



Gospel Reading: [Mark 1:1-11](#)

Behold I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. God is One.

After the fall of man, sin, death, and corruption entered the human race. And even though God had commanded saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth,” man rebelled. They began working on this building project called the *tower of Babel*. It was like the first great skyscraper in one of the world’s first great cities. And God said, “*This is not a good thing. They are serving self. They are serving sin. They are serving Satan. And in that frame of mind, in that frame of heart, they are working together. They are coming together as an unholy community.*” And so He confuses their languages. And unable to communicate with one another, they scatter to the four winds of heaven. And they finally go out to populate the earth as He had originally commanded. He cast them out of the city and sent them into the wilderness.

Fast forward many centuries, and in the ancient Middle East, we find the ancient Middle Eastern version of New York City, or Chicago. The name of the city was *Ur*. There’s a young man in this city named Abram. There’s a young woman, his half sister, Sarai. And they had everything here that one could imagine: all of the entertainment, all of the business opportunities to win friends, to influence people, and grow their little empire, all the food, all the merchandise, all the trade from around the world, all the entertainment that one could imagine, and not only that, but a support group for who knows how many generations–Abram’s father, Terah, and men even before that–there was this whole support group of hundreds of Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, Grandparents and Great-Grandparents. And if you look at the ages of these people in Scripture, great, great, great, great, great-grandparents . . . Lots of friends, lots of opportunities. And God calls Abram and Sarai out of the city. And He sends them into the wilderness to become strangers in a foreign land, to herd farm animals far away from any city.

Fast forward to Moses. He is pulled up out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter. He is raised in the capital of the empire as the grandson of the King, the grandson of the Pharaoh. He is given the best education that that culture had to offer. He is given the most sumptuous feast, the most amazing foods. He had influence, he had wealth, he had power. You know all the young ladies looked at him as a very eligible bachelor. He had it all. Any entertainment that he desired, it would have been right there at his door. And around the age of 40, God calls him out of the city and sends him off to shepherd sheep in

the wilderness for 40 years, in preparation for the other *dumb sheep* that he was going to shepherd in the wilderness for another 40 years. Because that's just what happened: when he was 80, God brings him back and now, not just Moses, but all the Israelites—all two million of them—God calls out of Egypt. And He calls them to walk in the wilderness.

Fast forward several more centuries in Israel's history and look at some of the greatest prophets of God: Elijah & Elisha. Some of their best work, some of their most intimate times with God, some of their greatest miracles are performed not in Times Square, not on State Street in Chicago, not on 6th Street in Austin, but in the wilderness with very few spectators.

Then we come to the greatest prophet of all: John the Baptist. Of all of those under the old covenant, Jesus said there is none greater born of a woman than John the Baptist. According to Scripture and according to the Tradition of the Church, not long after he was born, he ended up being raised not in the city, but in the wilderness. You see, his Dad was a priest! He served in Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation. He's the son of a priest, and yet he ends up being raised in the wilderness. And when he becomes an adult, he becomes that *voice crying out*, not one of many voices in the city, but this lonely, isolated voice in the wilderness.

At the birth of Christ, does God send signs from Heaven? Does the veil between Heaven and earth open up and do the angels appear and announce, "*Glory to God in the highest and peace and good will towards men*"? Yes! But they don't announce it in the city.

The angels do not appear to Caesar. The angels do not appear to the high priest. The angels do not appear on main street in Jerusalem. The angels appear and announce God's good news in the wilderness to a bunch of shepherds. What is God's affinity for the wilderness? What is His affinity for these blue collar shepherds? Why doesn't He want to go where all the millions of people are and proclaim His message there, so that more people will hear it right away? Why is this pattern repeated again, and again, and again, and again, and again throughout Scripture? God is calling us out of the city and into the wilderness.

In today's Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, it says, "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*" And then when telling us the beginning of the Gospel, it doesn't start with the Crucifixion; it doesn't start with faith. It starts with "*a voice crying out in the wilderness,*" a voice that calls us to repentance and to baptism. We hear in the wilderness — in Mark chapter 1 — we hear the voice of God's prophet. And at the end of the passage, *we hear the very voice of God*. For when this prophet baptizes the Son of God—not in the city, but in the wilderness—That is when we hear the very voice of God coming down out of Heaven saying, "*Thou art my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.*"

Does God speak to man? Absolutely. But so often, you have to be willing to turn your back on the city and walk out and be practically alone. And that is where you hear the voice of God's prophet. And that is where you hear the voice of God.

What reasons does God have for doing it in this way? I believe one of the reasons is the background, the context of the message, just like the canvas that you are going to paint on needs to be the right type of material. God needs the right type of canvas, the right type of background on which to write His message. If you walk into a city, almost everything that you see is man-made. And most of it is made by men who are fallen, sinful and at enmity with God. You see, God doesn't say there is anything wrong with the idea of a city. Scripture starts in a garden and ends in a city. We start in Eden, but then by the time you get to the book of Revelation, John says, "*I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven.*" You see, if you have a bunch of holy, godly people working together, a city can theoretically be a good thing. But when you have millions of sinful men and women coming together into one city like New York, Chicago, New Delhi, Mexico City, etc. . . . a lot of times what we get is a lot more like *Babel* than it is like the New Jerusalem.

