

6. February 2020

**“To proclaim the gospel”**

*Mk 6, 7-13*

*At that time Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.*

Jesus has come to destroy the works of the Devil - so the Scripture tells us elsewhere (*cf. 1 Jn 3,8*). With the coming of Jesus, the final judgment on demons, on those fallen angels who want to draw people into their own revolt against God, already begins! They are therefore the mortal enemies of man. Jesus empowers His own, so that they can drive out these spirits in His authority. This continues to be an essential part of the Church's mission!

The demons, who try to destroy the works of God, if possible; exercise their power especially over those souls who live in sin! The word "sin" means separation from God. That is why the demons' intention is to seduce men to sin, because that is how they want to attain their goal, which consists in replacing God's authority with their own dominion: a dominion of oppression, of arbitrariness, of dictatorship; a dominion of darkness!

These intentions of the fallen angels can and must be consciously opposed in order to limit or break their influence! This does not happen only through exorcisms, which are reserved to certain priests by order of the bishop; but, day by day, in the proclamation of the Gospel and the call to conversion that accompanies it, the fight against the plans of darkness continues.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul, speaking of the spiritual battle, teaches us that we are to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (*cf. Eph 6,10-17*). With the proclamation of the gospel and the response of conversion on the part of people, souls are being torn out of the

kingdom of darkness and freed from the dominion of Satan. That is why evangelization also constitutes an indirect expulsion of Satan, to which the disciples were called at the time of Jesus and we are also called today.

Here again we find this very important hierarchical order, which shows how the ministry of the disciples should be: first there is the proclamation, which goes hand in hand with the expulsion of the Devil; then there is the healing of the sick, which implies first of all their spiritual health, and then their bodily health.

In today's Gospel, it is also important to take into account the attitude in which the disciples are to carry out their mission.

All the instructions given to them by the Lord point to the same aspect: The disciples are to carry out their service in great freedom, both interiorly and exteriorly. They are to rely completely on the providence of God, since it is God himself who has sent them.

Thus the Lord is giving a very important indication that embraces all ages, even our own; an indication that is part of the spiritual foundation of evangelization. The kingdom of God does not spread primarily through the multitude of financial means and possibilities; but through working with authority in the Lord's commission and in His Spirit.

In this context, the situation of the Catholic Church in Germany, which is so rich but at the same time so poor, comes to mind. Although it is one of the strongest economically, its spiritual fruits are - unfortunately - very small. The Catholic Church in Germany seems to be sinking more and more into the river of secularization and to be adapting herself to this world. One of the reasons why she is becoming so weak is certainly also that not enough inner distance to the world is being kept and therefore the salt, which the Gospel is supposed to be for the people of the world, is threatening to lose its saltiness! The same thing that we have said about the Church in Germany, certainly applies to other countries as well.

If the Church wants to renew herself and become salt of the earth and light of the world (*cf. Mt 5,13-14*), she must do so in the Spirit of the Lord! She must be guided by the Lord's precepts and not consider the realities of life of the people of this time as if they were a source of revelation! People, who often lead a sinful and misguided life, need a clear and unambiguous message for their orientation, even if it were rejected. A lukewarm proclamation will never awaken anyone from the sleep of sin, and certainly not cast out the Devil!

Let us keep the main points of today's reflection: to proclaim the Gospel, to expel the devils, to heal the sick; and all this in a great freedom, with complete trust in God and the necessary inner distance from the world!