

The 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Ezekiel 2:2-5
<i>Response</i>	Our eyes are fixed on the Lord, pleading for his mercy.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 123:1-2, 2, 3-4
<i>Second Reading</i>	2 Corinthians 12:7-10
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor.
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 6:1-6

The 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year B takes us to the story of Jesus' rejection by the people of Nazareth, of his hometown, and this story is found in Mark 6:1-6. Now before I begin, this is not a long gospel text and the reason the church selects it for the day, as will become apparent in just a moment, is to focus on the theme of the rejection of Jesus as a prophet, that the prophet is not accepted in his own town. However, in my experience when this particular gospel comes up on the lectionary, that central theme of being rejected as a prophet frequently can be eclipsed by the appearance of the brothers of Jesus: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas — or Jude you can see it translated either way. And I know I've had this experience for myself sitting in the pew, when I hear about the brothers of Jesus, I hear them mentioned, what I start wondering about is well wait, who are these guys, what's going on here? So in the video for today what I'm going to do is focus on both aspects. I want to look briefly at the theme of Jesus' identity as a prophet but then I also want to make sure I address the question that a lot of people are probably going to have in their minds, at the back of their minds at least, as to who are the brothers of Jesus and what is their identity. So let's just read through the text with both those questions in mind. Mark 6:1-6 says this:

He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought

by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.¹

Alright, end of the gospel. Okay, I wanna bracket for a minute the whole question of the identity of the brothers of Jesus, just hold on to that, we'll come back to that in a moment. I want to first focus on the central theme of what's taking place here. The first is the setting and that is Jesus coming "to his own country." The literal Greek here *patrída* just means his fatherland, it means the place from which he hailed, his hometown, which as we know from elsewhere in the gospels is of course the city of Nazareth. So he's come back to Nazareth, he's come back to his hometown and he is going to the local synagogue in Nazareth in order to teach and to preach. And if you recall from parallels with this text, like in the Gospel of Luke, that doesn't go too well. Jesus' first homily, so to speak, that he gives in the synagogue at Nazareth meets with rejection and meets with doubt, it meets with anger actually on the part of some of the people from Nazareth. And so Mark is giving us a kind of shorter, a briefer account of that same event that we find expanded and given in more detail in the Gospel of Luke. In this case though you'll notice that Mark focuses on the people's response to Jesus' teaching when it says things like where did he get all this wisdom, how's he doing these miracles, and then they asked a very important question they say, "Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" And then it goes on to mention his brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, Judas, and it says are not they all with us and they took offense at him. Now the Greek word there for take offense is *skandalizō*, we get the word scandalize in English from this, or scandal, and literally a *skandalon* in Greek is a stumbling stone or stumbling block, it's something people trip over. And so the central meaning, the central focus of this passage from Mark's gospel is what I would call the scandal of Jesus' humanity, the scandal of particularity. The fact that the

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

Nazarenes, the people of Nazareth, have a hard time accepting Jesus as a prophet and as a miracle worker, as a wise man. They recognize that he's preaching and he's filled with wisdom, they even recognize that he's doing miracles, but they have a hard time accepting it because they trip over the scandal of his humanity, over the fact that they knew him when he was growing up, right, he's the son of Mary.

They also trip over the scandal of his identity as a laborer, it's very important. Jesus wasn't a scribe, he wasn't a priest, he wasn't a Levitical priest at least. In his first 30 years of his life he wasn't a prophet, he was a carpenter, he was a laborer. And the Greek word here for carpenter is *tektōn*, we get the word architect or other words, you know, tectonics that kind of thing, those English words are derived from that Greek root. And a *tektōn* here literally, although we translate it as carpenter, the literal Greek just means a builder, somebody who builds things, right. So you know, when we think of a carpenter we think primarily of someone who works or who builds things made out of wood, but in Jesus' day a *tektōn* could be someone who build things out of wood but also out of stone, right, like a stone mason, somebody who would build things from stone, because they would use both materials, whatever building materials could be used at the time, a *tektōn* would be engaged in that kind of building activity. In other words, he's a tradesman, he's a laborer, he works in the trade of building. So he's got a common job, he's just an ordinary layman, an ordinary day laborer, so they can't reconcile that identity as a carpenter or as a builder with the fact that he is now speaking as if he's a wise man, teaching as if he's a scribe, prophesying as if he's a prophet, and performing wonders and miracles as if he is a divine healer, like someone like Elijah or Elisha.

