

HE TAUGHT THEM AS ONE WHO HAD AUTHORITY – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 1.21-28

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.

And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Jesus had called the first four disciples inviting them to be fishers of men. What is the meaning of fishers of men? To take man from an environment that can bring death. And the fishing begins. But where will Jesus take His disciples to become fishers of men? This is the surprise that waits for us in Mark's gospel in the reading this Sunday; chapter 1, 21-28.

Jesus does not take His disciples to save men in places of ill repute and sin, but in places of worship and religion. It is in these places that there is need to save man, because these are the places that are likely to bring death to those that frequent them.

.Let's read Mark's gospel

"And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching." The evangelist does not say that Jesus participates in the worship of the synagogue, but that He goes into the synagogue to teach and His teachings are the exact contrary to those that were being

given there. Jesus, in His teaching, wants to free the people from those that He will denounce as “doctrines of men”, “ancient traditions”, nothing here has to do with the will of God.

Mark writes that the reaction of the people is singular, “*..they were astonished at his teaching*” underlining that “*..he taught them as one who had authority*,” To have authority means the commission divine, “*And not as the scribes*” It was the scribes that had this commission divine to teach.

The scribes were the official theologians of the Sanhedrin; they were infallible magistrates, people with extraordinary importance; it was thought that the words of the scribes were the same as God’s, when there was conflict between the written word and the teaching of the scribes, one had to listen to the scribe because he was the only real interpreter of the Holy scriptures. Well, as soon as Jesus began to teach, the people began to open their eyes. This Jesus had the commission divine to teach, not our scribes.

And, here an incident erupts. Immediately, as Jesus is at the entrance of the synagogue and has begun to teach, there is an incident straight away. “*And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit*” What the evangelist says is very serious and dramatic: here is the product of the synagogue, a man possessed with an unclean spirit. Frequenting these places of worship and religion was to accept without criticism the teaching that was given, making the people unclean.

Unclean meant the impossibility to communicate with God. The religious teaching not only did not bring people nearer to God, but it was that prevented it. So, “*And he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”*” Strange that this man talks in the plural “*Have you come to destroy us?*” This man feels threatened by Jesus. But why does he talk in the plural? Who is it that Jesus is destroying with His teaching? He is destroying the category and the reputation of the scribes. This man belongs to the unquestioning, unconditioned teaching of the scribes and when he sees this teaching attacked, feels danger for his religion and his faith.

This is why he shouts. The man speaks for the category of scribes. And says to Him. “*I know who you are —the Holy One of God.*” The Holy one of God is an expression that indicates the Messiah that must observe the law and then enforce it. Jesus does not accept this, “*...saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”*” *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.*”

Why does this unclean spirit that is defeated by Jesus’ words leave him convulsed? Because it is agony. When one arrives at a certain stage of life and encounters Jesus’ message one must realize that all the teaching in which one believed, all the religious practices performed, not only did not permit the communication with God, but were the real obstacle that prevented it, so to free oneself of all this is agony. One feels betrayed and cheated.

“*And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority!”*” Teachings of new quality that supplants all others. The teaching of Jesus is God’s answer to the needs of the fullness of life that each person carries inside of themselves. And this the people have perceived.

“...with authority” Here it is repeated that Jesus has authority, meaning the mandate divine to teach and not the scribes. *“He commands even the unclean spirits,...”* Here Jesus commands one, but the people extend the effect, the effectiveness of Jesus’ teaching in all situations of impurity *“...and they obey him.”* *And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee”*

So Jesus’ teaching spreads. Naturally, the scribes will not stay with their hands tied, but they will take revenge and we will see later on that the scribes will say that it is Jesus that is the one possessed by an unclean spirit.