

## The Voice of the Fathers of the Church

The celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God this year gives voice to St. Jerome, Father and Doctor of the Church. The 16th centenary of his death was commemorated by Pope Francis with the Apostolic Letter *Scripturae Sacrae affectus*, promulgated on September 30, 2020.

### EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON MK 1:14-20

In commenting on this Sunday's Gospel, St. Jerome focuses on two aspects: after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus, instead of going to Jerusalem, the center of political and religious power, goes to the region of Galilee, a periphery, and from there he announces the good news of God's Kingdom.

**“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee” (Mk 1:14).**

The story is well known, and it appears clear to the listeners, even without our explanation. But let us pray to him who has the key of David, he who opens and no one closes, who closes and no one opens (Rev 3: 7), so that the hidden way of the Gospel may open to us, and we too can say together with David: “Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things of your law” (Ps 119: 18). To the crowds the Lord spoke in parables and spoke outwardly. He did not speak within, that is, in the spirit; he spoke with the external language, according to the letter. Let us pray to the Lord that he may introduce us into his mysteries, let us enter his secret chamber, and we too can say, together with the bride of the Song of Songs: “The king has brought me into his chambers” (Ct 1: 3). The apostle says that a veil was placed over the eyes of Moses (2 Cor 3: 13). I say that not only in the law, but also in the Gospel there is a veil over the eyes of those who do not know. The Jew listened to him but did not understand him: for him there was a veil over the Gospel. The Gentiles listen, the heretics listen, but for them, too, there is the veil. Let us abandon the letter together with the Jews and follow the spirit with Jesus: and not because we must condemn the letter of the Gospel (everything that was written has come true), but to be able to gradually ascend to higher things. “After John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee.” Last Sunday we said that John is the law, while Jesus is the Gospel. In fact, John says: “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals” (Mk 1:7). And elsewhere: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3: 30). The comparison between John and Jesus is the comparison between the law and the Gospel. John says again: “I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8): this is the gospel. So Jesus comes back because John was locked up in prison. The law is locked up, it no longer has the former freedom: but from the law we pass to the Gospel. Pay attention to what Mark says: “Now after John

was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee". He did not go to Judea or Jerusalem, but to Galilee of the Gentiles. In short, Jesus returns to Galilee: Galilee in our language translates the Greek *Kataklyiste*. Because before the coming of the Savior there was nothing lofty in that region, but rather, everything was degraded: lust, abjection, shamelessness were rampant and men were prey to vices and bestial pleasures.

### **“Proclaiming the good news of God” (Mk 1:14)**

As far as I remember, I have never heard of the kingdom of heaven talked about in the law, in the prophets or in the psalms, but only in the Gospel. In fact, it is only after the advent of the one who said: “For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you” (Lk 17:21), that the kingdom of God is open to us. So Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force (Mt 11:12): before the advent of the Savior and before the light of the Gospel, before Christ opened the door of CHURCH AND THE WORD OF GOD 35 heaven to the thief, all the souls of the saints were taken to hell. Jacob says: “No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.” (Gen 37: 35). Who does not go to hell if Abraham is in hell? (Lk 16:22). In the law, Abraham is taken to hell: in the Gospel, the thief goes to heaven. We do not look down on Abraham, in whose bosom we would all want to rest: but we prefer Christ to Abraham, we prefer the Gospel to the law. We read that, after the resurrection of Christ, many saints appeared in the holy city. Our Lord and Savior preached on earth and preached in hell: and when he died, he descended into hell to free the souls who were imprisoned there. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:14-15). He did not say: the kingdom of God has already come; but he said the kingdom has come near. And that is, before I suffer the passion, before I shed my blood, the kingdom of God will not open; for that, it is now approaching, but it is not here because I have not yet suffered the passion. “Repent and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15): no longer believe in the law, but in the Gospel, or, better, believe in the Gospel by means of the law, as it is written: “through faith to faith” (Rom 1:17). Faith in the law strengthens faith in the gospel.

*(Jerome, Comment in Mark, 1-2)*