

31. August 2020

“The Lord in Nazareth”

Lk 4, 16-30

He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself," and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country." 'And he went on, 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured - only Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.

The Lord's year of grace, which the Lord quotes from the prophet Isaiah, is still valid. Before the judgment comes, all mankind is offered reconciliation with God. The good news that God has had mercy on his people and in his Son has opened the way into the Father's heart for us is to be carried out to the ends of the earth. It is always the core of every true proclamation and opens the door of freedom to those who are still imprisoned in darkness and in the shadow of death (*cf. Lk 1,79*). They will be released from the bondage of sin. Their eyes are opened to see the glory of God reflected in the face of Jesus!

The words of the Lord, or the fulfilment of the words of the prophet Isaiah, may be understood on several levels - in their physical, spiritual and mental dimensions. The redemption of man is a comprehensive one and leaves no level out. Everything should be penetrated by the light of the Lord, so that man can stand up and fulfil his mission as a child of God in this world!

We hear that the audience in the synagogue of Nazareth received his gracious speech with applause, and yet this affirmative attitude turned even so much that Jesus finally passed through the crowd to prevent them from throwing him down the slope of a mountain!

What had happened?

This initial applause was mixed with the words: *“This is Joseph's son, surely?”* What was it: envy or jealousy? The non-recognition of the specificity of the person and mission of Jesus, was it because he had grown up in Nazareth and his family was known? Couldn't and didn't they want to realize that in their midst came someone who had received such wisdom from God?

The word of Jesus, that *“no prophet is ever accepted in his own country”*, points this out!

Jesus perceives this changing mood and holds up a mirror to their faces with the following words. Has it not often been the case that the prophets were not recognised and rejected in Israel? Could therefore only a few signs have happened?

Jesus criticises the lack of faith in which Israel so little understood the presence of God and his messengers! With this the Lord addresses the core of the problem! Despite all the signs and wonders, hearts often remain closed to the presence of God and therefore no consequences are drawn! We must not forget that the signs and wonders are also there to strengthen the faith, especially for those whose faith is still weak.

When Jesus then confronted them with their lack of faith, there was no wish to understand better and the desire to believe more, something like a reversal of the previous behaviour, but an evil anger came that does not even stop at killing! This makes it clear that there was an evil force connected with their unbelief, the very force that wants to prevent people from reaching the light!

This is important for us to know when we are at the service of evangelisation! The unbelief is not only limited to a human lack of openness towards God, but can also show a deep closeness through various circumstances, which requires our accompanying prayer!

In today's gospel text the Lord withdrew himself from the grasp of his fellow countrymen! We can also take this as a hint that sometimes it is not useful to continue a preaching or an evangelistic conversation when aggressions show up and the heart is simply not open! It is better to pray and wait for the moment when a new circumstance arises that allows us to continue what we have begun, or even to go further to reach those who are open to the message, without ceasing to pray for those who did not listen!