And so we have these buildings. We have these storefronts. We have these banners, we have these advertisements, we have these billboards, very few of which are calling us to humility, very few of which are calling us to be ascetic, very few of which are calling us to a deeper and closer relationship with God, very few of which are calling us to obedience to God. You walk into a city, and you're surrounded with the arrogance of man. You're surrounded with advertisements and storefronts that want to call you in, and in exchange for your money to fulfill any lust that your heart may have.

You go out into the wilderness and you may not find much. You may just find a bunch of sand in the desert. But *God created each grain*. You may just find a bunch of straggly old trees. But *God created them*. You see, the Maker of that sand, the Maker of those trees, is without sin, which is more than I can say of the maker of those skyscrapers, and those businesses, and those billboards. And so in the wilderness, God has a canvas that is relatively free from sin, death, and corruption. It's a place where you are more easily without contradiction and without distraction. You are going to be able to hear the message. But the canvas is not the only reason. The background and the context of the message is not the only reason.

Another reason that God calls us out of the city has to do with the fact that He is unwilling to be simply one voice among many. You see, if you listen carefully enough, it is possible to hear God's voice even in the city. Abram heard Him well enough to know, *"I need to get out of here!"* Lot, in Sodom, was able to hear God's voice clearly enough to leave. God speaks at all times. God speaks everywhere. And anybody who is attentive enough can hear Him. But even if you are listening, even if you are open to hearing the voice of God, God knows how many distractions there are in the city. He knows for every word you hear from Him, you are going hear a thousand words from the radio stations, the TV's, the acrobats, the performers, the advertisers, the salesmen, who want your money, the people who are trying to suck you into the world.

Now with all of these things going on, is it still possible for you to hear the message? It is possible. Wives, is it possible for you to have a conversation with your husband, to hear everything that he says while you're cooking, while you're disciplining a child, and while the TV is on in the living room? Yes. But *it's not possible to give him your undivided attention while doing all those things*. Husbands, is it possible to have a conversation with your wife while you are watching a football game, while you're munching on some nachos, and while you're patting one of your grand-kids on the back? Yes, it is possible. But at that particular moment, *you are not giving your wife your full and undivided attention*.

See, you can hear the words of somebody, you can even listen to the words of somebody, and still be lacking in the conversation. Because in addition to hearing them, in addition to listening to them, sometimes people need that respect of *receiving your full and undivided attention*, where you say, *"You are so important that I'm going to block everything else out. I'm going to concentrate on absolutely nothing except what's coming out of your mouth."*

If your husband deserves that, if your wife deserves that, if your parents deserve that, if your children deserve that, *how much more does the Lord and Creator of the Universe deserve our full and undivided attention* when we listen to what He has to say?

In the city He can speak. In the city you can hear him. But there are so many distractions. If you'll leave the city and go into the wilderness—a couple of cows, a goat or two, some trees, some dirt, some leaves, some chirping birds—It is far less distracting. Now you can hear God. You can listen to what He says. You can give Him your full and undivided attention. Out in the wilderness Abraham did not have to be distracted by the merchandise in Ur. Forty years herding sheep, Moses did not have to be distracted by the pomp and the pride of Egypt. John the Baptist, growing up in the wilderness and being a prophet in the wilderness, did not have to endure the grating on his soul of the arrogance and pride of the pharisees and the high priest.

Turn your back on the city and walk into the wilderness, and give God your full and undivided attention.

There's another reason why God, over and over, calls people into the wilderness away from the cities. And this is simply a matter of the *audience*. Now, what I'm about to say is not a hard and fast rule. Can you find humble people working in the city? Yes. Absolutely. Can you find arrogant and prideful people living way far out in the country, in the boondocks? Absolutely. You can. But if you're really looking for pride, if you're really looking for haughtiness, if you're looking for the best example you can find of that thing which is the stench in the nostrils of God, are you more likely to find it in the wilderness, or in Times Square? Hollywood doesn't make it's movies in the desert. It does most of its work right there in the city where it has all the resources available to it. Secular music, be it rock, country, whatever, most of their work is done where? Places like Nashville. Big corporations where people bow down to the almighty dollar. You don't find many fortune 500 companies in Omaha, in Norris City, in Stonefort. How many fortune 500 companies do you have in Stonefort? Probably the same amount we have in Omaha . . . Zero. If you have the pinnacle of pride in movie production, in television production, in music, in business, in restaurants, in any field that you can imagine, where are you likely to spend your life? In the city.

