

## V ORDINARY TIME– 7th February 2021

### HE HEALED MANY WHO WERE SICK WITH VARIOUS 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 ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

*That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at 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 rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking 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.*

In the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus teaches for the first time and the people begin to understand that the will of God is not expressed through the doctrine imposed by their scribes, the official authority of that time, but in the liberating works of Jesus. That is why, in today's Gospel, Mark 1, 29-39, as soon as they left the synagogue they went to the house of Simon and Andrew together with the other two disciples, James and John, the first ones called by Jesus and there was Simone's mother-in-law who was in bed with a fever.

In that culture, a woman was considered the human being the furthest from God and she is irrelevant and counts for nothing in her family; and instead here they immediately talk to him about her. They have understood the novelty of Jesus' teaching, where the good of man is put in first place, even before the observance of divine law. Why this? Because it was Saturday; and on Saturday, there are 1521 actions prohibited and among these there is also the visit and the care of the sick. Well, the disciples understood that the good of man was the most important value and that's why they talk about her.

Jesus could have said "*Let's wait, let's wait for the Sabbath to pass*"; no, the good of man is more important than the observance of divine law. Recall that the commandment for rest on the Saturday was not a commandment among others, but it was the most important commandment of all because it was believed that God himself observed it. The observance of this one commandment was the equivalent to the observation of all the laws, so the transgression of this one commandment was equivalent to the transgression of the whole law and for this there was the death penalty.

But in this group of Jesus' they had understood that there was something new. So Jesus went to her "*...and lifted her up...*" and Jesus surprisingly took her hand. Why? There was no need, but because it was forbidden. Jesus every time he found himself in conflict between the law, tradition and the good of mankind, he has always chose the good of mankind and here the surprise is that Jesus, taking the hand of a woman who is impure, he does not receive the impurity of the woman, but transmits his strength to her, to give her energy. So "*.. the fever left her, and she began to serve them. .*" For the verb 'to serve' the evangelist uses the term "*diaconeo*", which we also know in English as, '*deacon*,' meaning one who freely serves for love. This term is important because it appears in the gospel after the temptations, when the angels, being closest to God, served Jesus. Well, the woman with Jesus, who was considered the being farthest from God, the most useless and insignificant, once she welcomes the message of Jesus, the Christian community, she becomes closer to God. This in the house of Simon and Andrew.

But outside, the evangelist writes. "*That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.*" Why had they waited? Because they had kept the law, to rest on the Sabbath. While at home the need and the good of the person was more important than the observance of the Sabbath, in the city the law was more important than the good of the people. The observance of the law had slowed down the encounter with the life that Jesus was trying to communicate.

"*..the whole city was gathered together at the door.*" Jesus heals the people and the passage ends in a surprising way; the evangelist writes that Jesus went to all of Galilee "*...preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*" The evangelist is denouncing that the synagogues, that is, the places of worship and religious teaching is where demons nest. It's where the people are subjected to a teaching that is believed to come from God when it does not come from God. Jesus will denounce these scribes teaching doctrines to mankind, well, people are suppressed by these doctrines taught in the synagogue. So, the synagogues will become the most hostile and refractory places to Jesus, in which he with his teaching will try to free the people.