

XV ORDINARY TIME – July 12th, 2015

**HE BEGAN TO SEND THEM OUT – Biblical Commentary by Fr. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Mk 6.7-13***

***He summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.***

***He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick-- no food, no sack, no money in their belts. They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there.***

***Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." So they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.***

After the failure of Jesus preaching in the synagogue, where he had been welcome with skepticism and was surprised at their unbelief, Jesus combines his activity with the Twelve. The Twelve are those disciples representing a new Israel, the one composed by the twelve tribes.

*"Jesus began to send them out",* Mark writes, *"two by two",* because they form a community, they don't present themselves as leaders, or bearers of a message; there must be a community that lives this message. And *"gave them authority over unclean spirits".* Spirit means energy, power; when it comes from God it is called Holy, not only for its quality, but for its activity; it separates man from the sphere of evil and sin and attracts him towards the good. When this power comes from any reality which are different from God, or even are against him, those are defined as unclean for they hold him back in impurity, that is an impossibility of communication with God – according to the culture of those times.

*"He instructed"* – this is the only time that Jesus instructs someone in this Gospel; there must something very important, then. It has to be taken seriously. What is he commanding? He is instructing *"them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick – no food, no sack, no money in their belts".*

Why does he say so? Because disciples' life has to display the truth of the preaching. It's impossible to preach the good news of Jesus –by which man totally trusts God and others, a message of giving up of ambition – if behavior, dress and life style contradict it. Life of a preacher of this message has to demonstrate the truth.

Jesus, who is normally lacking of descriptions, provides here a very detailed one; he even describes the dress of disciples; *“to wear sandals”* - sandals are necessary as they will have to walk a lot – but *“not a second tunic”*, because having two tunics was a luxury for the rich. Disciples must not belie their preaching of a universal love of a God that serves people.

Then Jesus urges these disciples to be free from economic worry, to completely give trust; he says they shall also be free inwardly, in fact he says *“Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave from there”*. Why does he provide this indication? Because when Jews travelled, they only used to ask for hospitality to other Jews, they never entered pagan houses. Why? Because the house of a pagan was unclean. They even didn't enter a house of people who were not totally practicing precepts and laws regarding food cleanliness.

Well, Jesus urges people to be free;” stay in the house you enter, apart from the fact they practice or not”. We must be free in order to set others free. But, he warns, “whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet”. This was a symbolic gesture that Jews made when going back from a pagan land, before entering Israel in order not to bring even a small grain of pagan land - an unclean one - into Holy Land. The evangelist explains that those who don't welcome the announcers of the message, are to be treated as pagans.

A ‘pagan’ is not the one who doesn't believe or believes in another religion, but the one who doesn't welcome, the one who doesn't help. The one who doesn't display the universal love of God, through his behavior, is a pagan. Jesus sends his disciples out to preach this good news, and those who don't welcome them are to be treated as pagans; the definition of ‘pagan’ doesn't depend upon which God you trust, but upon your attitude to welcoming and giving hospitality.

*“So they went off”* – we should ask ourselves if disciples really did what Jesus told them to do or not. Jesus urged them to preach conversion which is meant to be for the kingdom of heaven; he never urged them to go and drive out demons, he gave them the power over unclean spirits, which is different, and urged them to anoint with oil the sick.

Disciples never did what Jesus told them. As the narrative of this Gospel goes on, we will see Jesus taking them aside and preventing them from preaching a message he didn't allow them to.