

III ORDINARY TIME – January 27th, 2013

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 1.1-4; 4.14-21

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

At that time, Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about 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 as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll 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."

Every time that Jesus, the son of God, finds himself in a synagogue, the place of worship, there is always conflict. It seems that there is incompatibility between Jesus, the son of God and the religious environment and religious people. The first time, in Luke's Gospel, was the most serious: they try to kill Him.

Let's see the reasons in the verses that the liturgy presents us today. It is chapter 4 in Luke's Gospel. The evangelist writes, " *And Jesus returnedto Galilee..*" after the baptism in the Holy Spirit and after having received that same strength as God after the temptations in the

desert, with “...*the power of the Spirit.*” So, all that the evangelist presents us with now is the effect of this spirit, the effect of the love full of God that Jesus has.

“...*and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.*” There is great anticipation. Galilee is a despised region, the people are suppressed, there is extreme poverty and a great desire of a Messiah, of a liberator. “*And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.*”

This image that may seem positive must not be misleading, because, we in fact seeing the effects of Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue in His place of birth, Nazareth. “*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read*” Of all the four times that Luke presents Jesus in a synagogue he never says that He participates at the worship or prayers, but always announces a message – as in this case - contrary to the expectations of the people. And this is the cause of the conflict.

“*And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and...*” And here Jesus begins the first of many violations that rise the anger and hate of the participants at the synagogue worship to a point where they try and kill Him. “*..found the place where it was written,...*” The readings had a three year circle, well Jesus does not read the reading expected for that day, but goes and searches for some particular passage. But the passage is happy because it is what the people expected.

It is Isaiah chapter 61. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,..*” it is what Jesus had experimented with the baptism, “*.. because he has anointed me..*” The term “anointed” is the same from which comes the term “Christ”, that is the Messiah. “*He has sent me..*” the first action of the man anointed by God, of the man that has the Spirit of God is not that towards God, but an action that comes from God towards mankind.

Cult and religious behavior is not spoken of here, but profound humanity aimed at resolving the needs and sufferance of mankind. In fact “*..to proclaim good news to the poor.*” And what is the good news that the poor are waiting for? The end of poverty. Jesus comes to realize that which was the will of the Father, the will of God that was expressed in Deuteronomy (15,4), where God had said “But there will be no poor among you;”

This was a only true sign of God’s presence amongst the people: that no one is in need. It’s so true that in the Acts of the Apostles, in the first Christian community it will be said that they witnessed with great strength the resurrection of Jesus because “*no one amongst them was in need* “. So Jesus’ action, that is God, that is the son of God, is that of easing the sufferance of mankind.

So the first announcement is for the poor. And consequently “*..to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,..*” all those that live in a oppressive situations, of injustice, all those that live in darkness. This is the communication of life that Jesus, that Christ, Messiah, will bring to His people.

“..to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” This is why there is this liberation. In the Lord's intended legislation it was done in such a way that the poor did not always remain poor, but every now and again there was the restoration of the land they had lost, It was called “ the jubilee feast”. So Jesus comes to realize this promise, that had remained on paper rather than being reality, which is spoken of in Leviticus (25, 13) *“In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property.”* This is why there is good news for the poor, they will be no longer poor.

But the verse continues and Jesus stops the reading here and it was the verse most waited for, that is which the people of Nazareth hoped for, remember they lived in a situation of great oppression and poverty. And what was this verse? *“...and the day of vengeance of our God;..”*

Dominated by the Romans, victims of the rich, these people wanted revenge, revenge on God's behalf. But Jesus does not agree, Jesus comes to proclaim only love for all, not vendetta, and this causes discontent in the synagogue.

Not only this. *“..he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant..”* Luke is describing step by step this situation that will lead to the attempted lynching of Jesus on the behalf of those present in the synagogue *“...and sat down.”* There is great tension. Luke writes that in fact *“..the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”* The insult that Jesus had done, not only choosing to read the wrong reading, but censuring that reading, censuring the Prophet Isaiah!

Jesus does not agree with this image of a warlike religion in which God punishes or vindicates. Jesus' God is not a good God , but an exclusively good God and his love is offered to all, and as further on in this Gospel, also for the ungrateful and evil.

“And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” So Jesus confirms that Isaiah's prophesy will be realized in Himself. The evangelist literally writes *“ Today this scripture has been fulfilled and you have heard it with your own ears”*. Why this reference to ears? The prophet Ezekiel had written these words of God: *“Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house.”(Ezekiel 12,2)* Because they are rebellious.

So here is why the reference to eyes and ears. This prepares for the angry reaction of those present in the synagogue, that without exception try to kill Jesus.