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HE.....BEGAN TO SEND THEM OUT - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 6, 7-13

And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

Jesus' failure in the synagogue of Nazareth where he was not believed and was able to perform only a few gestures does not only not discourage Jesus, but leads him to intensify his activity in different ways. It is chapter 6 verses 7-13, but there is an important short verse that has been left out in the liturgical version. The evangelist writes "*And he went about among the villages teaching.*" What does this mean? Jesus does not enter into a synagogue again. Now he has realized that places of worship, religious places are refractory to the works of the Spirit. So it is a useless waste of time in these places, but he goes to the villages, these are the places of marginalization and poverty.

And this time "*..he called the twelve..*" the number twelve of the disciples represents the new Israel "*.. and began to send them out..*" from the Greek verb to send comes the word apostle, which does not indicate a title, but an activity, is that to be sent. "*.. two by two,*", he did not send them alone, but in twos, it must be a community that expresses the message, "*..and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.*" The unclean spirit has already appeared in this gospel when for the first time Jesus had tried to announce his message in the synagogue. The spirit is a strength, when it comes from God it is called Holy, not only for its excellent quality, but for its work in separating people from evil; when the reality is contrary to God it is called unclean. So, Jesus "*.. gave them authority over the unclean spirits.*" this expression has a double meaning, both the obvious one of freeing people from these spirits, that is, from these nationalistic, religious ideologies, which prevent them from accepting the good news of Jesus, and for working on themselves because in order to liberate we must be totally free .

. "*He charged them..*" it is the first time that Jesus orders something of his disciples, which means he had found resistance "*...to take nothing for their journey except a staff — but to wear sandals* " that which is needed for walking. Then Jesus says to not take "*.. no bread, no bag,..*" it was a bag, typical of beggars "*..no money in their belts..*" what does this mean? They must be completely free, they must be confident and trust fully the richness of the message that they carry, free men, but not rich. For this Jesus says "*..and not put on two tunics.*" Two tunics was the

clothing of the rich. What you are must not deny the message that you announce. Jesus does not say what they must say, but how they must be: messengers of the good news.

And this freedom must also be interior. And Jesus continues stating "*Whenever you enter a house, stay there..*" When the Jews were travelling, they asked hospitality only at the home of other Jews, possibly observant to be sure of the ritual rules of the pure and impure. Jesus asks to be free from all this, to go to homes as they are and to stay there because they must be completely free of these taboos, of these superstitions. "*... until you depart from there.*"

But, warns Jesus "*And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.*" It was typical of the Jews, when they went into the gentile land, on re-entering into Israeli territory they shook the dust off their sandals to not carry any impurity into their land. So, what is Jesus saying? He is changing the idea of the gentile. Who is this gentile? For religion the gentile is he who believes in another divinity, for Jesus he is the one that is incapable of accepting, and so is incapable of hospitality. So, the conclusion, that these disciples "*So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.*" So a change of life, "*And they cast out many demons...*" they were freed from all these ideologies that made people refractory to the reception of the good news of Jesus. And the last particular is important because they healed not only the spiritual part, but all the person, the integrity of the whole human being. Jesus has this at heart, "*..and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.*" This is the first part of the work of the disciples. We will then see the next time if Jesus was happy or not of their work.