

Fr. Mike Homily—June 10, 2018
Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

A few times each year I have the occasion to return to my home parish in Edina where I was raised in the faith and went to grade school. Usually it's for the funeral of an old-timer or for a penance service. It's called a "home parish" because I spent the first 22 years of my life with that community at the center of my religious orbit. My family was there. Most of my friendships came from there. It was within walking distance of my house. It was "home" to me.

But it isn't anymore, and hasn't been for a very long time. I still refer to that place as my home parish, and most people understand what that term means when I use it, but it's an inaccurate description now. A home is a place in which you feel most deeply known and connected by important relationships and shared history and stories and values. But I realize every time I arrive at Our Lady of Grace parish how profoundly disconnected I am from its life. I know almost nobody there, and more importantly, they don't know me. Sometimes at a funeral there I will remark to one of the grade school altar servers that I used to sit in the very same classrooms that they do, and I used to serve mass too. They are polite about it, but it's quite clear they could not be less interested in hearing about that. Why should they be? To them I am a stranger.

And the spiritual vibe there is completely different today. It is a far more traditional worship experience than anything I had growing up. I'm always warmly welcomed there, but I clearly no longer "belong" there. It is not my home in any true sense. For the last several years my real home parish has been St. Pascal's, and it's likely that that will soon change too.

All of which is why some of the most important words in today's gospel of Mark are the first three words we heard: "Jesus came home..." They seem at first to be unremarkable words, really just a set up for the strange stories that are about to follow. But they are crucial words here because Jesus was raised in Nazareth through his childhood, but Mark is speaking of his home now as the village of Capernaum, which is nowhere near Nazareth—dozens of miles away.

When his relatives set out to seize him because, as they said, "he is out of his mind," they didn't just cross the street to retrieve Jesus. No, they set out from the mountains and made their way to the seashore. They thought that bringing Jesus home would put an end to all the commotion he was causing for the family, the religious authorities, and the crowds who followed him. What seems not to have occurred to them, however, is the possibility that Jesus was already at home, in a place and among people far removed from his youth. His faithfulness to his life mission had distanced him, physically, spiritually, and culturally from many of the traditions that were considered "normal" by his ancestors and his Jewish religion. In fact, the only time any gospel tells us about his returning to Nazareth as an adult, the townsfolk tried to throw him off a cliff. His mission was about God's Reign—not just talking about it or preaching about it, but making it real in the moment, by behaving on the basis of its being true and now.

It's not so hard to see why doing that could cause people to question his emotional health. The unclean people with whom he was willing to hang around and physically touch, the meals he was willing to eat with sinners, the attention he was willing to give to outcasts and enemies, the way that he was even willing to describe his followers as more important than his own blood relatives. All of it would have been shocking, scandalous, and provoking of anger, fear, and resistance. Jesus had left home alright, and created a new one, and not everybody was happy about it. Whenever the kingdom of God is being acted into existence, there—HERE—is home, and here are my mother and brothers and sisters. Nazoreans or not, blood relatives or not. Here is home.

In today's gospel Jesus' relatives seem to believe that they will help him—and themselves—by relocating him to the place where it all began, where he grew up, before all this trouble. There's no reason to think that they weren't motivated by love and concern for him. But they were motivated by a profound misunderstanding of what the reign of God looks like, and what it demands of those who are utterly faithful to creating it—like Jesus. It is not a continuation of business as usual, either in church or in society. It is not a return to the way things used to be in some falsely imagined "golden age" of religion or culture. It is, in fact, nothing less than a re-definition of what the word "home" means. I and we are at home wherever the will of God's justice, peace, hospitality, compassion, and forgiveness are acted into concrete existence, no matter whom we happen to be with as that essential mission unfolds. And it means that home is wherever Eucharist is celebrated, no matter with whom or in what community, because nothing builds up the kingdom more powerfully or surely than that. Than this. Welcome to your home parish today, wherever you are from. Here and now is home.