

6. September 2023

Signs of the Kingdom of God

Lk 4: 38-44

At that time, Jesus left the synagogue, and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they besought him for her. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her; and immediately she rose and served them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

How healing is the presence of the Lord for all people! Whether it was Peter's mother-in-law or so many sick people brought before the Lord, all were healed. It was palpable to the people that the kingdom of God was among them. They must have experienced something like a notion of paradise, where sickness and death did not yet exist. Now another kingdom was appearing before them, one that would not be subject to decay or the dominion of death.

In Jesus the kingdom of God had indeed come to humanity, but it had not yet reached its consummation. The Lord still had to travel the road that would lead to Calvary and to His glorious Resurrection; and the pilgrim Church still had before it its mission to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The hour of judgement had come for the demons. Those who had been cast out of heaven and hurled down to earth (Rev 12:7-9); those who wanted to continue their rebellion against God here on earth (Rev 12:17), knew that their final end was at hand (Rev 20:7-10).

"Have you come to destroy us?" the demons cry out to Jesus in another biblical passage (Mark 1:24). In today's Gospel, on the other hand, they confess with a loud cry: *"You are the Son of God"*, but Jesus does not allow them to speak. He does not want His identity to be revealed by the demons who hate and fear Him.

It is the Holy Spirit and the disciples who are to bear witness to Jesus in love and truth. It is to them that people must listen in order to be convinced by the message of the Gospel. What demons say is always of a different character, even when they are forced to speak the truth. They cannot give a loving testimony of God; they give a false image of Him.

I therefore give you a piece of advice: let us not dwell on the devil more than necessary, and let us not be impressed by the negative fascination he exerts. This fascination can even be hidden under religious pretexts. We may believe, for example, that it is necessary to know more about the devil's plans in order to be able to fight him better. Nor should we be interested in the messages that might be given out during an exorcism. We must never forget that a demon, even if he is forced to speak the truth, will not speak it as a beloved child of God, but as a demon.

In today's Gospel we hear that the people who had received so much help and healing from the Lord wanted to prevent Him from leaving, and understandably they wanted Him to stay with them! But Jesus wants to fulfil His Father's mission: the Gospel of the Kingdom of God must be proclaimed!

Jesus cannot be held back because, as Saint Paul would later express and as all missionaries would experience, a "duty of love" weighs on him (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). They cannot stop and rest in this life until the Gospel has reached the ends of the earth. They are obedient to the One who sent them, the heavenly Father.

There is always a certain urgency to the proclamation of the Gospel, which is not to be confused with haste or a kind of stress to convert everyone, nor with a false sense of obligation. Rather, it is an urgency born of the gift of piety, which seeks to please the heavenly Father and hastens to fulfil His mission. On the other hand, this urgency is also awakened by the sight of so many people who have yet to be touched by the Good News, so that they may be redeemed and thus live a life in communion with God and not trapped in darkness.

This urgency existed in the time of Jesus, it has continued through the centuries and it is still relevant today as we draw ever closer to the Second Coming of the Lord at the end of time.