Which by the way remember, miracles were not something that happen all the time in ancient Israel, sometimes people get that impression. There aren't many miracle workers in the Old Testament. Lots of prophets, lots of priests, not a lot of miracle workers. Moses performed miracles, Elijah performed miracles, Elisha performed miracles, but you don't hear about miracles from other people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are miraculous things that take place around them, but they're not miracle workers in the strict sense like these other people were. So for Jesus to be performing miracles in his hometown is pretty extraordinary, and yet at the same time they can't accept him. They're scandalized by him because they know him, because they know the fullness and the reality of his ordinary human life that he

had led with them for 30 years before beginning his public ministry and they trip over that. And I might be getting ahead of myself here but I think it's something for us to remember too. Today people are still scandalized by the particularity of Jesus. They're still scandalized by the idea of a God who becomes fully man. That he really is a human being, he's fully human and yet he's also fully divine, and they can't square that circle, so to speak, because they know him, because they're too familiar with him, right. The old saying "familiarity breeds contempt," well familiarity particularly breeds contempt for a prophet, or someone who's going to be exalted and have an exalted status or mission in God's plan.

And sure enough Jesus responds to their being scandalized with one of his most famous sayings: a prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. There we see, notice this is important, that Jesus accepts the identity of prophet, right. Some people will reduce Jesus to that, they'll say oh he was a good prophet and as Christians we believe no, he's a lot more than that. He was a prophet, he accepts that, and what he's saying here is that prophets are respected by everyone except their own kin and people within their own town precisely because the people who know them from their ordinary days of existence, their ordinary life, their childhood for example, can't understand how God can now give them such a special status or special mission. And then Mark goes on to say something pretty remarkable, he says, "He could do no mighty work there except to heal a few people, a few sick people." Now some scholars will point to that and say "aha, look you know, he could do no mighty work, therefore he must not be divine because he was hindered in his ability to do miracles." Well obviously here in context that's not what Mark means. He's not denying Jesus' divinity, we'll see elsewhere in the gospel that he's very clear about Jesus' divinity, like when he walks on the water, for example, he displays a power over the created world and takes God's name as his own, I am, right, don't be afraid I am, he takes the divine name. But what Mark means here is that throughout the gospel it's very important that for people to be healed that they participate in that miraculous act through faith. We've already seen that in the healing of the hemorrhaging woman and Ja'irus' daughter, don't be afraid but believe. Where Jesus says to the woman, you know, my daughter your faith has made you well. Well is it her faith or is it Jesus? And the answer is both, it's both. There's a cooperation between God's grace and the human will and the human act of the intellect assenting, believing, accepting through faith. And so what Mark means

here is that there were only a few miracles performed by Jesus precisely because there was a lack of faith in the people of Nazareth, the people in his hometown by and large didn't believe in him. And it says that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief, he was in a sense taken aback by just how hardhearted they were and how so many of them tripped over the scandal, over the stumbling block of his humanity and of their familiarity with him.

So once you see those themes in mind here, we can now go back to the Old Testament text for the day and it begins to make a lot of sense. The Old Testament text today is the story of another prophet who was rejected by his people, and in this case it's the story of the vocation or the call, the mission of the prophet Ezekiel. Now Ezekiel in our day and time is not like a household name, I mean you might have heard the name but who exactly was Ezekiel? Just a brief note of background. So Ezekiel is living in the Sixth Century B.C., right around 587 B.C. was the famous event of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jewish people into exile in Babylon. That was the time when Ezekiel was prophesying. He was a priest in the Temple of Jerusalem and God calls him to go and proclaim to the people repentance from their sin and to warn them about the coming destruction of the Temple and the coming exile. He was prophesying around same time as Jeremiah the prophet who had a similar mission, although it wasn't identical. In any case, in Ezekiel 2 the church selects a reading there which is God commissioning Ezekiel to be a particular kind of prophet, namely one who gets rejected, right, this is not the prophet you want to be but this is the one he is called to be. So in Ezekiel 2:2-5 it says this:

And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The people also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that there has been a prophet among them.

So it's kind of a short reading there but you can see a few parallels with the gospel. First, it's worth pointing out here, whenever the Lord speaks to Ezekiel he addresses him as Son of man. Now that is going to become a title that Jesus takes to himself when he refers to himself as the Son of man, and there he will be alluding to this mysterious figure in the Book of Daniel 7, who is a messianic figure. That's one meaning of the Son of man. In this case though this is an example of the Son of man just meaning a human being, right. So the Lord, who is God, speaks to Ezekiel as a Son of man, as a human being. He's a human being but he's a human being given a prophetic mission. What is that mission?

