

**SATAN IS COMING TO AN END -
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

Mark 3,20-35

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.

"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus has committed a real madness. Faced with the refusal of Israel that even decided to assassinate him, Jesus breaks away and appointed twelve disciples, twelve like the tribes that made-up Israel . He makes a new Israel. Faced with Jesus' clamorous break from the religious institution here is the reaction of the family and the institution. Mark the evangelist writes in chapter 3, verses 20-35 that "*And when his family heard it,*" that is hearing of Jesus' breakaway with the institution "*..they went out to seize him,*" literally capturing him, it is the same verb of the capture of John the Baptist and of Jesus "*..for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."*" that is, he is crazy because it could only be madness. The evangelist to justify this accusation of insanity also inserts the accusation from the scribes who have actually come from Jerusalem, the seat of the religious institution. The scribes are the most important leaders of the Sanhedrin, who will sentence "*He is possessed by Beelzebub,*" Who is this Beelzebub? There was a Philistine deity called Beelzebub that was the god of the flies and the Pharisees to prevent the worship of this deity had transformed him into Ba'al zebul, the god of manure. Not only were the flies not protected but they were attracts them. The accusation made by the scribes is subtle: attentive to Jesus, they cannot deny that Jesus does not heal people, but heals them to infect them even more.

Then Jesus calls them and demonstrates the inconsistency of their speech by saying "*How can Satan cast out Satan?* If Satan drives himself out he is finished. And then, here's the very harsh sentence "*Truly, I say to you, ...*" therefore what Jesus says is secure "*..all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter,*" Sins resulting from ignorance and fragility

will be forgiven, but, Jesus declares “*..but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.*”

And then Jesus continues “*..for they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”*” this is the reason. What is this sin against the Holy Spirit? It is that which the prophet Isaiah had already declared. They are those that call good evil and evil good. These scribes understand, they know, they are cultured people, that know the Bible. They know that if Jesus acts like this it is because of the strength that comes from God, but they cannot admit it because if they admit it all their prestige and rule that they have over the people, disappears. So they defame Jesus. Then they say that what is good, the activity that Jesus is doing, is bad to maintain his prestige. But why will they never be forgiven? Because they will never ask for forgiveness. When Jesus forgave the paralytic the scribes themselves had declared: blasphemy, that is, he is guilty of death.

In this situation the evangelist writes “*Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.*” They are outside meaning they have not understood Jesus’ teaching, they believe that they have a power over him and they call him. But the evangelist underlines, there is an impediment. A crowd was sitting all around Jesus, and the term used by Mark indicates a mixed crowd of impure people, gentiles “*.. and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.”*”

The verb ‘to seek’ in Mark’s gospel has always a negative connotation towards Jesus.

And here is Jesus’ tremendous and terrible answer “*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” Those outside? Those that are ashamed of me, as the crazy one? “*And looking about at those who sat around him,..*” therefore he doesn’t see his mother or his brothers that have remained outside, Jesus states “*Here are my mother and my brothers!*”

And then the invitation, the invitation addressed to his family clan, in particular to his mother and brothers “*For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.*” In Nazareth Jesus’ family clan are victims of the teachings of the scribes, they think that Jesus is not only truly crazy, but possessed. Jesus wants it to be understood that the truly possessed are the representatives of the religious institution that, to not lose their prestige, say that Jesus’ works are negative and not good.