

A Community of Unbelievers

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"They did not believe." Mark 16:11

Even the Gospel of Mark, as we have seen, has its last page in order to narrate the time between Easter and the Ascension. It is perhaps an attempt to give a conclusion to the Gospel itself. This is a summary of other Gospel texts. The church at the beginning of the second century felt the opportunity to "summarize": for the catechists? as a "pro_memoria"? It is difficult to say. In any case she did not feel it to be improper for faith to facilitate memory with summaries, with short cuts. This point is important; to summarize for the sake of summary; to condense in order to engage in a renewed way.

The church engages with renewed interest the memory of the resurrected Christ, but also of the attitude of the disciples. "They did not believe." Is this an apologetic motive for the outside? As if to say, "We did not make a blunder; we did not believe at first; only in the face of overwhelming trials we had to, in the end, convince ourselves that the Messiah was really resurrected." Perhaps this inspiration is not totally absent and is important even for us. But the insistence on the unbelief of the disciples in this final passage of Mark is truly ruthless: "they did not believe" (v.11). And "they did not believe them either" (v.13); "He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe" (v.14). Therefore Jesus says, "Go into all the world, preach the Gospel to every creature" (v.15). The choice of the evangelists could not have been worse. Jesus takes this group of unbelievers to go and announce the Gospel. It could be said

that the church is the community not of believers, but of unbelievers that are announcing the resurrection of Jesus. This is the wretchedness and the greatness of the church: it is composed of unbelievers, but it cannot conceal the truth. Even if you do not believe, you can be quiet or speak a lie, which you believe rather than the truth. You can believe what is false, but you have to speak the truth.

Perhaps this last page causes us to think also toward a self-criticism of the church-about herself and for herself. The past needn't be idealized. The mission of evangelism has been entrusted to an unbelieving group. Rather than to believe, the disciples prefer to continue to cry, a situation that has often been repeated in the history of the church. Crying is considered by some the greatest virtue- "the more crying the better". Roman Catholics even make the statue of the Virgin Mary to cry. Taking into account who we were, and also who we are, we cannot do otherwise than to throw our hands into the air_(and to consider that even the Lord did it). Nevertheless the Gospel is preached and believed; it produces gifts, miracles, and signs. Truly it is not because of the church that this happened; it is only a gift of God.

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