Number two, it's to go and preach to a nation of rebels. Now I don't know about you but this would not exactly be the pep-talk that I'd be longing for God to give me. You know, guess what, I've chosen you to be a very special prophet, you're going to get to go and speak to a nation of rebels. You're gonna get to go and speak to a rebellious house. You're going to be speaking to people who are impudent and stubborn, right, so good luck with that, I hope it goes well. This is in effect...God already knows how Ezekiel's mission is going to turn out. He's going to be commissioned to call the people to repentance. He's going to be commissioned to warn them about what their sin is going to bring but if you know anything about the history of Israel you'll know that the generation that was alive at the time of the destruction of the Temple was a very sinful generation, was a very wicked generation, was a very hardhearted generation. In fact elsewhere in the Book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel himself is going to describe how before the Temple was destroyed the priests in the Temple were so corrupt that they are actually carrying out acts of idolatry inside the sanctuary itself, offering worship to other gods, consorting with temple prostitutes and all kind of...I mean it's serious immorality, serious degradation, serious depravity, or should I say grave depravity on the part of the people of Israel in his day. So Ezekiel has this task of bringing the word of God to a people who by in large are going to reject it.

And that's the parallel with Jesus because, as we're going to see, it's not just Nazareth that is going to reject Jesus' message, but ultimately it will be the leaders and the priests in the same city that Ezekiel preached to, the city of Jerusalem, who will ultimately be scandalized by the particularity of Jesus' humanity, who will be scandalized by the fact that Jesus is from Nazareth — I mean what good can come out of Nazareth right — and will reject his messianic claim, reject his identity as a

prophet of God, and end up eventually sentencing him to death on a cross. So there's a kind of parallel between the rejection of Ezekiel the prophet by Jerusalem and the eventual rejection of Jesus the prophet by the city of Jerusalem, which is anticipated in a small way by his rejection at the city of Nazareth.

And so in this case, the Responsorial Psalm for today is simply a plea for mercy. In Psalm 123 the main theme there — it is a very brief psalm — that is focused on the cry of mercy. I'll just read verse three, it says:

Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.
Too long our soul has been sated
with the scorn of those who are at ease,
the contempt of the proud.

So in that case the psalmist is crying out on behalf of the people of God for the Lord to have mercy on his people, to have mercy on the people of Israel who are going to precisely be the ones who reject Ezekiel and then eventually, as we'll see, the leaders in Jerusalem will reject Jesus as well, so it's a cry for mercy. Alright so those are the themes for today: the prophet is not accepted in his own hometown, the scandal of Jesus' humanity, the scandal of his particularity.

With that said, let's go back now and look for a few moments at an issue that is really frankly rather a big issue for a lot of Catholics, and that is the whole reference to the brothers of Jesus. I don't know about you, but I remember being a young Catholic and hearing this particular passage, Mark's gospel in particular, read at Sunday mass and wondering well wait, I thought Mary was perpetually virgin, who are these so-called brothers of Jesus? What is the gospel referring to here? And it doesn't just mention his brothers, it even mentions his sisters as well. So who are all these brothers and sisters of Jesus, are they the children of Mary? Because if they were the children of Mary, obviously then the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary would make no sense, it would be a false teaching, it would be a false idea. And I even remember being challenged by non-Catholic friends or family members, you know, why do you Catholics say Mary remained ever virgin when the gospel doesn't just mention the brothers of Jesus, it actually names the brothers of Jesus, and associates them in the same passage with Mary. I

mean that's the other thing, they're not just appearing, they're appearing in the context of Jesus being called the son of Mary, so they're kind of juxtaposed with the appearance of Mary. So let's go back to Mark 6:1-6 and look at that for just a minute.

Now before I say anything about this, a brief caveat. I could talk about this subject for a solid hour easily, so this is not the place to do that, this is a short video. If you want more on the subject of the brothers of Jesus I recommend two sources. First, I cover it in my audio bible study called *Mother of the Messiah*, you might want to check that out, but I also treat it in more depth in my book, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary*, where I have a whole chapter just on the perpetual virginity of Mary and the whole question of the identity of the brothers of Jesus. I go into a lot more depth there, you might want to check that out. But for now I just want to make a couple of brief points about the brothers of Jesus.

