

THE LORD JESUS.....WAS TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN AND SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi

Mark 16,15-20

And he said to them,(the eleven) “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

The evangelist Mark concludes his gospel, at chapter 16,8 with the announcement of the risen Christ, he told the women who told no one. This ending aroused scandal in the primitive church for which, in the first half of the II century, two different endings were added. This which we now read is that which is considered canonical.

The context: the risen Christ manifests himself to the eleven, and scolds them. He scolds them for being incredulous, he calls them “*hardness of heart,*” for not having believed in his resurrection. They are the disciples that at the moment of the arrest all had run away, all had abandoned him and Peter had actually denied him. Well, Jesus to these undoubtedly immature disciples, who had not yet understood his message, unable to follow him, Jesus gave these disciples a universal mandate. As will say St. Paul in one of his letters “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay,*” (2 Corinthians 4,7) Therefore the richness of the good news was given to imperfect men. This is important because Jesus’ good news was not brought by super men with a sense of superiority towards who is inferior, but by people humble, with their humility, with their weaknesses, with their fragility, but carry a message of extraordinary beauty.

We read in chapter 16, 15 that “*.. he said to them, “Go into all the world..”* Jesus’ message is not limited to one nation, but is universal, they do not need to wait, but they must go to them. Jesus had called them to be fishers of men and so they must go and fish, to pull people out of what gives them death, “*..and proclaim the gospel..”* , what is this good news? God’s love reaches everyone, there is no one in the world that feels excluded from this love. “*..proclaim..*” the good news “*..the gospel to the*

whole creation.” And then the effects are: “*Whoever believes...*” that is all those that welcome this project of love “*.. and is baptized..*” the baptism was a sign of conversion, and a change of life. What is this change of life? To not live for oneself any more, but to live for others. “*... will be saved, but whoever does not believe...*” who refuses this project of God, “*...will be condemned.*” Not condemned by God, but self-condemnation is self-imposed because it rejects the project of fullness of life. “*And these signs,*” and Jesus lists five signs “*..will accompany those who believe:*” they are not signs for the disciples that announced this message, but for all those who believe them. These are signs in which those who receive evil communicate good, who receives death transmits life. In particular, driving out demons means freeing people from deadly ideologies that prevent the receiving of Jesus’ message. And the last “*..they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*” It is not that it guarantees the healing of the sick, but they will feel better. The meaning of “visiting the sick” is to give a meaning to what they are living, and to relieve their anxieties and sufferings. So the laying on of hands is to make people feel better and possibly heal them also in their illness.

“*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven...*” Here, to be able to understand this passage the author needed to refer to the conception of the world, to the cosmology of the time. God was on high in heaven and mankind was on earth, so for this all that came from God was said to come down and all that went towards God went up. That is the meaning that the evangelist gives us. “*..the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven..*” heaven means the divine dwelling place, the divine condition. “*..and sat down at the right hand of God.*” Jesus had already said that the son of God would be seen sitting on the right-hand side of the power, taken from Psalm 110. Sitting on the right-hand side of God means to have his same divine condition. It is a reproach that the author makes to the authors of the murder of Jesus. That man whom you condemned as a blasphemer and crucified him, in reality had the divine condition. But this ascension of Jesus is not a separation from mankind, he does not distance himself from man, but it means that Jesus in the fullness of the divine condition, collaborates in all the activities of his disciples as one reads now.

“*And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them..*” he ascends into heaven, but works together with them. So the ascension does not separate Jesus from mankind, from his disciples, but he is nearer with a force even greater. “*...and confirmed the message..*” what is the message? The good news that Jesus had asked to be taken into all the world to proclaim the gospel not the proclamation of a text, but to have an experience of life. So he confirmed this transmission of an experience of life “*..by accompanying signs.*” Jesus strengthens with his presence and his power of love, all those who announce a message of life.

