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**YOUR PEACE WILL REST UPON HIM - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi
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Lk 10.1-12.17.20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.

Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The passage we are going to comment is only present in Luke's Gospel. *"After this"*, after what? What happened? Jesus, having acknowledged the failure of the Twelve who were sent to set people free, but not only don't succeed but want to prevent them from liberating – called the Samaritans in his wake.

"After this, the Lord", a title by which Jesus the Risen was addressed, *"appointed seventy-two others"*. Why just seventy-two? Because, while Twelve is the number that concerns the tribes of Israel, so it might be seen as a message addressed to Israel, the seventy-two, according to the statement in the Book of Genesis chap. 10, are pagan known nations.

So it is a universal mission for which Jesus sends the Samaritans, that is those who are not from Israel. *"Ahead of him, two by two"*, because of them being a community, but mainly because number two was the one needed to be witnesses, *"into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them «The harvest is plentiful»"*, that is the response of people to the good news, Jesus assures that.

As one really proclaims the good news, the outcome is an extraordinary one, *"«But the laborers are few»"*. This request made by Jesus *"pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers"*, is not especially addressed to certain categories of people – as it is thought to be – such as priests, nuns or monks, but is an invitation to everyone, so that anyone might understand the urgency of this mission.

Then Jesus provides very clear instructions: one cannot deny the message through his behavior. Therefore he says *"«I'm sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves"*, the opposition of society which feels threatened in its foundations such as having, rising and ruling, will be tremendous.

Jesus says: *"Go ahead defenseless for the Lord, the Spirit, will be your defense"*. Then, *"«Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals»"*, that is don't worry about your livelihood, don't worry about what you will drink or eat, because the Lord will provide; so go ahead in such a way not to betray the faith you proclaim.

"«Greet no one on the road»", for greeting in Eastern mentality was typically endless. Then the Lord provides very clear indications: *"«Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!'»"*, this is the wish. Peace means an invitation to fullness of happiness.

"«And if a son of peace is there»", that is if someone who carries with him this desire of fullness of life is there, *"«Your peace will rest upon him»"*. Then Jesus warns *"«And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide»"*. Why is this particular so important? In Hebrew world, also for Samaritans, particular attention was paid not to eat something unclean, not to touch something considered unclean; that's why people didn't enter pagans' houses, as they were thought to be unclean, too.

But Jesus says *"Never mind, forget those scruples"*. He already said elsewhere that not what enters a man makes him unclean, but what comes out from him. *"«For the laborer deserves his wages»"*, that is *"go without worrying, as what you ask will be given to you"*. *"«Do not go from house to house»"*. In Acts there's Peter saying that *"it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or*

visit anyone of another nation". Jesus says then, "don't worry about these things when you enter a house, don't be squeamish or difficult for religious purposes", *«but stay there»*.

And again Jesus insists, because it seems there was an opposition on behalf of these envoys, "*«Eat what is set before you»*", that is "don't say 'this is clean, this is not, etc...'", and then "*«treat»*", or 'take care', not 'heal' how it is translated. "*«Treat the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'»*".

The kingdom of God takes care of needs and pains of mankind; the kingdom of God has come to alleviate sufferings of men and these are to be treated. One must try and alleviate others' suffering. Jesus says "if they don't receive you, don't insist, it means that the environment is still not ready for this, so don't waste your time".

One part has been eliminated from the text of today's Liturgy. Jesus says that pagans' response will be greater than that of Israel and lists three pagan cities opposed to three of Israel, which are Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin, that didn't receive him. Well the outcome is that "*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, «Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!»*", that is through the message of Jesus men were set free from wrong ideologies that made them hostile to this good news.

But, of course, only free individuals can set others free, that's why the Twelve didn't succeed. And here comes a very important statement made by Jesus: "*«I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven»*". According to this ancient view Satan used to be in heaven and was a servant of the divine court, a minister of God. In the Book of Job God receives his sons, among whom also Satan is present. He used to be God's inspector, the one who took care of his interests and his job was supervising men activity and then accusing them before God, inflicting them punishments for their sins.

Well, with the announcement of the seventy-two, the Good News has been successful. What is this Good News? The Good News is that God is not good, but exclusively good: the God of Jesus is not the one of religion, who rewards the good and punishes the wicked, but the one who conveys his love to anyone. The role of Satan, thus, is finished; his accusations are useless for God conveys his love to everybody, regardless of their behavior.

In this Gospel Jesus already said: "*For God is kind to the ungrateful and the evil*".

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Then Satan is cast out of heaven, his role has ended. In the book of Revelation an important definition is given to this episode, *“for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before God”*.

Then comes the final reassurance, “Nothing will harm you”, hostile forces will not hurt you for light is stronger than darkness and life is stronger than death. And last think Jesus said *“but rejoice that your names are written in heaven”*, meaning the experience of feeling loved by God.

So, while the two disciples sought a fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, the Samaritans make Satan, the enemy of mankind, drop from heaven.