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...HE HEALED MANY WHO WERE SICK WITH VARIUOS DISEASES...

Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 1, 29-39

And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, and immediately they told him of her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them.

That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him

And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him followed him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

The evangelist Mark presents us with what was the effect of Jesus' first teaching in the synagogue. Let's read the first chapter verses 29 to 39.

"And immediately he left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John." There is the first irregularity. Simon and Andrew were not in the synagogue, it was obligatory to participate in the cult, it is a community of brothers a little more liberal from the point of view of religion. And here comes the unexpected and it is the effect of teaching, and what was it? Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with the fever. It is not something of great important. Women at that time were of no value, they were not considered and what's more she had a fever and was therefore in some way impure, and therefore ignored. Instead here is the effect of the new teaching, or better, of the new teaching that Jesus had taught in the synagogue.

“...and immediately they told him of her.” Jesus’ teaching is an expression of the love of God for all creatures. There is no first, second or last category of people, all creatures are objects of his love, and so they spoke of her. Well, Jesus could have ignored this fact, she was a woman, not worth anything and what’s more she had a fever. But Jesus *“...came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her; and she served them.”* That this woman gets up to serve them does not reduce the figure of the woman or the role of the woman, and the evangelist emphasises this. In the culture of that time God was surrounded with angels that served him, they were called the angels of service. Therefore serving God was the task of the spiritual creatures closest to him. Then there was the category of the humans, and last, the excluded, and furthest from God there were the women. Here, the fact that this woman begins to serve, the verb is *diaconeo*, from which derives the term *deacon* that we all know, meaning a non-obligatory service, but voluntarily rendered out of love, that indicates that in the gospel women are equated to the spiritual beings closest to God, the angels.

“That evening,” for the first time this phrase appears, and it will appear five times and it is always negative in Mark’s gospel, *“..at sundown,”* why after dark? We know it is the Sabbath when it is not possible to do anything, even cure the sick. *“...at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.”* What is it that the evangelist wants to say to us? While at home the need of a person, even a woman, was more important than the observation of the Sabbath, the most important commandment because Jesus could not, should not have treated this woman, in the city on Saturday. The observance of the law of the Sabbath was more important than the good of the people, so they waited for it to end. The observance of the law delays the experience of the love of the Lord.

“.. they brought to him all who were sick .” It is the first time that the words *“possessed with demons”* appears in Mark’s gospel, what does it mean? Jesus in the synagogue had dealt with a person possessed by an impure spirit. Nobody knew that this person had an impure spirit, it was the occasion with meeting up with Jesus that made it emerge. *“And the whole city was gathered together about the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons;”* Here also for the first time appears the word *demons*. It will appear nine times in Mark’s gospel, what does it mean? In the Old Testament for nineteen times there are remains of mythological beliefs of that time, for example fauns, satyrs, sirens and the Greek translators translated everything automatically with demons, intermediate beings. For example in the book of the Prophet Isaiah chapter 34. 14 it reads *“And wild beasts shall meet with hyena the satyr shall cry to his fellow; yea, there shall the night hag alight, and find for herself a resting place.”* The *night hag* was considered a female demon, responsible for infant mortality, here was all the mythological world. In the Gospels these demons indicated the realities that prevented man from accepting the message of Jesus or making him refractory. Therefore

an adhesion to values, to ideologies that did not allow the person to welcome Jesus. Well, Jesus' teaching and preaching frees us from all this.

"..and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him" in what way did they know him? As the person possessed with an unclean spirit in the synagogue, *"You are the saint of God"*, that is you are the Messiah who must teach us the law, which must observe the law, on the contrary Jesus will free everyone from the observance of the law.

"And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed." It is the first of the three times in which in this Gospel Jesus prays and always at times critical for his disciples. He will pray in chapter 6 at the moment of the dividing of the bread and fishes, the moment of exaltation for the disciples, and will then pray in chapter 14 at Gethsemane, a moment of crisis for the disciples.

Well, Jesus has left, *"And Simon and those who were with him followed him,"* already there is a sign of a rift. Jesus had invited his disciples to stay with him, but there is a group that are with Simon. Simon is the leader, the boss. *".. and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."* The verb to search is always negative, it always has a implication, of negativity in the gospels.

And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also;" here is a change in Jesus' strategy. In the synagogue he had taught, teaching means exposing the novelty starting from the texts of the Old Testament. Now Jesus, after the clash in the synagogue, changes strategy, he does not teach, but preaches, preaching means announcing the news of the kingdom without relying on the ancient realities of Israel.

"...for that is why I came out." *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching..."* Jesus is not teaching anymore *"...in their synagogues and casting out demons."* The reading finishes as it had begun: in religious places, the synagogue, they are places where there are nests of demons, what does this mean? They are places of cult, religious places where the ideology is contrary to Jesus' Fathers. They dominate mankind, they prevents their happiness. Jesus' work is to free people from all those religious ideologies that prevent their development and their growth.