If you're more like a monastic, somebody who wants to dedicate every moment to God – How many monastics gravitate to the city? They don't. People that are humble, that aren't trying to claw their way to the top in business, that aren't trying to claw their way to the top in music, in advertising, in any other field, the people that are humble, they are more likely to be content having just a loaf of bread out in the desert, to be content just living in a trailer in Omaha or Norris City. They are more likely to be content with less. And remember what it says in the Scripture, that *God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*. Now, that's true no matter where you are. If you are humble and you happen to be in the city, then God will give grace to you. If you live in Omaha, in the boondocks, and you have a haughty and an arrogant spirit, God will resist you. But just in general, the proud are attracted to the city. The humble are content enough to be in the wilderness.

And so, to whom do you believe God will reveal Himself? Remember at Christ's birth, the angels said nothing to the emperor. The angels said nothing to the governors, to the rich. The angels appeared to the humble shepherds, the blue collar workers, the farmers, the coal miners, the teachers. Over and over and over throughout Scripture, we find that the voice of God's prophets and that the very voice of God so frequently is not in the city, but is in the wilderness.

What are some things that we can take away from this for ourselves?

Well, first of all, do not be ashamed, even a little bit, that you are part of a small, podunk hometown, little country church. I *like* being in the wilderness! I like being far away from the city. I like being in the boondocks. According to Scripture, that seems to be a pretty good place to be if you want to hear Him.

Second, we need to learn from this how we should order our lives. For you see, with modern technology, Satan has tried to come around our right flank and attack us where we don't expect it. He says, "*Alright, you go live in the country. You go live in the wilderness. I'm going to go get ABC, and CBS, and MTV and all of these other hundreds and thousands of channels, and I'm going to pipe the city into your home. I'm going to create all this music in this city called Nashville, in this city called Chicago, and I'm going to pump that into your home. I'm going to use the television, the radio, the TV set and I'm going to bring the city to you!*"

See, now you too can get on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and get on [Sears.com](https://www.sears.com). You can get on eBay and you can be just as superficial as the people in the city when it comes to fashion. *Congratulations*. You too can melt your brain with thousands of hours of music that say absolutely nothing about obedience to Christ. *Congratulations*. You too can spend all this time on, whether

its television shows, whether it's driving into the city for things and get so engrossed in food that you're more interested in how you can have your next gourmet meal than you are interested in how soon can I take the Eucharist. You see the sins of the city; do not stay in the city. The pride and the pomp and the arrogance of the city of Babel doesn't stay in Babylon. Satan has learned how to very effectively export it to anyone who is willing to drink it in.

So what should our attitude be? Same thing that God has always taught us. Our attitude should be one of simplicity, humility, putting God and the Church and our families at the center of our lives. Not putting sports and clothes and food and entertainment at the center of our lives. Now, am I saying that it's ever wrong to listen to a secular song? That you should never, ever, ever go to any movie? That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that Christ needs to be at the center of your life. You need to take *every thought captive* to Christ.

And there's also this concept of *silence*. Remember where God says in the Psalms, "*Be still and know that I am God,*" whether you're standing in the wilderness, or whether you're standing in downtown Evansville, or Chicago. This is the opposite concept to what the devil does. This is saying, "*Wherever you are, bring some of the wilderness to where you are. Take some time out of every day and just be still. Be silent.*" That means turn off the TV, turn off the radio, lay down the newspaper, put down your video games, put down your hobbies, put down your guns, and just take some time to drink in and to breathe in a little bit of the wilderness. You see, God speaks in the still small voice. He doesn't thunder from Heaven. He doesn't paint in pink and green stripes up in the sky. He speaks in a still small voice. And the only way that you're going to hear him—even if you have children—is to have some *silence*. You get enough control over your children that there is some time out of every day that it's quiet. And as a family, every single one of you slow down, push out the world, push out the city, and just meditate on the Word of God, the lives of the Saints, and prayers to Christ.

There is a lot that we can learn from this. You see, there were a lot of Priests, there were a lot of Pharisees, there were a lot of Sadducees that lived 2000 years ago, who, if you asked them, they would say, "*I would give anything to hear the voice of God. Anything!*" And yet, were they willing to turn their back on Jerusalem, turn their back on the city and go out into the wilderness to hear His prophet preach? "*Well, no, no, no...he's just this crazy, poorly dressed guy that has no culinary ideas whatsoever. He eats locusts and honey, and I'm not...I'm allergic...I'm not into those things.*"

And because they would not go into the wilderness, they missed the voice of Gods prophet. And when Jesus was baptized they weren't there. And they did not get to hear the voice of God saying, "*Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

I don't want to miss the voice of God!

And so it all boils down to something very simple. We are given the world that we can love. We are given Christ that we can love. And you have to choose one or the other, for you cannot love both. Either you will hold to one and reject the other, or you will serve the one and you will despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. You cannot serve God and material things. You cannot serve God and worldly pleasures. In your spiritual life, you need to leave the city. You need to hear the still small voice of God that calls you into the wilderness, and there is where you will hear the voice from His prophets. There is where you will hear His voice from Heaven.

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God is One