

**A PROPHET IS NOT WITHOUT HONOR EXCEPT IN HIS NATIVE PLACE – Biblical Commentary by
F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Mk 6.1-6

He departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him? What mighty deeds are wrought by his hands!

Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house."

So he was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them.

He was amazed at their lack of faith. He went around to the villages in the vicinity teaching.

In this dramatic passage, the evangelist introduces the very sad situation of a people who is subject to authorities. People are not allowed to hold an opinion, have to think exactly as authorities decide they should: whereas authorities teach what is black or white, people has to believe it. This is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

But let's have a look at what the evangelist says. "*Jesus came to his native place*", avoiding to name Nazareth, because this event is not precisely linked to the small village of Nazareth, but to the whole Israel. "*When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue*", this is the second time he teaches in the synagogue. The first one was in Capernaum and it was successful. The reaction was a good one and people were astonished but used to think "this man has authority" – that is has a divine mandate – "not as our scribes". The first time the situation was a positive one.

But Jesus brought the official theologians and scribes into disrepute, and they fought back by warning people: be careful, for this man, Jesus, maybe might be able to heal, but he does it in order to infect you with something worst, because he is a quack and acts by the prince of demons. And people believes this.

As a matter of fact people here is astonished by his teaching and there's no positive reaction. They ask *"Where did this man get all this"*. They don't feel his divine condition because doctors of law said that Jesus has a diabolic condition; they must believe what authorities are imposing. And are astonished by his mighty deeds and say they are *"wrought by his hands!"*, as if he was a quack. They avoid naming Jesus, they just refer to him with a great disregard, *"Is he not the carpenter"*, they avoid pronouncing his name and hurt him by calling him *"the son of Mary"*. In Palestinian world a child was always named with the name of his father, even when the father was dead; a child always kept the name of his father. People should say then *"Isn't he the son of Joseph?"*. But they ignore Joseph. Saying that someone is the son of a woman means that his fatherhood is uncertain. They start to insult him by listing all his relatives, brothers and sisters, that is his family clan and the evangelist ends up stating that *"they took offense at him"*.

The condition of people is really awful: though they have heard Jesus teaching, they cannot perceive his divine authority because religious officials, in order to keep their advantage – they know that Jesus has the divine condition, but if they acknowledge it they lose their power – told them that Jesus is acting under the influence of the prince of demons.

Here comes the bitter statement of Jesus, echoing what John wrote in his Gospel *"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him"*. Jesus says *"A prophet is not without honor except in his native place."* This is the destiny of prophets, in the name of God religious authorities never welcome the same God who reveals himself in the present.

Prophets are those who enlarge spaces, develop God's knowledge, but religious authorities, in the name of tradition, reject them and don't welcome the news God is conveying, subjecting people to their tradition. Jesus is blocked and *"was amazed at their lack of faith"*.

Jesus is very sad for he is acknowledging the oppression that people is subject to. Those who were considered the representatives of God are the ones who prevent people from knowing Him.