First, and you may know this already, but I think it's worth repeating, the word that is used for brother in Greek is *adelphos*, and this word has multiple meanings that have to be determined by context, right. Now the primary meaning of the word *adelphos* is exactly the same as it is in English, it means a, what we would call, a blood brother. In other words, a child of the same mother, a sibling born from the same mother, and we actually see Mark himself use the word *adelphos* in this way earlier in the gospel. For example if you look at Mark 1:16 when Jesus begins to call the disciples he says:

...passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen.

The Greek word there is *adelphos* and whenever we encounter that word, Simon and Andrew his brother, we assume rightly that what that means is that Simon and Andrew were siblings, they had the same parents, they had the same mother, right, that therefore Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. That's the primary meaning of the word *adelphos*, brother. However in Greek the word *adelphos* can, in other contexts, mean a close relative or what we would call a cousin. Now in those cases, the meaning has to be determined by the context. In other words, there has to be some clue in the context that would make you think that the word doesn't mean a sibling but rather a relative or a cousin. Let me give you a couple examples of this.

The best example is from the Book of Chronicles, 1 Chronicles 23. Now in 1 Chronicles 23:21-23 this is, for my money, this is the best example of how brothers can mean cousins in the Old Testament. Some times people will point to other passages, Genesis 14, where Abraham uses the word brother to describe Lot who is his nephew, and that's okay, but I think 1 Chronicles 23 is best because it's actually referring to cousins in a very specific way. So if you look at 1 Chronicles 23:21-22 this is what it says, and there's a quote on your handout but it says it here:

The sons of Mahli [were] Eleazar and Kish. And Eleazar died, but he had no sons, only daughters. And the sons of Kish, their brothers, married them.

Right, now in that case the word for brother in Greek is *adelphoi* and the RSV actually translates it as kinsman but the literal Greek word is brothers in the Septuagint, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament or *acheihem* in Hebrew, in the original Hebrew. Now what's good about this one is you can see there that Eleazar and Kish are blood brothers, they have the same parent, they have the same father, Mahli. But what happens is Eleazar dies, he doesn't have any sons he only has daughters and so they end up marrying the sons of Kish, who are called their brothers but who are explicitly from the context obviously the sons of their uncle and therefore their cousins, right. And this is just one example. I can give you many more examples of this. For example, the First Century Jewish writer Josephus, in his book on the Jewish war, it's book 6 paragraph 356-357, actually uses the word brothers, again same way, and then switches to the word relatives or cousins as synonyms. So in other words, in 1 Chronicles 23 we know that the word *adelphos* can't mean sibling because if the daughters of Eleazar were marrying their siblings they would be committing incest, that's the first problem. And then the second problem is even more direct, namely that the text itself tells you that their so-called brothers are not the sons of their father but the sons of their uncle and therefore their cousins. So what that establishes for us is a principle. Whenever you see the word *adelphos* in the gospels you should ordinarily assume that it means brother, just like in English, a sibling, unless there's something in the context that gives you evidence to the contrary.

So now when we come back to the Gospel of Mark, the question really becomes, is there anything in the context that would suggest to us that the word brother means

something other than sibling? In other words, is there anything to suggest that these brothers of Jesus (James, Joseph, Simon and Judas) are not the children of Mary? Now for most Catholics what we would say is, well the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is what gives me reason to think that those men are not the siblings of Jesus. But for non-Catholic Christians who don't accept that doctrine, who don't accept that tradition, that argument is not going to carry any weight for them. So it's also important to be able to point out that there is not just a doctrinal reason for thinking *adelphos* doesn't mean brother here but that there's a literary reason, that there's an exegetical reason in Mark's gospel itself. What is that reason? Well it's real simple. Two of these brothers, James and Joseph the first two mentioned, are elsewhere identified in the Gospel of Mark as the sons of another woman named Mary, okay, the sons of another Mary. In order to see this you gotta track down Mark 15:40. So if you turn to Mark 15 and 16 for just a minute, again I've given you the quote on the handout, on the outline. In Mark 15:40, if we fast-forward to Mark's account of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, James and Joseph this pair of brothers, appear later in the gospel. And this is what it says. After Jesus dies on the cross it says:

There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome, who, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him; and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

So notice Mark singles out three women there at the foot of the cross: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and then Salome. And then, I don't have time to read through them right now but, later on in the account Mark's going to refer to this woman again. He'll call her Mary the mother of Joseph in Mark 15:47 and then he'll call her Mary the mother of James in Mark 16:1, so just alternate between the two brothers.

