

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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## **Jesus, a man of His time and space, shows us our true and full humanity**

### **Lectio n° 2 Indignation, a shock conducive to growth**

Once again Jesus is compelled to warn his own disciples against their mentality, that distorts their relationship with Him and with others.

In the text we are dealing with in this Lectio, taken from the Gospel of St Mark, Jesus is indignant, and He intervenes against their picking and choosing those whom He should (or should not) meet. “Do not disturb Him... especially if you are unclean and poor.” Of course, precedence should be given to the wise or the elders of the people who are waiting to meet Him, not certainly to children, who were not counted even when Jesus gave the loaves to the four thousand men, “to say nothing of women and children” (Mt 15:38).

Here the disciples have already been corrected about their dreams of grandeur (Mk 9:35-37) but they are unable to change their mentality, according to which only wealth and power are equal to God’s blessing. In fact, Jesus will bless the children, who count as nothing, before their very eyes!

#### **Let us invoke the Holy Spirit**

*Holy Spirit of God, please give me a heart docile to listening.*

*May I experiment in my life*

*the loving presence of my God*

*“whose hands designed me” (Is 48:16).*

*May I welcome and not object to the Word*

*coming out of God’s mouth.*

*May the Word that goes from His mouth*

*not return to Him unfulfilled*

*and having achieved what it was sent to do (Is 55:11)*

*in me.*

*(C. M. Martini)*

# 1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

## Mark 10:13-16

*13 People were bringing little children to Him, for Him to touch them. The disciples scolded them, 14 but when Jesus saw this He was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15 In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' 16 Then He embraced them, laid His hands on them and gave them His blessing.*

Let us approach the text...

This is the second part of the Gospel of St Mark: its main features are the 'journey' and the 'three prophecies of the Passion'.

Chapter 10 specifies that Jesus is going southward even though, if we compare this to St Luke's parallel passages, here the journey is described more briefly, given that the focus is all on Jesus' identity, revealed by what He tells His disciples about Himself.

The passage we are dealing with is placed in between the second (9:31) and the third prophecies of the Passion (10:33-34).

The outline is fixed: 1) prophecy; 2) the disciples' reaction; 3) reply or instruction on Jesus' part.

Our passage is the second of Jesus' replies / instructions, enhanced by the new understanding of Jesus' second prophecy that the community gathered after Easter and the Resurrection.

Jesus' reply / instruction is made up of norms ('halakot') and stories ('aggadot'). In Mk 9:35-37 Jesus had already taken children as an example of how one should welcome Him as well as the Father, in opposition to each disciple's desire of being "the greatest". Now, in Mk 10:13-16, children are once again the protagonists and Jesus is outraged by those who would like to keep them away from Him.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

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| a) 10:13 | The children approach Jesus and are turned away |
| b) 10:14 | Jesus' indignant reaction                       |
| c) 10:15 | Amen: a 'loghia'                                |
| d) 10:16 | Embrace   |

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|----------|---|
| a) 10:13 | The children approach Jesus and are turned away |
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"People were bringing little children to Him, for Him to touch them." Let us examine the term 'children', rendered in Greek with 'paidion', a word which denoted children up to 7 years of age. Another word that could have been used is 'teknon', that is, a child as the fruit of generation, as a gift coming from Above that cannot be refused to God (cf Gn 22:12). Here, instead, the evangelist

highlights the children's lack of authority, skills and credibility, given that they are waiting for a relationship that can legitimize them. They are dependent until they establish a relationship with someone leading them to freedom.

This occurred to the people of Israel, as related in Dt 1:31; 8:12-16. Here, to touch is the basic form of relationship. How many times, in St Mark's Gospel, Jesus touches someone deliberately (Mk 1:41; 5:41; 7:33) or less deliberately (Mk 3:10; 5:31) in order to heal them, to raise them, to free them.

Please note also that here the action of bringing children to Jesus is rendered with the Greek term 'proseferon', which is the same verb used for the presentation of the Temple offerings which, to the Jewish mind, were destined to come into communion with God. Therefore, here St Mark is saying that the children are the symbol and paradigm of all those who would like to be in communion with Jesus, as opposed to the disciples turning them away. That action is rendered with 'epitimon', used also by St Mark when dealing with Jesus rebuking the evil spirit in 1:25.

These two groups show two different approaches to frailty: to the former, it is an opportunity to welcome the relationship that frees them from dependency and leads them to freedom, providing them meaning and legitimization; to the latter, it means remaining in the precarious condition, given that they are unable to establish the relationship with Jesus.

#### b) 10:14                      Jesus' indignant reaction

"When Jesus saw this He was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.'"

