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FOR THE ONE WHO IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US.....AND IF YOUR HAND CAUSES YOU TO SIN, CUT IT OFF. - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 9,38-43.45.47-48

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

Jesus had given his disciples the ability to free people from demons, that is, from the ideologies that make them refractory to the Word, to the teaching of Jesus. Well, they have not been successful, they are incapable of following Jesus and what is more serious they prevent those who want to follow Jesus. The evangelist writes in chapter 9, 38 "John," John appears always with his brother James, called by Jesus 'the sons of thunder' in Aramaic "boanerges" (phonetic) for their arrogance. Here he appears alone because the evangelist wants to put a parallel with Joshua who was the servant of Moses and who had gone to protest to Moses because two Jews who had not attended the meeting to receive the Holy Spirit had in fact received it.

"John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name..." in the name means giving adhesion, so this does what the disciples were unable to do. And here's the arrogance, the claim to be an exclusive group, "...and we tried to stop him, because" he did not say he was following you, "...because he was not following us." Right from the beginning there was a temptation in the Christian community to be an exclusive group. Well Jesus will rebuke him, "...Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who..." the translation is not "to do a miracle, the word used by the evangelist is "dynamis" which means a force, energy that communicates life. So we can translate "...does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us." All those who work for the good of mankind, to free mankind, Jesus sees them as his allies, even if they do not belong to his group.

And then he invites the disciples again to identify with him and says "For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward." The presence of Jesus and the Father is the reward for those who welcome them. But then Jesus changes the tone, changes the register and he, almost always maternal with sinners, so tender, has words of extreme harshness specially for his disciples, terrible words. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin," The word used by the evangelist is "micron" meaning

the invisible, the excluded and the marginalized by society; so they are not children, they are people that have heard Jesus' message as the answer to their aspiration of life. They have heard love, brotherhood and forgiveness spoken of and have welcomed Jesus.

But there had been the precedent incident when Jesus had surprised these disciples discussing among themselves to know who was the greatest and most important. And therefore they remain scandalized, they see that within Jesus' community there are the same rivalries, the same tensions that are outside. Then Jesus says if someone makes me stumble and fall for his ambition "*..one of these little ones who believe in me..it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck...*" There were two millstones: a smaller one, the domestic one that was used by the woman in the house to grind the grain and a larger one, the mill one, which was used in the olive press, and Jesus says exactly this one, large and immovable. But it is not enough "*..and he were thrown into the sea.*" why this? The Jews believed that they could only be resurrected if they were buried in the land of Israel. If one died at sea and drowned, there was no hope of resurrection.

But why is it not enough for Jesus to say to them "*..thrown into the sea.*" Why does he want the millstone put around their necks. Because if one drowned the body could then come to the surface and be buried. No, Jesus' words are tremendous to his community, he says he puts a millstone so that, who by his ambition makes one of these marginalized, one of those excluded from society sin then he does not want to see him here nor in the afterlife. These are very terrible words.

Then he gives advice to his community: "*And if your hand..*" he will talk of feet and eyes, the hand means activity, feet conduct and eyes judgment and values "*.. if your hand causes you to sin,...*" so if you have values, attitudes, behaviours in your life that favour ambition, putting you above others Jesus is very clear "*..cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell to the unquenchable fire.*"

So Jesus says, he asks that all that is opposed to the message must be eliminated even if it is painful And after listing these he concludes with regard to hell '*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*' What does this mean? Jesus quotes the Prophet Isaiah chapter 66, 24 where there is the punishment for those that rebel before God. Why does he speak of worms that do not die and fire that will not be quenched? It refers to the two ways of destroying a corpse, through rotting or through cremation, the worm and the fire. Why is it not quenched? Because it is total destruction. So those who are the cause of sinning over others because of their ambition are going to meet the total ruin of their existence.