

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

### TENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

#### Psalm 129 (130)



This psalm of lament is part of the group of psalms called ‘Songs of Ascent’ (Psalms 120–134), probably so-called because they were sung by pilgrims ‘going up’ to Jerusalem. Ideally Jews were expected to travel to Jerusalem three times a year for the main religious festivals.

St Luke relates one such visit to Jerusalem when the twelve-year-old Jesus stayed behind in the Temple talking with the Doctors of the Law (Luke 2: 41–50).

The characteristic of these psalms is the use of clear, simple imagery, which is why they are often among people’s favourites. Their main feature is a great confidence in the Lord’s protection and help.

In Psalm 129 (130), the exact nature of the sin is not specified, but the person praying acknowledges their total trust in the forgiving mercy of the Lord.

It is interesting to note that whereas the psalm begins with an individual confession of sin (‘Hear **my** voice, **my** pleading’), it moves to a collective lament (if you, O Lord should mark **our** guilt), and ends with the whole nation of Israel needing God’s pardon.

#### Gospel Mark 3: 20–35

Opposition to Jesus is gathering momentum. In this passage, St Mark is using a favourite technique of his to stress the importance of the events related. Theologians call it ‘intercalation’, though it might more simply be called the ‘sandwich method’, where two episodes are used as ‘book ends’ with another story in between. Here we meet the crowd and Jesus’s relatives as the ‘book ends’ (vv. 10–21 and 31–35), with the attack by the scribes followed by Jesus’s reply in between.

#### Jesus went home and such a crowd collected ...

Jesus’s home here is Nazareth. Crowds are omnipresent during his public life. They are often overwhelming (Mark 4: 1), yet despite the fact that they ultimately called for him to be condemned (15: 8), Jesus shows great compassion for them as they were like ‘sheep without a shepherd’ (6: 34).

#### His relatives were convinced he was out of his mind

Jesus breaks down all society’s conventions. At the time, there was no social mobility. For a carpenter’s son to become a preacher, threatening the well-ordered fabric of society and the religious authorities, the only possible explanation was that he was out of his mind. His relatives, if they did not want to be dishonoured and shamed through him, needed to intervene.

James Tissot, All the City Was Gathered at His Door



#### The scribes had come down from Jerusalem

This is the first time that the opposition to Jesus is no longer merely local: it has now reached the authorities in the capital.

#### He spoke to them in parables

Parables here have a broader meaning than the usual familiar story with a thought-provoking twist. Jesus uses them as illustrations or examples to answer those critics who accuse him of being possessed by demons and an agent of Satan.

#### ‘Anyone blaspheming against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness.’

This sin is the wilful refusal to recognise God’s activity in the actions of Jesus.

#### ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’

In the radical answer to this question, Jesus breaks down the blood-relation bonds which made the fabric of society. His definition of the new family is one of discipleship, expressed not just in words, but in actions too. In the Christian tradition, ‘brothers’ generally means relatives or kinspeople.