Jesus saw and, according to St Mark, He was indignant. The term used here is 'aganakteo', which is made up of two words: 'agan', 'a lot', and 'achtos', 'sorrow'. We can conclude then that Jesus' indignation is the human expression of His sorrow in seeing – similarly to what happened at the beginning of Chapter 10 regarding the relation between man and woman – that hard-heartedness (cf 10:5) prevents them from becoming aware of the beauty of God's plan for His creatures, a plan which is fulfilled only thanks to man's relationship with Him and of which marriage is an image.

Jesus is indignant because He sees that the path of growth from child to grown up is distorted, while as a grown up he should be able to establish a relationship leading him to freedom and, consequently, to responsibility. To become a man or a woman means to enter a relationship.

In Jewish society the 'paidion' was a child between the age of three (when he was weaned) and seven, entrusted to his mother. They could be regarded as unclean, because they lived with women (unclean because of menstrual discharge).

Perhaps the disciples prevented people from bringing little children to Jesus in order for Him not to become unclean.

At the end of the day, however, the issue had indirectly to do with the dynamic of the Incarnation, with God the Father's plan, with the possibility for the Son to come into contact with the frail creatures and to legitimize them, to give them that credibility which does not derive from power (as Jesus Himself explained to them in Mk 9:36) but rather from a relationship of trust.

The weaned child (cf Ps 131) does not relate to his mother because of his physiological needs but rather because his identity is growing in all serenity and tranquillity within the love relationship of trust with her.

Jesus' indignation comes as a shock to the disciples' way of relating to Him. We should not forget that these lines come after the second prophecy of the passion, within His reply / instruction. He is indignant at seeing the distorted disciples' view about Him. His teaching for them is: Jesus' humanity, His human weakness that comes to the fore through His prophecies of the Passion, must be welcomed by them, not be rejected.

Their view was distorted also when, at Mk 9:34, "they had been arguing which of them was the greatest", even though they could not be great without Him.

Here the scene suggests that the right attitude is to let ourselves be touched by Jesus, that is, to establish a relationship with Him, a relationship that will make us grow in the same way as children grow, from being dependent to the freedom, maturity and responsibility of being grown-up men and women. They are a symbol of tranquillity and trust, of the openness one should have... The disciples' transformation, continual growth and maturity make up their similarity with Jesus, who is fully Himself through His relationship with the Father.

If we go back to the beginning of the Gospel of St Mark, where Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom has been fulfilled, we will understand His present indignation / sorrow with relation to the people's rejection of the kingdom. He proclaimed that the Kingdom had been fulfilled, but everybody should become part of it. How?

By establishing a relation with Jesus, instead of objecting to it.

Grammatically speaking, "It has been fulfilled" is a perfect tense, denoting a past action which still has an effect on the present: Jesus was there, the time of God's salvific intervention had come. God had taken that permanent step, and the kingdom would grow while man slept and while man was awake (cf Mk 4:27).

We do not have many things to do. But we have to welcome Jesus and establish a relationship with Him, so that our point of view may be changed too.

c) 10:15                      Amen: a 'loghia'

"In truth I tell you, anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

'Amen' ('In truth') always precedes an important statement on Jesus' part, important as a rock on which we can found ourselves. Therefore, we must always ponder on what comes next: "anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it".

The Italian text differs twice from the Greek text: "...will never *ever* enter *towards* it". "Never ever" makes the Greek statement more definitive; "towards"

expresses a dynamism. There is no alternative to welcoming... "...like" clarifies that the way we can enter is pre-determined, fixed. Conversely, not being able to enter would not be a punishment for being evil, but the consequence of a substantial lack on our part, that is, of not being able to welcome the kingdom of God like a child.

To welcome and to enter may seem two different movements, one opposed to the other, but in fact they are complementary: if we welcome we can enter and establish a relationship with Jesus who is the Kingdom, God's Presence, the One we must tend to in order to grow and to become like Him.

d) 10:16 Embrace

"Then He embraced them, laid His hands on them and gave them His blessing." Jesus' gestures towards the children help us better understand the two movements of welcoming and entering the Kingdom.

To embrace: this helps us see how the child in Jesus' arms is also within the Kingdom, after welcoming His presence in all trust and enthusiasm, abandoning himself in His arms, letting himself be embraced. We too have to let ourselves be embraced.

Jesus "laid His hands on them and gave them His blessing". Jesus speaks of them in good terms, He praises their way of being, mirrors Himself in their trust which is an image of His own trust in the Father as well as of man's powerlessness.

Already in Mk 9:37 Jesus had embraced a child and likened him to Himself and to His own welcoming the Father.

