

# Chiavi di lettura di *Mc* 1,14-20

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## Some reading keys for *Mk* 1:14-20

### Introduction

The text that we have before gives the first words and actions that, in Mark's gospel, have Jesus as protagonist. These words and actions (*verba gestaque*) come after that the most scholars believe to be the prologue to the whole of the so-called second gospel. In this prologue there is first of all the scriptural (or better, prophetic) foundation (*archè*), therefore belonging to God's saving plan of the gospel of Jesus, the Son of God, the role that John the Baptizer plays in it, the baptism received by Jesus from the one who, as it is written, had to prepare the way for Jesus and the paradisiacal and neo-exodic experience of Jesus in the desert, where Jesus overcomes the temptation of the Devil, thus confirming his filiation.

Having said this, the author closes the story of John the Baptizer with the expression "after John was delivered" (where the verb *paradidomi* = to deliver already alludes to the delivery to death of Jesus himself in the final part of the text of St. Mark), only now does he let Jesus enter (elthen = came) on the scene. And he does so by means of two words and two actions that almost all exegetes consider paradigmatic and summarising the whole story that follows.

To understand what we have just prologically stated, it is useful to see how the text is presented from the point of view of its literary construction and content in order to grasp the message. Keeping in mind the background of what we have said, which is the prologue, vv. 14-20 that we analyse can be divided as follows:

- vv. 14-15: paradigmatic announcement or theme of the gospel
- vv. 16-20: paradigmatic call of the first four disciples

This subdivision is quite easy to observe, since in the first part one can easily notice the tone of the summary (often found in Mark: cf. vv. 28; 39; 45 only in *Mk* 1) with the first very brief words of Jesus and in the second part, the first actions of the same protagonist. In spite of some authors (Légasse; but also the Greek text of Nestlè-Alland with the punctuation suggests it) who consider vv. 14-15 rather as part of the prologue, the vast majority consider these two verses as belonging to the first section of the second gospel (1,14 - 3,6) for good reasons: compared to the prologue, the place of action is changed (now we are in Galilee), the main character is changed (it is Jesus now) as well as the narrator's point of view. As for the latter, there is no disagreement regarding its literary position and content. Now, it may be fruitful to spend some words of exegetical analysis for both parts of our text.

### vv. 14-15

We have already mentioned the literary and theological meaning of the verb *paradothenai*. The narrator then is almost in a hurry to specify that Jesus comes to Galilee. He will also mention this place in v. 16. The reader will realise that in Mark, the evangelising (proclamation and healing) activity of Jesus takes place mainly in this area, Jerusalem remaining the hostile city where Jesus will be put to death. Galilee itself and the native area of the majority of the disciples: from here they will be called to be "behind Him" and here they will be sent back after the resurrection. Therefore, it is here that Jesus cries out (*kerysso*) his first words that we know from the Gospel of Mark. Now, these first words are built on a declaration and an admonition. The declaration - with two components - refers to the fulfilment (*pleroo*) of the favourable time (*kairos*) and the approach (*enghizo*) of the kingdom of God. The first component suggests the fulfilment of all God's

preparations (found in Scripture and in the history of the chosen people), which in fact produces, concretises the nearness of God's presence (of his kingdom).

Now, this very fulfilment of God's presence in Jesus constitutes the *kairos*. And if it is a propitious time, one understands the urgency of doing what the warning of the second component invites. The two verbs - *metanoeo* and *pisteuo* - if they are implemented, make the awareness of the experience of the encounter with God concrete. Changing one's mindset leads to believing; but the reverse is also true: believing involves changing one's mindset. Both verbs must be dealt with and experienced deeply and truly if one wants to experience God's closeness. Otherwise, you are on the side of the neutral (and easily manipulated) crowd, or even on the side of those who are hostile to the gospel and put Jesus to death.

#### **vv. 16-20**

The author of the Gospel, while having in mind the possibility (which in fact will be a reality) of refusal to change one's mentality of life and, therefore, refusal to really believe, is anxious to give examples of the acceptance of the announcement of Jesus to change one's mentality/life and to believe in/through Jesus. And he does so by recounting the call of the first four disciples, an account done in two stages, but basically with the same literary scheme built on verbs: see and speak/call. Some details are very surprising:

a) Jesus addresses the call to the fishermen in the very place of their work, of their ordinary life; not in the temple, but in a profane place.

b) The four respond immediately to a stranger who invites them to leave everything and walk behind him (to be disciples), a master-disciple relationship unusual in the world of the first century: it is Jesus who takes the initiative by seeing and calling them to follow him.

c) They are called to "become fishers of men": their trade does not fundamentally change; only the object of the catch changes. The author most probably formulates a play on words using the profession of those called to suggest their new life (in the same way as the call of Moses or David, to give just two biblical examples).

d) All four of them abandon their normal way of living their lives and follow Jesus: here is the example - a fourfold one - that it is possible to change one's mindset and start on the path of believing.

#### **Global lines**

At this point we can try to grasp the overall message of the passage. Let us remember that we are at the beginning of the Marcan story. The author is anxious to summarise the theme of all that follows. So, we are faced with the adventure of proclaiming the Gospel. It is an announcement that invites a reset of life. This reset comes as a result of the awareness of the approaching presence of God, which entails a change of perspective in life and, therefore, to faith, albeit in an incipient form and in need of being brought to maturity. Now this maturity of faith can only be achieved if one stands behind Jesus, only if one walks with him on the winding paths of life, where faith will be tested by temptation. The initiative always belongs to God, therefore to Jesus: it is he who "sees" and "calls". Being behind Jesus, allowing oneself to be looked at by him, listening to his word, becomes a concrete proof of being a disciple, therefore a concrete proof of a vision that seeks to become mature: a filial faith lived in the ordinariness of life, which in this way becomes extraordinarily compelling. The experience of the first four disciples, even with all their hesitations and even their falls, will demonstrate this in the rest of the story... and, no less, in their lives.

#### **Synthesis**

The passage - in double time - of Mk 1:14-20 proleptically summarises the entire content of the second Gospel. The first words of Jesus condense his proclamation that invites us to change our mentality and to believe. The possibility of rejection of this announcement (suggested by the verb "to deliver") is immediately counterbalanced by the immediate response of the first four disciples. With them begins the adventure of a community that, in spite of misunderstandings, mistakes and

even betrayals, will follow Jesus, staking its whole life on him, transforming it into an adventure of faith that will orientate its whole life, leading it to an encounter with God.