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HE WENT AND LIVED IN CAPERNAUM..... SO THAT WHAT WAS SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET ISAIAH MIGHT BE FULFILLED - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 4,12-23

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

After the episode of the temptations of the desert, temptations that had not been exhausted in that period, but that will continue throughout the Jesus' existence, the evangelist in the fourth chapter, from verse 12, presents the beginning of Jesus' activity. Let's read.

“Now when he heard that John had been arrested...” the evangelist sheds a sinister light on the activity of Jesus. Here is what happens to invite change: the powerful do not want to change, but the stupidity of power is that when they silence a voice, because it is uncomfortable, the Lord then sends an even more powerful one. So, on silencing John, Jesus arrives.

“...he withdrew...” this verb always indicates a withdrawal in relation to danger, *“.. into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea,..”* here there is an inconsistency, *“..in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali,..”* but Capernaum is in the territory of Naphtali, how come the evangelist writes that it is the territory of Zebulon? Because, according to the literary style of the rabbis, Matthew, who was probably a scribe, wants to introduce a prophecy, a passage from the prophet Isaiah that is close to his heart, in fact he says *“..so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:”* This prophecy is a promise of liberation from the situation of oppression and domination by the Assyrians: *“..“The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali ..”* that's why he said it then, *“..the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—“*

While Judea, the region that has Jerusalem, the holy city, takes its name from Judah, one of the forefathers of the tribes of Israel, this territory is so despised by the prophet that he has no name, he calls it the district of gentiles, district in Hebrew is “ghelil”, hence the term Galilee.

“Galilee of the Gentiles— the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.” the evangelist anticipates what will then be the work of the disciples, whom Jesus will invite to be the light of the world. *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent,..”* Jesus' first words are an invitation to change, a change in mentality which then affects behaviour, *“.. for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Jesus' message does not concern a kingdom in heaven, but a kingdom of heaven, heaven means God, the kingdom of God, the alternative society that Jesus came to

inaugurate," .. *is at hand*." Why doesn't it say it's already there, why is it at hand? Because this kingdom will become reality with the proclamation of the beatitudes, and the first beatitude of Jesus is "*blessed are the poor for the spirit, because of them is the kingdom of heaven*". It is not a promise of the future, but a possibility for the present. When there is a community, even a small one, which agrees to share what it is and what it has, the kingdom of heaven begins, that is, God rules these people, these communities. And God does not govern by issuing laws that men must observe, but by communicating to them his spirit, his own ability to love.

"While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers,.." this is important for the brothers, because being brothers will be the characteristic of the community of Jesus, *"Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother,.."* and these brothers have names of Greek origin, so it means a larger family, mentally freer. Simone, the first, is known for his nickname, which indicates stubbornness, Pietro(Peter) that is a hard head. *".. casting a net into the sea.."*, and then here the evangelist makes a superfluous comment, *".. for they were fishermen.."* obviously if they threw their nets into the sea. Why does the evangelist point out, it seems unnecessary, that they were fishermen? Because in reality it refers to the prophet Ezekiel who, in chapter 47, has a prophecy in which, in the times of the messiah, it indicates an abundant fishing for fishermen. *"And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* this is the invitation that Jesus makes. Jesus does not invite those he calls to be shepherds, he is the only shepherd, but fishermen of men, what does it mean to catch men? Fishing fish is well known, it means pulling fish out of its vital habitat, water, to give it death, for the peoples own interest and profit. Instead, fishing for men means saving them, pulling them out of the water that can kill them, and not for their own interest, but for their interest. It is interesting that in calling his followers, Jesus does not choose the monks, the pious, the members of the priesthood, the powerful, the theologians who were at that time, but he chooses normal people, outside the realm of religion, because they have to communicate life, and those who live under the hood of religion do not have life so cannot communicate it.

"Immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,.." we see how many times the evangelist stresses being brothers. These two brothers, on the other hand, have a strictly Hebrew name, so it means a family of closer observance of the religion and laws of Israel." *.. in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. .."* So, it is a family already structured in a hierarchical way, and this will be seen throughout the Gospel.

"Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him." they left their father, because in the community of Jesus there are no fathers, the only father is the Father in heaven, but unfortunately they did not leave the mother, and the mother will be a source of trouble for these two brothers, because of her ambition , which will risk bringing division, schism into the community of Jesus.

"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom..." for the activity of Jesus, the evangelist uses two different verbs: in the synagogues Jesus teaches, teaching means taking his teaching from the richness of the tradition of Israel, from the contents of the old testament in the Bible; but, to announce to others, to those outside Israel, to gentiles, the verb used is to preach, which indicates something new

And what does Jesus preach, what does Jesus proclaim? The gospel. It is the first time that the term gospel, that is, the good news, appears in this book, and what is this good news? The good news of the kingdom is that ,Jesus does it by healing all sorts of diseases and infirmities of the people. God's attention is for the infirmities, for the people, the effect of the kingdom is to bring the tenderness of God for every creature, especially the most needy, the most suffering.

