The Feast of St. Mark

Saint Mark, whose feast is today and whose Gospel we have been reading this year, is one of the four Evangelists. He is often portrayed with a lion, which symbolizes the power of his writing. Mark’s Gospel is considered by scholars to be the oldest. Internal evidence suggests that it was probably composed before the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple in A.D. 70, and his likely audience was Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. It is the shortest of the Gospels, and begins rather abruptly with the story of Jesus’ baptism. From then on, Mark’s Jesus is almost constantly active. Jesus is the Son of God, and he demonstrates this by a series of miracles that are signs of God’s power and the coming of the kingdom. The original ending of Mark’s Gospel does not have an account of the Resurrection.

Little is known about Mark’s background. In the Acts of the Apostles, he is identified as the cousin of Barnabas and associated with Paul and Peter. Tradition says he became the first bishop of Alexandria, and he is the patron saint of Egypt. St. Mark is also the patron of Venice and of Notaries Public.

Since Matthew and Luke borrowed from him, it is easy to read more into Mark’s Gospel than is actually there. When I study Mark’s Gospel, I am conscious that I mentally ‘fill in the blanks’ for much of his story with the accounts of the other evangelists. I’m always a little surprised by Mark’s ‘no-nonsense’ approach.

I encourage you to spend a little time this week reading the Gospel of Mark in one sitting. It’s the length of a good short-story, and will give you a sweep of the Gospel which can’t be had by hearing small passages proclaimed on Sunday.