

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 1,1-4; 4,14-21

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theoph'ilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The reading for this Sunday presents us with the beginning of Luke's gospel and then passes to present Jesus' first preaching in his country, Nazareth, which was a great failure. However, let us see what the evangelist writes.

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us,.. " Luke takes almost two thirds from Mark's gospel and puts it in his work. Luke, from recent studies, appears as a rabbi, therefore someone very educated and very aware of all the history and traditions of his people.

"..just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word," The believers are the servants of this word, they must not dominate this word, nor are they the owners, they put themselves to the service of these words so that they reach every one.

"...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past" here you can see the scrupulousness and attention of the rabbi, *".. to write an orderly account for you"* Here this work is dedicated to the most excellent Theoph'ilus. It was a title reserved for great personages: in the Acts of the Apostles, they are the Roman governors. The name Theoph'ilus means God's friend or loved by God. Who is this Theoph'ilus ? Recent studies, at the beginning of 2000, confirm that Theoph'ilus was the third son of Anna, the high priest, and he also was a high priest from 37 to 41 and he was the brother- in-law to Caiaphas.

Therefore Luke addresses his work to a high priest that, with his family, had an important story in Jesus' life.

"..that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." Here we understand that this high priest had accepted Jesus as the Messiah of his life. Therefore, the evangelist wants to show the origin, the depths of this message. Now the reading takes us to chapter 4.

"Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee," Galilee was a despised region; remember in John's gospel, with what contempt it is referred to when the Pharisees and the high priests say "Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee." (*John 7, 52*), therefore a region ignored by God.

"..a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all." The evangelist has never said that Jesus went to the temple to worship; Jesus went to the synagogue to teach his message, free from the teaching that the scribes gave in the synagogue.

And naturally this could only be the occasion of incidents. The first of the four times that Jesus entered into the synagogue is always a situation of conflict. *"..he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read;"* In the liturgy of the synagogue there was - as we have - a cycle of the readings. It began with a psalm, psalm 92, then there was the passage from the law, from the book of Deuteronomy, and then it finished with what was known as the reading of the greeting, the reading of a prophet.

Jesus stood up to read *"..and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah."* - that Sabbath it was the turn of this prophet, but here Jesus makes the first offence. The evangelist wrote: *"He opened the book and found..."* (*translated as "found", but the verb used is "search"*). The Greek verb is *eurisko*, from which comes Archimedes' famous exclamation, which we all know, Eureka! Meaning I have found it. I have found that which I was searching for. Therefore, Jesus disagreed with the reading for that day and searched for a particular passage.

What was it? It is the passage of the consecration of the Messiah, Isaiah chapter 61. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,..”* The Jewish liturgy was always read in the sacred language, Hebrew, but as the people did not understand it, there was a translator, that translated each verse.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me..” - the “anointed” , in Hebrew is the Messiah, he who would become the Messiah therefore anointed by God. *“..to preach good news to the poor.”* What is the good news that the poor are waiting for? The end of poverty. This will be Jesus’ aim, to create an alternative society where the people, rather than accumulating for themselves, share with others.

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,..” the blind were the prisoners that lived in caves underground. *“..to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* The acceptable year is the jubilee, that of the liberation in the country of all the inhabitants. Jesus interrupts the reading; which should not be interrupted, because the passage continues with what the people were waiting for: *“..the day of vengeance of our God;”*

The people are waiting for this. Jesus does not agree with Isaiah. From God there are only words of love and grace and not vengeance. The tension is rising.

The evangelist writes: *“And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant,..”* Therefore, the reading was finished. *“And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him”* Therefore there is great tension. So Jesus begins with that which will cause an explosion of anger. They will try to kill him.

And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled..” And the evangelist adds *“.. in your hearing.”* Why? He prepares the refusal, with the quote from the prophet Ezekiel, that says; *“Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.”*(Ezekiel 12, 2)

He is preparing the refusal that we will see in the next episode