

**JESUS LIKE ELIJAH AND ELISHA WAS NOT SENT ONLY FOR THE JEWS –
Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

Luke 4,21-30

And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?” And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away

In the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus reads and attributes to Himself the verses of chapter 61 of the prophet Isaiah where it speaks of the coming of the Messiah. But Jesus commits a grave error to the ears of those listeners in the synagogue, the Nazarenes; He omits the verse that was most waited for after the proclamation of the year of God's grace, Isaiah's text that went on to say "...and the day of vengeance of our God;.." This is what the people are waiting for.

Suppressed for seventy years, by the domination of the Romans, waiting for a liberator that will help them to be freed of the terrible occupation of the domination of the pagans. Well Jesus does not agree with the Prophet Isaiah, He speaks of grace announcing this love of God, but omits the word vendetta. And this brings an angry reaction , that we will see in the verses that the evangelist Luke writes in chapter 4, 21-30.

So, Jesus speaks of grace to the Nazarenes that were waiting for the vendetta. Then, after He had attributed the realization of this passage, *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* Luke writes: *"And all..."*, meaning all the participants at the liturgy in the synagogue, *"... spoke well of him and marvelled at the gracious words."*

And they were surprised, amazed and bewildered . By what? *"...the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."* They expected vendetta and Jesus spoke only of grace. Jesus has come to announce the universal love of God, a universal love not only for its extent, everywhere, but most of all for its quality, for all.

There is no one in the whole world that needs to feel excluded from God's love. When Jesus must talk of this love He will compare it to the sun and to the rain. The sun and the rain carry their effect over all, not only to those that merit them. This is God's love. It is a universal love in the sense that it is everywhere, there is no individual that must feel himself excluded from this love.

This causes a reaction in the Nazarenes that ask: *"Is not this Joseph's son?"* They do not doubt the Joseph's paternity. The evangelist had already written that Jesus was the son, as one believed, of Joseph. "Son", in that culture, did not only mean born of the father, but he who was similar in behavior, therefore evidently Joseph shared the nationalistic ideals, violent, of the rest of the population of Nazareth.

Well now Jesus, instead of calming the souls, explaining Himself better, worsens the situation. He quotes a known proverb, *'Physician, heal yourself.'* *What we have heard you did at Capernaum,..."* a derogative was used because Capernaum was a border town, where there was a mixed population of Jews and pagans, *"..do here in your hometown as well."*

These are the new temptations of the Devil. The Devil had tempted Jesus to use His skills for His own advantage. Jesus refused. And this temptation of the Devil repeats itself in the waiting Nazarene, that Jesus uses something to His own advantage, and to the advantage of the Nazarene.

Then comes Jesus' dramatic declaration: *"Truly, I say to you..."*, therefore a solemn affirmation, *".. no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."* And this will always be a long story of humanity. The prophet is not he that comes to repeat a known doctrine, but he that, for his own experience of God, creates formula's , new attitudes and a new way to relate to God. And this is always refused.

And Jesus makes things even worse by bringing up a very sore point in Israel's past, he brings up from nowhere two episodes that the Nazarene would prefer not to remember. Two episodes in which God's actions, in situations of grave emergency, actually rather than go to the Jews, he turned to the pagans. So Jesus remembers the actions of Elijah and Elisha - the first in the situation of great famine, three years and six months, . when God's action was not towards the people of Israel, but to *"..the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."* Therefore a pagan.

For God there is no elect people, but his love is for all. Here Jesus does nothing but renew the warning that the prophets had said many times, especially Amos that said that God loved even the Philistines, the historical enemies of Israel. So the love of God is attracted to where it is most needed, not towards who merits it and has special rights. Likewise the plague of leprosy, which was terrible, the only time a leper was cured by a prophet it was a pagan. In fact, generally, from the enemy's army.

Well, this is too much. "*When they heard these things, all...*" the same people that were against Him before "*... were filled with wrath.*" And the preaching of Jesus ends dramatically. The first time that Jesus preaches in the synagogue of Nazareth, what will be the peoples reply? An attempt to lynch Him, the try to kill Him. They do not accept this announcement of universal love. Therefore to Jesus' announcement of universal love they reply with deadly hate.

So, "*..they rose up and drove him out of the town..*" to a place where criminals were executed "*....and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.*" They try to kill Jesus. "*But passing through their midst, he went away.*" The evangelist does nothing but anticipate what will happen in Jerusalem, where they will kill Jesus, but His life will be stronger than death. Jesus' life does not end in death, but will allow to manifest Himself with greater fullness.