

25. April 2022

Feast of St. Mark the Evangelist  
“Proclaim the gospel to all creation”

Mk 16:15-20

*And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven; there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.*

In the Easter Season, we hear again and again the missionary mandate that the Lord gave to His disciples, as the Gospels tell us. So it is also today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Evangelist St. Mark, who, according to tradition, is said to have founded and led the church of Alexandria, where he finally gave his life in martyrdom.

In yesterday's meditation, I raised the question of whether the Church today is still proclaiming the Gospel with authority and without retrenchment, i.e. whether it is fulfilling the primary mission that the Lord has entrusted to her.

Let us take a concrete example: How is the question of the evangelisation of the Jews, God's "first love", being handled in the Church today? Indeed, Israel is the first addressee of the Gospel message. Not only because the Lord Himself was a Jew "so far as physical descent is concerned" (cf. Rom 9:5), but also because the Virgin Mary and all the apostles were Jews. St. Paul the Apostle was consumed with zeal to bring his brethren to Christ, so that they might be saved (Rom 9:1-3). Moreover, a promise of great dimensions awaits mankind when the people of Israel turn to their Messiah, as the Scriptures assure us:

*“If their fall has proved a great gain to the world, and their loss has proved a great gain to the gentiles - how much greater a gain will come when all is restored to them! Let me say then to you gentiles that, as far as I am an apostle to the gentiles, I take pride in this work of service; and I want it to be the means of rousing to envy the people who are my own blood-relations and so of saving some of them. Since their rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, do you know what their re-acceptance will mean? Nothing less than life from the dead!”* (Rom 11:12-15)

So, we can assume that the conversion of the people of Israel will come hand in hand with a special grace, which will be important for the Church and, consequently, for the whole world. We know that this great longing of St. Paul for the conversion of his brethren, who are his “own flesh and blood” (Rom 9:3), has not yet been fully realised; but there are testimonies of individual Jews who met Jesus and, in Him, finally found the Messiah who had been promised to them.

What then should be our reaction as we consider the promise concerning Israel's conversion and God's love for His "Firstborn"?

It should awaken in us a great zeal to announce the Good News to the Jews in an appropriate way, and to pray intensely for their enlightenment. We must insistently ask the Holy Spirit to open access to their hearts, for could there be anything more beautiful for them than to recognise the Messiah for whom they have long awaited?

But what is the hierarchy of the Church doing in relation to the evangelisation of the Jews, which is part of its primary mission?

On 4 April, Archbishop Bruno Forte, Archbishop of the Diocese of Chieti-Vasto in Italy, gave a lecture at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas ("Angelicum") in Rome on the Catholic Church's perspective on Judaism.

Among other things, Archbishop Forte suggested that in order to promote Jewish-Christian relations, purified of “every form of anti-Semitism”, Christians should stop affirming and preaching that faith in Christ is necessary for the salvation of Jews as well.

Archbishop Forte echoed a statement issued by Jews in 2016 ("Between Jerusalem and Rome"), quoting the following passage from that document: *“We call upon all Christian*

*denominations that have not yet done so to follow the example of the Catholic Church and excise anti-Semitism from their liturgy and doctrines, to end the active mission to the Jews, and to work toward a better world hand-in-hand with us, the Jewish people.”*

There is no doubt that anti-Semitism is an issue that must be overcome at all levels. However, it should be more precisely delineated where anti-Semitism is actually concerned, so that the term is not abused by applying it to all sorts of statements.

It has nothing to do with overcoming anti-Semitism to want to practically officially stop the mission to the Jews, nor to claim that faith in Jesus is not necessary for their salvation. Behind such statements is the conception that there would be two different ways of salvation for Jews and Christians: for the former, that of the Old Covenant with Moses; for the latter, that of the New Covenant with Jesus.

What a wrong thinking and what an adulteration of Holy Scripture!

The task given to the Church by the Son of God is different. She was sent to proclaim salvation in Christ, which is necessary for all men: *“Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.”* No one must be deprived of the grace of knowing the Redeemer, much less can the people of Israel, God's "first love", be excluded from it.

In order to show what it means for a Jew to meet Christ, I will pass on to you in the meditations of the coming days some testimonies of Jewish conversions. They speak for themselves and show how wrong it is to pretend that a Catholic no longer has the ardent desire that Jews and all people should know and follow Christ. To defend the position that faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation is to renounce the holy mission entrusted to us by the Lord.

Let us conclude this meditation with a quotation from the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand, taken from his book "The Devastated Vineyard":

*“The love of God impels the Church, but also every true Christian, to bring each man into the full light of truth, which is the teaching of the holy Church. Every Christian must long for all men to become acquainted with the Revelation of Christ and to respond to it with faith, for every knee to bend to Jesus Christ. And similarly true love of neighbour requires this. How can I love somebody and not ardently desire that he become acquainted with Jesus*

*Christ, the begotten Son and Epiphany of God, that he be drawn into His light, believe in Him and love Him, and know that he is loved by Him? How can I love him without desiring for him even on earth the blissful encounter with Jesus Christ, which is the greatest source of happiness?”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich von Hildebrand, „The Devastated Vineyard“, Chapter 11: “Ecumenitis”