So what's going on here? Well scholars agree and this is not just Catholic scholars but Protestant scholars too, commentators on Mark, recognize that when Mark refers to James and Joseph, these two brothers in Mark 15 & 16, this is clearly the same two James and Joseph that Mark referred to in chapter 6 who are there called the brothers of Jesus. He introduces them here without any explanation and assumes that you recall these two figures from earlier in the gospel. Now the

question becomes, who is this woman Mary, their mother, who's at the cross? Now Mark identifies her as one of the women who travel with them from Galilee but what scholars have pointed out is that she cannot be the same woman as the mother of Jesus because elsewhere in Mark's gospel whenever he wants to refer to Mary the mother of Jesus he would just call her the mother of Jesus. The other gospel evangelists do the same thing, that's the obvious way to refer to his mother. And so they pointed out that it doesn't make any sense to refer to the mother of James and Joseph as the mother of James and Joseph and not the mother of Jesus unless she is a different woman, right, unless she is a different woman. So who is she? Well she's the mother of these two men who are called the brothers of Jesus in Mark 6. And so when you put those two things together, Mark 6 them being called his brothers, and then Mark 15 & 16 which they're called the children of this other woman named Mary, it becomes really clear then that the word brother has to mean something other than sibling and so we fall upon the second definition. It brings us to the second definition, that they must be relatives of Jesus, they must be his cousins, they must be relatives of some sort.

Now if you have any doubts about that, it actually is fascinating to go back and look because in Mark 6 Jesus actually says as much, but you can't see it if you're just reading in English. So if you go back to Mark 6 for just a second, after these brothers of Jesus get named James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas in verse three, Jesus responds to the scandal of the community by saying something interesting. He says, "a prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin." Now in English we don't really even use kin anymore, right, I mean it's kind of those things we might associate with southern part of the United States, people talk about somebody being kin as being their relatives. But the Greek word there *syngenēs* literally means relative but it can also be translated as cousin. For example, the old King James version of the Bible and the Douay-Rheims use this word to refer to Elizabeth. When Gabriel appears to Mary he says Elizabeth your *syngenēs*, your cousin, is now with child, right, and we all think of Elizabeth as Mary's cousin. But what we tend to miss because the way this is translated is that Jesus basically just identified for you what the nature of this relationship was. Who has he just been rejected by, the members of the town of Nazareth, including James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, they're mentioned as not just being his brothers but as those who are among the Nazarenes. Well what does Jesus say? He's not accepted by his own town or among his own cousins. The Greek word there is

syngenēs, right, he's not accepted by his cousins or among his relatives. So another reason for thinking that the so-called brothers and sisters of Jesus are not his siblings is because Jesus, mark my words this is important, another reason for thinking that these brothers and sisters of Jesus are not his siblings but actually his cousins is precisely because that's what Jesus calls them. He says a prophet is not accepted among his cousins, among his relatives, the *syngenēs*.

In summary then, what we're saying here is that Mark's gospel itself and Jesus' own words give us reason to believe that when Mark mentions the brothers of Jesus he is not referring to children of Mary. Notice actually I should say that they're never called the sons of Mary, they're just called the brothers of Jesus, because if they were called the children of Mary that would be a whole different ballgame, but Mark's gospel itself never calls these brothers or sisters of Jesus the children of Mary but rather gives us evidence to believe that two of them, James and Joseph, are in fact the sons of another woman named Mary, who Mark very tellingly calls the mother of James and Joseph and not the mother of Jesus. At the risk of complicating matters even more, I just want to add one last observation that I think is really important, or at least it was important for me. It's not from Mark's gospel but it comes from the Gospel of John. If you go to John's gospel, chapter 19, verse 25, he actually makes clear that this Mary that's at the foot of the cross, is Mary, the sister of the virgin Mary, who is also the wife of Clopas. He identifies her as Mary, the wife of Clopas. And what's fascinating about that identification is if John's referring to the same woman as Mark, we know from early church history, like Eusebius, that Clopas was regarded as the uncle of Jesus and the father of James and Simon, who are some of the first bishops of Jerusalem, and who obviously have some of the same names as these so called brothers of Jesus. So when you put all of the evidence together, Mark, right, having the Mary being identified as the mother of James and Joseph, Matthew identifying that woman as the other Mary, and then John's gospel calling her the wife of Clopas, who we know from church history as the uncle of Jesus, it puts together a picture that helps make clear why the gospels use the word brothers to refer to these men, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. It's because they are the children of Mary and Clopas, they are the children of Jesus' uncle Clopas and therefore they were his cousins, or his brothers in the common Semitic idiom. If that all sounds a little complicated, if you check out the handout I've got a chart, a kind of genealogical chart of the family which will help you see, the holy family of Mary and Joseph who have one

child, Jesus, and then the relatives of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas, and then their four sons, James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Two of whom are actually identified by church historians as the first two Bishops of Jerusalem.

