

VI ORDINARY TIME– 14th February 2021

AND HE HEALED MANY WHO WERE SICK WITH VARIOUS DISEASES –

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Mark 1, 40-45

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them." But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

The evangelist writes that Jesus teaches throughout Galilee and here is the reply to his teachings, the response to the good news; and who are they? They are the marginalized by religion. They are those that religion has cataloged as impure and for them there is no hope. The only one who could save them would be God, but as they are impure, they cannot turn to God; therefore they live in a desperate situation.

Let's read this beautiful passage in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, from verse 10. "*And a leper came to him...*" this is a surprise. The leper is not considered only a sick, but a sinner punished by God. Leprosy was a terrible plague for which there was no salvation. Throughout the Bible we read that only two lepers were healed; they must stay out of the cities, they must neither approach nor can be approached and, if they see someone, they have to shout "*Unclean! Unclean!*". Well, this leper who heard Jesus' teaching and understands that there can be hope for him as well so, he transgresses that law, he approaches Jesus. But he doesn't know Jesus' reaction, that's why he gets on his knees and he isn't sure, he asks "*If you will..*" and strangely he doesn't ask to be cured of the fever, he asks to be purified. This expression will appear three times to indicate that it is what is important to the evangelist; that is, this is a man who has lost everything with leprosy, has lost his family, his job, his dignity, his friends, but he has also lost God. So, he asks Jesus to re-establish this contact with God, by purifying him.

Well, Jesus should have been horrified at this unclean, sinful being that continues to transgress the law and turns to him; he should send him away. Instead, the evangelist writes that Jesus "*Moved with pity, ..*", a term used to indicate the restitution of life to those who do not have it. And the evangelist creates suspense, because he says "*...he stretched out his hand...*" This is a technical expression that Mark takes from the book of Exodus to indicate the action of Moses when he extends his hand against his enemies. Then one wonders: what will Jesus do? Will he chastise him for breaking the law? "*..and touched him*" it was not necessary to touch him "*I will; be clean.*" The will of God, because Jesus is God, is the elimination of all marginalization carried out in his name by definitively canceling the category of the pure and the impure.

And here is the surprise *“And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.”* What merit did this leper have to be purified? Nothing; indeed, he continued to transgress the law. Then Jesus teaches that it is not true, as religion teaches, that you must purify yourself to be closer to God. To be close to him, welcome the Lord and it is he who purifies you. So this is the great novelty of Jesus.

But strangely Jesus, writes the evangelist *“..sternly charged him..”* It's strange: if he had to scold him he would have done it first when he approached him ; why is he scolding him now? And he, *“..sent him away at once,..”* where does he send him and why did he scold him?

What is the action of Jesus? He scolds him for believing in a God who had excluded him from his love and to where does he drive him away? He chases him away from a religious institution that, instead of God's will, teaches the thoughts of men who are far from God. So after having freed him, he helps him to free himself from himself and says *“..go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded,..”* He says *“Moses”* non God: *“for a proof to them.”* Here the evangelist quotes the book of Deuteronomy where Moses himself says *“Take this book of the law and let it remain there as a witness against you”*

What is this testimony against? The proof is that God acts exactly the opposite of what the priests teach and demand, that it is not true that there is a need to bring some offerings to be pleasing to God, to be purified, but it is God who continually offers himself to purify people.

“But he..” writes the evangelist *“... went out..”* he does not go to the priests, he understood. He turns away from a religious institution that had marginalized him *“..and began to talk freely about it ..”* exactly like Jesus and *“.. spread the news, ”*, literally not the episode: the term is "the word", that is the message that exists in this and what is the message? That God does not discriminate against people, for him there are no pure or impure people, it is not true that one must purify oneself to welcome the Lord, but it is to welcome the Lord who purifies; that the acceptance of God is not a consequence of purity of man, but it is what precedes it. .

This leper, once purified, begins to preach, but the consequence is that Jesus could not publicly enter in the city, but he remained outside. Why? For Jesus, for love, for having touched this leper now he becomes ritually impure. To purify the leper, the impure man, Jesus in the eyes of religion has become impure. But now it is done and people rush to Jesus, they understand that in Jesus there is a new image of God.