

IV ORDINARY TIME– 31st January 2021

HE TAUGHT THEM AS ONE WHO HAD AUTHORITY - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 1, 21-28

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

This Sunday's Gospel presents us with the beginning of Jesus' activity; in the first chapter of Mark's gospel, from verse 21. Jesus called the first four disciples and invited them to be fishers of men. Fishing for men, we explained, means pulling men out of the 'water' that can give them death to give them life. Well, Jesus with these four disciples begins this activity of 'fishing' for men, but where does he go to fish for men from a place of death to give them life? In the place we least expected ; he does not go to places frequented by sinners, he goes to Capernaum to a synagogue.

Let's read what the evangelist writes "*And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.*" The Sabbath is the day of the cult for the synagogue. Jesus does not participate to the cult of the synagogue, he immediately begins teaching. Lets see the reaction. "... *they were astonished at his teaching...*" why? "... *for he taught them as one who had authority...*" This does not mean that Jesus taught authoritatively; the authority was the divine mandate that God had given to the prophets and then passed on to the scribes to make known his will, his word. Then the people, those present in the synagogue feel in Jesus' teaching that there is the divine mandate because in every person there is a desire for the fullness of life and Jesus' word is the answer to this fullness of life.

So they were amazed at this novelty and said that he taught with authority and not like them who, on the other hand, had to exercise it, their scribes. The scribes were believed to be successors of the prophets, they were people who, after a long life of studying writings, received the same by the transmission of the spirit of Moses and were the infallible authority of the time, their word was considered the word of God. Well, as soon as Jesus begins to teach and as soon as there is this surge of enthusiasm, something happens. The evangelist writes that then "*..immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.*" Spirit meaning a force or energy when this spirit comes from God it is called Holy because it separates the person from the sphere of darkness, of sin, when it comes from the reality contrary to God it is called impure, it holds man in darkness, in sin. . Well,

in the synagogue the evangelist presents us with a person with an impure spirit, why? It is the religious institution that with its teaching, instead of bringing people closer to God, distances them from God.

So, this person with an impure spirit starts to cry out, he can't stand either the teaching of Jesus nor the enthusiasm on the part of the others present, he starts shouting and says "*What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?*" then he reminds him of his origins, from Nazareth, the den of nationalists and rebels ; "*Have you come to destroy us?*", he speaks in the plural. But who is it that Jesus is destroying with his teaching? Jesus with his teaching is destroying the prestige of the scribes, those who claimed to have the authority from God to teach. So who is this man possessed by an unclean spirit? It is the man who has given uncritical adherence to the teaching of the scribes and, when he sees himself endangered by the teaching of Jesus, he feels himself in danger.

Then he says to Jesus "*I know who you are—the Holy One of God.*" The Holy One of God was the Messiah who had to faithfully observe the law and have it observed, instead Jesus liberates from the law. Jesus does not accept any dialogue, he says, "*Be silent, and come out of him!*" *And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.*" Why the agony? Getting to a point in life and having to admit that the religious teaching in which one had believed and on which one's existence was based not only it did not come from God, but it was also contrary to God, well to free oneself is a torment.

"And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching....'" a new doctrine; not a new teaching, but a new doctrine. The term used by the evangelist indicates a quality that replaces everything else. And what new doctrine is it? It is that God does not manifest himself in the doctrine of the scribes, but in the liberating activity of Jesus. This is why Jesus invited his disciples to be fishers of men. The teaching of Jesus is an authoritative word which, when accepted, transforms the life of those who receive it.