And I think that's really important, that last point, because it shows us that these so called brothers of Jesus, they're not obscure figures in the early church, they were actually very famous, James was the first Bishop of Jerusalem. And so the idea that James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, could have been a son of Mary, and at the same time the doctrine of her perpetual virginity have arisen is just absurd. The reason early Christians both believe that Mary was both perpetually virgin and that James the Bishop of Jerusalem was the brother of Jesus, is because they understood that calling him the brother of Jesus was a way of expressing the fact that he was a close relative of Jesus, that he was a cousin of Jesus. Because remember, Christianity grew out of Jewish roots, it grew up in a Jewish context, and it's only centuries later when people begin to lose that understanding of the Semitic meaning of the word brother to be able to refer to a cousin or relative, that people began to raise questions about who exactly were these brothers of Jesus and were they the children of Mary. That comes out much, much later. In the early church, people understood that brother could have multiple meanings and that if the context gave us clues that they were children of someone else then that was the reasonable interpretation of these texts. So check out that chart of the family tree of Jesus and I hope that'll help you make sense of this.

Now don't take my word for this though because the Catechism of the Catholic Church actually explicitly deals with this question. The Catechism gives us an official magisterial interpretation of this entire section in the teaching on the perpetual virginity of Mary. So if you have a Catechism of the Catholic Church, I would call your attention to paragraphs 499-500, this is the section on Mary's perpetual virginity. And I'm just going to read what the Catechism says, but I want to listen to it in light of what we just studied in our passage for the Bible for today. The Catechism says this and I quote:

[T]he Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the “*Ever-virgin*.” Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus [Cf. Mk 3:31-35; 6:3]

And if you pause there and look in the footnote of the Catechism, it actually cites the text we just were looking at, Mark 6:3, along with some other passages like Mark 3:31-35 and other texts. Look, this is what it says:

The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. *In fact James and Joseph, “brothers of Jesus,” are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls “the other Mary.”* [Mt 13:55; 28:1; cf. Mt 27:56]

So I was focusing on Mark earlier, but the Catechism goes even further. Because if you look at the gospel of Matthew’s account of the crucifixion he’s even more explicit. Not only does he call her “Mary the mother of James and Joseph” but he calls her “the other Mary.” Now it is absurd to assume that Matthew would ever refer to Mary the mother of Christ as “the other Mary,” when at the beginning of his Gospel he frequently calls her “the mother of Christ” or the “mother of Jesus,” right. So the Catechism is saying here that this is clearly the children of another Mary. And then finally it ends by saying:

They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression²

And there it cites a few passages from the Old Testament in which brother is used to refer to a relative or a cousin of some sort who is not a sibling.

So in closing then, I think is important for us to recognize that although some Catholics in the pew may be scandalized, sorry for the pun, by the reading from today and have a reaction to it that makes them wonder, well wait what about the perpetual virginity of Mary, the reality is that this passage from the Gospel of Mark in no way undermines the perpetual virginity of Mary, actually it supports it because it provides evidence to the fact that James and Joseph, two of the so-called brothers of Jesus, are actually children of another woman named Mary, who is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark as simply “the mother of James” or “the mother

² CCC 499-500

of Joses.” One of whom, by the way, would go on to become the Bishop of Jerusalem and one of the first leaders in the early church, whom Paul tellingly refers to as James, the so-called brother of Jesus, in the Book of Corinthians and the Book of Galatians. So in closing then, the gospel for today is packed, there’s a lot in there but it brings home to us the fact that Jesus the Messiah, who is revealing himself through his words and actions in the Gospel of Mark, is going to be a prophet who is not accepted and will ultimately be rejected, not just by his own relatives in his hometown, but by the people of Jerusalem, who will bring him to the cross and ultimately through the cross to his resurrection.