'

-a lion sometimes in the guise of St Mark.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour