

V ORDINARY TIME – February 8th, 2015

JESUS HEALED MANY WHO HAD VARIOUS DESEASES – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 1.29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

To understand this Sunday's reading it is necessary to think of it as on the Sabbath, the day that 1,521 actions are forbidden. This number is arrived at by the 39 jobs that were necessary to build Jerusalem's temple, of which each one is divided into 39 activities, for the total of 1,521 actions. And amongst these it is forbidden to visit or to cure the sick.

Let's hear Mark. "*As soon as they left the synagogue,*" in the synagogue there was the incident, Jesus was contested by the people with the unclean spirit. "*...they went with James and John..*" who were with Jesus in the synagogue, "*..to the home of Simon and Andrew.*" Who it seems were not at worship in the synagogue.

So, we have two couples of brothers, one more observant, James and John, and the others it seems less observant. In fact they have Greek names, Simon and Andrew. "*Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever..*" She is a woman, and the women are considered a nullity, and even more she is ill, which is an impure condition.

A woman in such a condition should be avoided. But, in fact, “immediately”, as soon as they left the synagogue “..they immediately told Jesus about her”. It is the effect of Jesus’ good news that was proclaimed in the synagogue, a message that does not divide mankind between pure and impure, outcasts or not, but his love is communicated to all.

“...he went to her, took her hand and helped her up.” So Jesus tries to cure her. It is also forbidden to touch an impure person, because touching one means to become impure oneself. Well, Jesus ignores this rule of the Sabbath. Every time that Jesus finds Himself in conflict between observing God’s laws and the good of mankind, He does not hesitate, He always chooses the good of mankind.

Doing good for mankind one is certain to do good for God, often for doing good for God, for the honour of God, one hurts mankind. So, Jesus takes her hand, violating the law, “The fever left her and she began to wait on them.”

The original word used by the evangelist is the Greek word ‘*diakonia*’ from which comes the word “deacon”. Who is the deacon? It is he that freely serves for love. Well, this expression had been already used for the angels that, after the temptations, served Jesus in the desert, therefore Mark equalizes the role of the women to that of the angels, they are the people nearest to God. So, the woman, considered the farthest away for God, in reality according to the evangelist is the nearest to God.

In the home the necessity of a person has been more important than the Sabbath, in the city the Sabbath is more important than the people. In fact “*That evening...*”, an expression that in Mark’s Gospel is always negative, “...after sunset...”, so they waited for the end of the Sabbath on which it is forbidden to visit and cure the sick, “..the people brought to Jesus all the sick..” The evangelist uses the expression “the sick”, and it is an allusion to the Prophet Ezekiel, in chapter 34,4, where the Lord complains to the shepherds and says “...the sick you have not healed...”

So it’s not only the sick, but the people oppressed by their shepherds. “... *demon-possessed*”. They are the ones that are possessed by an impure spirit and is known for his habitual behavior. “*The whole town gathered at the door...*”. It is a moment of great success for Jesus.

“..Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..” We have already seen at other times how He freed and castaway the demons that mean to free one from the national religious ideology that is resistant and hostile to the announcement of Jesus’ good news. “... *but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.*”

This indicates Jesus as the Messiah expected by tradition, exactly like the person possessed by an impure spirit in the synagogue. Well then, Jesus in front of the whole town that is with Him and that is ready to follow him, refuses the temptation of power, of success. “*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed*”

It is the first of three times in which the evangelist presents Jesus praying. And all three times it is always in a dangerous or difficult situation for His own disciples. Here He prays because, as we see, the disciples are excited at Jesus’ success, then He prays after the dividing of the bread when there is the temptation

to see Jesus the leader that solves the problems of society; and finally He prays at Gethsemane before His capture. He prays for His disciples that are not able to confront this drama , this moment.

“Simon and his companions went to look for him,..” The evangelist uses the same expression that in the book of the Exodus we find to indicate the Pharaoh that goes on the trail of the Jewish people to prevent the exodus , the liberation.

“..when they found him, they exclaimed: « Everyone is looking for you! »” this verb ‘ looking for’ is always negative in Mark’s gospel. Well then, Jesus does not stay in Capernaum, but invites them to follow Him. There is no temptation of power. *“Jesus replied, «Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also»”*. Jesus begins to preach, no more to teach. He taught in the synagogue where to teach means to announce something leaning on the scripture texts, that of the Old Testament.

Jesus, after the disruption in the synagogue, does not teach, but preaches. To preach means to announce the novelty of the kingdom of God without leaning on the traditional past. *“«That is why I have come. »”* Here the translation ‘ have come ‘ is not exact; it seems the Jesus has come into the world for this. No, the verb used by the evangelist is “ come out of ”, that is ‘come out of Capernaum, because I was limited in Capernaum, I must go and announce to all humanity’.

“So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching ..” here Jesus does not teach anymore, but preaches *“.. in their synagogues and driving out demons.”* The evangelist seems to refer to the fact that the place where the demons are nested is in the actual synagogue, the place of worship. It was the religious institution that in presenting their image of God, which will be very different the God that Jesus will present, that confused the people.