

XII ORDINARY TIME – June 21st, 2015

WHO THEN IS THIS WHOM EVEN WIND AND SEA OBEY? – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 4.35-41

On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, "Let us cross to the other side."

Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him.

A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up.

Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm.

Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"

By the end of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a seed that is thrown on the good soil giving birth to a big tree where birds come and nest. What did he mean by that? The Kingdom of God is not reserved to one people, one country or one religion; it is for the entire mankind. Everybody can find a shelter, a home and be welcomed. This is the meaning of "building a nest".

Jesus wants to slowly let the unruly disciples understand that he did not come to rebuild the dead Kingdom of Israel, but to begin the Kingdom of God, not a privilege for one people, but the love of God that has no boundaries and is poured out for the whole mankind.

Here come troubles and difficulties. The evangelist writes: "*on that day*", that is after Jesus had compared the Kingdom of God to this big tree where everybody can find a shelter, "*as evening drew on*" – five times we find this expression 'as evening drew on' in Mark's Gospel, always in a negative sense, indicating dislike, opposition and, like here, incomprehension towards Jesus and his message.

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘let us cross to the other side’”

“Crossing to the other side” means entering a pagan territory. Well, every time Jesus urges his disciples to cross to the other side, troubles and resistance occur. Disciples didn’t catch the suggestion and are always understood it was a matter of Kingdom of Israel, instead. They’re thinking of Israel ruling all other nations that had to remain subject to it; they’re thinking of stealing all treasures and goods of those people, never thinking of bringing them God’s treasures, instead.

That’s why Jesus suggests to *“cross to the other side”*. And the evangelist writes that *“leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat”*. They don’t want to share Jesus with others, they take possession of him, almost like a prisoner. Well, what happens then? *“A violet squall came up”*. The evangelist recalls the history of Jonah who put a strong resistance to the divine task, causing a violent storm. The Lord told him *“Go to a pagan city and preach against it”* and he argues *“If I go there and preach to them, then the Lord forgives them, so he went in the opposite direction because he doesn’t want to bring God’s love to pagans. A violent storm arose.*

What does this squall mean, then? It represents the resistance of disciples who don’t want to enter pagan territories. But the squall is only for disciples. You see, the description that the evangelist is providing specifies that *“waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up”*, and Jesus was sleeping in the stern. That seems impossible! It’s quite impossible to sleep during such a kind of storm! But the evangelist means that Jesus is not involved in the storm, he’s willing to approach pagans; disciples are causing the storm.

Well, they react, *“woke him up and said to him ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? Jesus woke up, rebuked the wind and said to the sea ‘Quiet! Be still!’* This is a kind of expression that indicates the divine condition, the one pertaining to Jesus that disciples still don’t understand. They called him “Teacher”, but later they will ask *“Who then is this?”*

Psalm 107 and 89 say that God rules seas and storms; therefore Jesus is showing his divine condition because he wants to teach them that going towards pagans is not against God’s will. It means, on the contrary, displaying the love of a God, according to whom – Peter will formulate this beautiful expression – *“no one is excluded from God’s love”*. He will say, after his same initial opposition regarding pagans, *“But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean”*. Any man in the world can feel left out of God’s love.

Jesus, who is God, is willing to bring this love to pagans, but disciples oppose.

And Jesus reproaches them. He doesn’t appreciate their help request and tells them they don’t have faith yet, they don’t have faith as that small mustard seed in order to be able to bring the love of God to the whole mankind.

Facing these events, disciples ask themselves *“Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”*. They realize that Jesus is not only the teacher they were addressing to, but represents something extraordinary, something new that we will slowly discover along the study of Gospels.