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REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 1.14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

The evangelist Mark denounces the stupidity of power. Everytime the powerful believe to stifle the voice of complaint the Lord comes out with an even stronger one. This is what Mark writes in his gospel, chapter 1, 14.

“Now after John was arrested,” this is the first conflict between those in power and one sent by God. But each time God answers with a stronger voice. *“Now after John was arrested..,”* literally ‘delivered’, *“..Jesus came into Galilee,..”* Jesus begins in the region furthest away from the Jewish religious institution, a region in contact with the pagans where the mentality should be a little more open.

“...proclaiming the gospel of God,..” that is God’s good news. And what is God’s good news? That God is different from that which the priests had presented. He is a God completely different. He is not a God that asks, but a God that gives. Not a God that punishes, but a God that pardons, not a good God but a totally good God.

This is the content of the good news in God’s gospel that Jesus will proclaim. God is love and his love is offered in an unconditional manner to everyone. This is the good news that Jesus proclaims: *“..saying, «The time is fulfilled, »”*. To explain the time the evangelist uses the term that means the lost opportunity, the right occasion, to snatch up because there is the risk that it will not re-present itself. *“«..and the kingdom of God is at hand; »”*.

For the kingdom of God means the lordship of God. In the new relationship with God that Jesus proposes, that with the Father, there are no more laws, a code external to mankind that the individual

must observe, but there is an acceptance and the practice of a love like his. Jesus' God does not govern mankind issuing laws that must be observed, but communicating to them his own strength, his own spirit that make them able to love generously as they feel loved by him.

The kingdom of God is at hand, but to make this reality, it is necessary of a decision on behalf of mankind, the conversion. The evangelist does not use the verb 'to convert' that indicates a return to religion, a God, but indicates a change of mentality deeply affecting in the behaviour, a renunciation of injustice and the orientation of one's own existence for the good of others.

This is the conversion to which Jesus calls, to which Jesus invites, so that the kingdom of God can become reality. For the kingdom of God in this gospel means an alternative society, a society where instead of rising there is the descent, where instead of commanding there is serving and above all instead of accumulating assets there is sharing. So to do this there is need of a conversion, a change of course.

And Jesus invites a belief in this good news, And what is this good news? That God governs mankind and that there is a possibility of an alternative society. But to do this Jesus has need of the collaboration of mankind. Here is why "*Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee,..*" the evangelist speaks of the sea of Galilee, actually it is a lake. Why does the evangelist use the word 'sea'? Because the sea was the boundary with the pagan land and above all the sea is that which the Jews had to cross to enter into the promised land.

Therefore the evangelist expands the horizon of Jesus' message, that is not only directed to Galilee, but is directed to the pagan world. "*... he saw Simon and Andrew..*" they are two originally Greek names, therefore a community with a more open mentality. "*...casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, «Follow me»*", This will be the invitation that will continually resound from Jesus throughout the gospel of yesterday and still today: follow Him, because He knows how to realize this alternative society, the kingdom of God.

"*«...I will make you become fishers of men.»*" ». The reference of the Bible is from Ezekiel, chapter 47, where a couple of brothers are presented that received the promised land. Therefore the kingdom of God is a reality that now already is emerging through the call of the brothers. But why does Jesus call them to be fishers of men? Jesus does not invite them to be shepherds, he does not invite them to be guides nor teachers, but fishermen.

What does this mean? To fish a fish means to take the fish from its natural habitat to let it die. And it is done for one's own interests, one fishes for one's own benefit. To be fishers of men means to take from the water, that is to risk that they die; therefore it is a habitat hostile to man, an environment in which man could perish, and it is not done for one's own interest, but for the interest of others.

This is the conversion. The conversion to which Jesus calls and invites is: while until now you have lived for your own interests, now to live for the interests of others; while until now you have fished for yourself, now you fish for others, to communicate life to others. So Jesus invites to collaborate with His actions in proposing and practicing concretely a different style to make possible an alternative society,

that which is called the kingdom of God, and the first action one does is to take mankind from that which could be the cause of their death. If that which gives life is the giving up of their own interests, that which brings death is living centered exclusively for one's own interests, of convenience.

And it will be precisely those that are centered on their own conveniences, their own interests, the bitter enemies of Jesus.

“And immediately they left their nets and followed him.”, therefore immediately these two, these first disciples, accept Jesus' invitation, but Jesus continues. And this time He turns to two brothers that have Jewish names; they are James and John, therefore they are more attached to the traditions and they will be those that in the Gospel will show difficulties in following Jesus. But also these leave their father Zebedee *“.....in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”* straight away

Therefore Jesus' intention is to call people with Him collaborating as bearers of life to those that live in an environment of death.