There is a similarity, a correspondence, between the child and Jesus... That is why He praises them. And lays His hands on them: in the Bible, this gesture intends to pass on the Spirit of God (as it happened to the prophets), to confirm, but also to transmit something of oneself. To embrace, to lay one's hands, to bless, may then be understood as if Jesus were recognizing Himself in children, symbolically identifying with them and with their way of being.

## **2. Meditatio**

**(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)**

- When will we be able to be aware of and to reject our identification with the institutions of power (disclosed or hidden), leading us to reject the poor and needy?
- Each of the poor and needy is waiting to be taken into consideration. Otherwise, he will become a sad and disillusioned man or woman... Nowadays the poor and needy are no longer the evangelical children, but being kept at the margins of society has made them 'wounded' people, their growth has been stopped, and they are unable to trust anybody, they are wretched men... And we become scandalized when one of them is not meek, grateful, complying to our wishes!
- Should we be insensitive, down-to-earth women? No, we shouldn't. On the contrary, Jesus' attitude should question our own attitude even more, given that more often than not we are insensitive to recognizing the child

hidden within ourselves, and we do not take the responsibility of making it grow through a 'good' encounter. Our own humanity is asleep, maybe. Are we really longing to become similar to the indignant / sorrowful Jesus? Where is the shock, helpful to make us grow and start the process of liberation by establishing a genuine love relationship? We must be aware that we are responsible for the growth (or conversely held accountable for the non-growth) of the child in us.

- We too can count ourselves among the poor and needy, either as true children or as those who oppose growth, either as weaned children or as people who do not put their trust in anybody, not even in God ("What on earth may He give us in order to make us grow?"). We should assess how much we are children, taking into consideration our genuineness, the number of our 'wounds', our readiness to welcome the future, our readiness to believe that we CAN be loved, our ability to rush to Jesus, as well as the ability to understand Jesus' mind.
- Once we are able to become indignant with the same sorrow of Jesus, are we also able to bless 'weakness', all that is not powerful and glittering, and to shamelessly embrace what is worthless, not important, disparaged... both in ourselves and around us? Perhaps we should also welcome the child in ourselves, the one Jesus identifies with, the tentative sketch of the face of Jesus in us, that peculiar and unique feature entrusted to each of us, which must grow and is waiting to come to full maturity and to manifest itself openly, exactly as the kingdom.

Please re-read n° 39 of our Rule of Life under this light, as if you had been elected to an office yourself. Each of us bears an individual responsibility / indignation for making the other Sisters and other people in general grow through "a spirit of love, of attentive listening to and of assistance to others".

I quote a passage from the 'Letter from Naples to the people in power' by Monsignor Mimmo Battaglia, Archbishop of Naples, who is a humble man, indignant and sorrowful for his people...

*"If we want to start considering the poor and needy first, they should be the focus of a 'process' of liberation aimed at giving them back their full dignity. Let us consider for instance the policies of the city council, the services provided to the weaker and more frail citizens... And let us assess them according to Justice... How can we still be happy with mere assistance, with social rights that look like concessions, or like a luxury that we cannot always sustain. If they really want to re-write, change the history of this area by taking care above all of its most frail 'children', politicians will have to re-kindle the flame of Hope and to re-weave the thread of Trust. These two elements – Hope and Trust – are at present really lacking from our community.*

*"We should re-start re-building the relations between people, and solidarity between citizens... But in order to do that, we should re-think our model of development: it should be integrally sustainable, and start from the awareness that everything is interconnected, and recognize the*

*deep relations between the social, spiritual, economical and environmental levels, as well as those between the local and global dimensions...”*  
(taken from ‘Avvenire’ newspaper, July 21, 2021)

### **3. Oratio** (to pray the Word / to repeat it)

*Merciful Lord,  
since You gave me the courage to feel that You need me,  
give me also the strength to love the outcast  
as much as You love and need me.  
Lord,  
You know that being an outcast means  
to be the poorest of the poor.  
A rich man or a wealthy woman  
can be outcast in the same way as the poor are,  
on this little earth that You gave us.  
May they all be rich  
in Your Kingdom on earth,  
being aware that You need us  
and that we need one another.  
Your love, Your mercy,  
and Your presence  
are the greatest treasures of my life.  
Amen.  
(Mother Theresa)*

### **4. Contemplatio** (to contemplate the Word / silence)

May the Holy Spirit be poured unto us. Let us taste the liberty of overcoming our petty schemes, of guessing the depth of Jesus’ love and of each and every of His gestures, and the wish of re-experiencing them.

### **5. Collatio** (to share the Word)

Let us share in order to grow. What am I ‘embracing’ or what I would like to embrace?  
What would I like to be able to ‘bless’?