

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time – February 8, 2009

We've all seen the letters WWJD on colored bracelets or T-shirts or bumper stickers,...and we know what WWJD stands for don't we?...Well, there's a Christian environmentalist group that says WWJD also stands for "What would Jesus drive?"...Would Jesus drive a gas-guzzling SUV or would He drive a fuel-friendly Toyota Prius?...Well, it doesn't really matter because Jesus Christ can't get a driver's license. ....We know this because He applied for one and got turned down,....about 15 yrs ago...A fellow in West Virginia whose birth name was Peter Robert Phillips legally changed His name to Jesus Christ...He claimed he did it to honor Jesus in whom he has a deep personal faith...Using the name Jesus Christ, he did get a passport and SS# but when He tried to get a driver's license in West Virginia, the DMV would not give him one...They said that using the name Jesus Christ would be very offensive to some people, and might even result in violent reactions...So, Jesus Christ – at least the Jesus Christ of West Virginia – will never experience the power of being behind the wheel (Vroom...vroom)...But Jesus Christ of Nazereth had a **power** much greater than that - **God power!**

Mark's Gospel, right from the beginning, shows Jesus putting that divine power to use...In the first few Chapters alone, Mark shows us Jesus thwarting Satan's attempts to lure Him away from His mission as the Son of God. Immediately after that, there's Jesus calling simple fishermen to leave work and family behind and to follow Him,...and they do....He expels demons with mere words....He brings healing and hope to the sick and the crippled ...He forgives sinners...He overpowers the religious leaders with His wisdom and His teachings. ...So, we don't dare say Jesus Christ can't drive...He can drive!...He drives right past the religious authorities of His day....He drives into new territory...His disciples following. ...He drives His enemies crazy! ...Mark wants to be sure that we see from the very beginning that this Jesus is huge – HUGE! He's beyond anything the world has seen, or would ever see.

Today's Gospel gives us a picture of a very busy Jesus going from town to town, drawing on God's power, changing peoples' lives...But there's something else that's going on here that is equally important to our understanding of Jesus Christ...Nestled in the middle of this Gospel passage is v. 35: "Rising very early..., Jesus left and went to a deserted place, where He prayed."...See the connection?...See what keeps Jesus going?...See what keeps Jesus – with all the activity, with all the demands on Him – from crash landing, from burning out?...**He goes to a quiet place to pray...**We're not told what He prayed or how. Just that He did....Mark shows us Jesus at prayer here at the *beginning* of His ministry...again in Ch. 6 right in the *middle*...and then at the *end* in the Garden of Gethsemane...It was prayer that strengthened Jesus to do what He was called to do,...It was prayer that kept Him on the path of servanthood when the people wanted to make Him king....It was through prayer that He plugged into God's power...Jesus knew He needed to step away...to a quiet place to be with God the Father in prayer.

If Jesus, who lived the perfect human life, needed to pray,...needed to go off to be alone with God, what about us?...What about you and me who are stumbling and bumbling through life?...Do we realize that prayer is our connection to the source of power in life – God?... When we try to live our lives without prayer, we're not connecting to the power God offers us...It isn't power to work miracles like Jesus;...it's power for living the kind of life God wants us to live....None of us would get behind the wheel of a car and just sit there if we wanted to go somewhere. All that power in the car's battery would do us no good if we didn't connect to it...If we don't put the key in the ignition and turn it,...we're going nowhere...In the same way, all the power for living that God offers us will do us no good if we don't connect to it through prayer...We're going nowhere.

As long as we're talking cars, prayer can also be kind of like a seat belt...because our lives sometimes get pretty bumpy...We'll be motoring along, everything is good, no problems...our life is on cruise control...Then suddenly, out of nowhere there's a pothole the size of North Dakota or a sharp curve or a blow-out or a crash...That's when we need a seat belt, maybe even airbags. When that happens - and it will - prayer keeps us safe...It keeps us connected to our God, to our faith...We've been prepared. We know how to drive defensively. We know that when bad things happen, we are not alone.

So, if Jesus needed to pray in order to live the kind of life God the Father wanted Him to live...then we certainly need to pray too...Now prayer is not always a matter of talking to God, or telling God what we need for him to do...like the little girl who was getting ready for bed. She put on her pajamas, brushed her teeth and when she was ready to pray, she ran out into the hall and hollered out: *"I'm going to pray now - anybody want anything?"*...Sometimes we're like that little girl; we think that prayer is giving God a list of things we want him to do: "Lord, help me find a good job,...help me pass my Math exam...end the stock market slide,...make Deacon Ron stop talking (good luck)."

Prayer is more than that...Prayer is spending time with God....It might involve asking for things. It might involve thanking God for things....It might involve being still and listening as God speaks to us. ...It might be simply being with God...Prayer is spending quality time with God...where we are alone with God ...It could be in our room or in our office - with door closed,...could be in our car. ...could be on a walk...could be here in church. ...could even be in the bathroom...anyplace we can give God our full attention. ....Like Jesus, there are times when we need to stop what we're doing...find a quiet place ....be still...be in prayer with God...talk to God....listen to God....But at the end of the prayer, when we say AMEN, we shouldn't treat it like we are saying GOODBYE...it shouldn't be as if we are hanging up the phone and disconnecting from God. ...Prayer should be an ongoing thing...an attitude...an awareness that God is only an ear's-length away...Saying AMEN is not disconnecting from God...it's more like putting Him on HOLD....and He's always right there waiting on the line.

Sometimes when we say AMEN, it's a call to ACTION...We have talked to God, we have listened to God,...we've been strengthened, encouraged, inspired,...and now we are ready to go on with life, ...we are ready to carry on with what God wants us to do...That's what Jesus did...In our Gospel, He snuck off to find a quiet place to pray...His disciples find Him and at the end of His prayer time, Jesus is ready to get on with His mission...He's re-energized, refocused, His battery's been recharged, ready to go....He tells His disciples, "Let's go on to the next village so I can preach there....because that's the purpose for which I have come."...He followed prayer with ACTION because He had God's work to do..

There are times when that's what we have to do...follow our prayer with action...It's good to pray for those who are sick,...but it's even better if after we pray, we pick up the phone and call them, let them know we're thinking about them and ask if there's anything we can do for them...It's good to pray for God to take care of the poor...but it's even better if we ask God to show us how we can help. ...maybe we can work with Habitat for Humanity,...maybe help in a soup kitchen...or donate money or food or clothes...It's good to pray for an end to abortion...It's even better if after we pray we go out and support organizations who help pregnant women and their children...It's good to pray to do well on our Math exam,...It's even better if after we pray we bust our butt doing some serious studying. ... It's good to pray that our Church will bring people to Christ...It's even better if after we pray we have the courage to go to someone who has lost their faith and tell them how Jesus Christ has changed our life....Yes, prayer alone is good...and sometimes that's all we can do. ...But when our AMEN can be followed by ACTION,...that prayer becomes more powerful...because not only will God be doing God's

work,...we too will be doing the work of God...So let's say AMEN and go out and live what we pray. **AMEN!**