

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO – HIS OWN CITY

Up to this time our Lord's disciples have not been always with Him. Now they are to be called by Him in a solemn manner to be His constant companions.

On leaving Nazareth, He went to Capharnaum, which you will remember was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Walking one day along the beach, He saw Peter and Andrew casting a net into the sea. And He said to them: "Come after Me and I will make you to be fishers of men." And immediately leaving their nets they followed Him. And going a little farther He saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father mending their nets, and He called them. And they immediately, leaving their nets and their father, followed Him. All they had—father, mother, the fishing by which they earned their living, all their little possessions—they left for His sake, not willingly only but joyfully. They did not care where He took them, or what He did with them, or how much they might suffer in His company. To be with Him, to belong to Him, this was enough.

You notice that we have now a sixth disciple, James, the brother of John, and like him a fisherman. Most of those who were to be after our Lord the founders of the Church were fishermen, about the last class of men we should have thought suitable for such a work. Go down to any seaside place and watch the fishermen putting out to sea or tugging in their nets. Do they look fit to be the teachers of the world? They know the ways of fish, and something about the weather, and how to manage their craft—and that is about all. The fishermen of Galilee were much the same as those you have seen, rough, simple, ignorant. And out of them our Lord made the Princes of His Church. He would not have it said that the world was converted by the learning of the teachers He sent to preach the Gospel, but He would force men to own that if such preachers could convince the wise and the great of the truth of the religion which they taught, it must be because God was with them, and therefore this religion must be divine.

Our Lord was so much at Capharnaum and so many of His miracles were worked there, that it came to be called "His own city." It was a busy place. Roman soldiers with their centurion passed to and fro, for it was a garrison town. Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, courtiers of Herod, custom-house officers, fishermen, thronged its streets; and in its market place and bazaars the traders of many nations were found.

Let us follow our Blessed Lord through one of His days in Capharnaum, a Sabbath day, of which three out of the four Evangelists have left us an account. At the hour of prayer He was in the synagogue, a handsome structure built for the Jews by the Roman centurion of the place, who, though a Gentile, was kind to the conquered people, and revered their God. Our Lord, according to His custom, was speaking to the congregation, when, suddenly, a shriek was heard, so piercing, so unearthly, that it was hard to believe it was the cry of a human being— Yet this it was, though not of a human being only. Before the coming of Jesus Christ, evil spirits had much more power than they have had since. They used this power to torment cruelly those who were "possessed" by them, throwing them into the fire and into the water, and making them say and do things which of themselves they would never have done. One of these poor creatures had got into the synagogue, and in the

midst of our Lord's discourse cried out saying: "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus of Nazareth! Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God." Dismal and fearful cry ! The evil spirits knew that Jesus had not come for them. They had nothing to do with Him. They hated Him and all that were His. How glad and grateful we must be that He has come for us, that we have everything to do with Him, that we belong to Him and He to us, that He has saved us from sin and hell. Jesus rebuked the Evil One saying: " Hold thy peace and go out of him." And the devil, when he had thrown him in the midst, tearing him and crying out with a loud voice, went out of him.

What a fearful scene! At the cry of the possessed man the people had sprung to their feet in terror. Then, curiosity overcoming fear, they came and stood round him as he lay on the ground, freed at last from his enemy, and looking up with tears of gratitude into the face of his Deliverer. But when he rose and went quietly away admiration broke forth in words of wonder and praise

"Who is this that with power commands even the wicked spirits and they obey Him ?"

Soon all Capharnaum knew what had happened in the synagogue, and on and on from town to town the news new till all Judea had heard. Encouraged, no doubt, by what they had seen, the disciples tell the Master that Simon's wife's mother is lying sick of a great fever, and they ask Him to go to her. He goes at once with James and John, making His way with difficulty through the crowds who are discussing the event of the morning. Standing over the sick woman, He commands the fever and it leaves her. And He lifts her up, taking her by the hand. The Evangelists notice that when our Lord and His disciples sat down afterwards to their humble meal, it was the invalid of an hour ago that served them. St. Luke, who was a doctor, notes particularly that it was "a great fever," and that "immediately rising she ministered to them." Our Lord's cures left no weakness after them.

The tidings of the cure at Simon's house soon spread and increased the enthusiasm caused by the event in the synagogue. If Jesus of Nazareth could cure the possessed and the fever-stricken, why should not all the sick in Capharnaum be healed? The excitement was intense. The diseased and afflicted of every kind, even those blind, deaf or dumb from birth, must all be brought to Him; there was hope for all. As soon as the sun was down and the Sabbath over, a sad procession was on its way to Peter's house. But was it sad ? Oh, no: the lame were hastening along on their crutches, the quiet faces of the blind beamed with hope, even the deaf and dumb had somehow come to understand what was in store for them. Of course there was trouble in getting the possessed to go forward, and there was risk in bringing out the dying. But what were risk and trouble provided every one of them could get to Him in the end! "And all the city was gathered together at the door," says St. Mark; the sick in their beds filling the street, the other afflicted ones massed together, pressing against the door; whilst choking up all the narrow thoroughfares an immense throng moved slowly forward, "all the city " coming to see what would happen. Could those who saw that sight ever forget it, ever forget the faces of that multitude when the door opened and Jesus of Nazareth stood on the threshold? He came out, and, going up and down among the rows of sick and dying, laid His hands tenderly on all and healed them by

that touch. We are expressly told that not one was sent away disappointed." He, laying His hands on every one of them, healed them. And devils went out of many crying and saying: Thou art the Son of God."

Think of the streets of Capharnaum that evening: the cured being surrounded, questioned, congratulated on all sides; the wonder, the thanksgiving, the delirium of joy everywhere. Was there any going to bed that night? And where was He who had made them all so happy? Tired in body and sad at heart, He lay down for a little rest when at last all had gone home satisfied. But, rising very early in the morning, He went out into a desert place and there He prayed. The crowds, however, came in search of Him. And Simon followed after Him and said to Him: "All men seek for Thee." And He said: "Let us go into the neighboring towns and cities that I may preach there also, for therefore am I sent." Well might He be tired in body after such a day, but why was He sad at heart? Because He was God as well as man, and therefore suffered as no mere man could do. He saw into every heart, He knew what was to come. He knew that His own city after all these miracles would refuse to believe in Him and would have to be punished. One day, when His time of preaching was drawing to a close, He began to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance:

"Woe to thee, Corozain! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! And thou, Capharnaum, thou shalt go down even unto hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in thee, perhaps it had remained unto this day. But I say unto thee that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for thee."