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### **Meditation on Mark 16:15-20**

People who have suffered abuse within the Church's sphere of responsibility are increasingly uniting. They are showing solidarity in dioceses, across national borders and continents. They are forming interest groups, supporting one another, drawing public attention to their problems and difficulties resulting from the abuse, and travelling to Rome, the heart of the universal Church, to speak repeatedly with the popes. They do not want to always be referred to as victims, but rather as survivors of sexual abuse, as independent, self-confident individuals who take their fate into their own hands and do not remain under the spell of their abusers. It is inevitable that these people do not hold back with their criticism of the Church. They argue that the Church has lost its meaning and purpose as a result of the abuse and the more than inadequate handling of it by Church officials, that it has betrayed the ideals of Jesus, and that those affected by abuse have lost their faith in a good and just God. The list of such points could go on and on.

Some people who feel they belong to the Church, who are involved in it, who bear responsibility within it, but who have not experienced abuse, often find it difficult to listen to these things and perhaps even to accept them. They feel attacked, become defensive, or, conversely, go on the offensive and claim that anyone who speaks so critically about the Church should be regarded as an opponent of the Church and treated accordingly.

This is a mistake. In fact, these people who have experienced abuse and rightly criticise the Church are like prophets in our time. Like the ancient prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos in the Holy Scriptures, their criticism helps to voice the word and will of God and makes it heard again. They criticised the abuses of their time, including those within their own religious community, so that they and everyone else could return to the path of God. The criticism of those affected by abuse should have the same effect on them. It helps the Church to see its mistakes, weaknesses, and dark sides more clearly and to overcome them more effectively and more quickly.

Let's examine today's Gospel more closely. It shows us how to identify those who truly believe. They are the ones who cast out demons, speak in new languages, pick up snakes, remain unharmed by poison, and heal the sick. They go out, preach, and God confirms their work with signs. Doesn't all this also relate to many actions and deeds of those affected by abuse, who demonstrate solidarity and unite in strength? Through their actions, they drive out the demon

of cover-ups and secrecy. They use the language of those affected to raise awareness of justice within the Church again. They help ensure that some clergy, who are like snakes, are held responsible. They bravely confront a difficult past that has long poisoned their lives and overcome it. Through their solidarity, those affected encourage and support each other, allowing some healing to happen.

The Church as a whole can only be thankful for this work. It must see itself and its conduct reflected in the complaints of those affected and feel ashamed. With this act of self-awareness, it is given the chance for repentance and renewal, as well as the responsibility of facing penance and atonement to move towards reconciliation. Concerning the Church and its changed stance on abuse, we can only pray and hope that what is already believed to be occurring in some places will indeed happen: 'the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs' (Mark 16:20).

### **Prayer**

Lord our God, you continually send people into the midst of your people's community. As prophets, they point to Your will and Your commandments. They call for repentance and conversion. Let us recognise these people in our own day, in our sisters and brothers who have suffered so much injustice in our midst.

### **Question**

To what extent do I recognise the voice of the prophets in the voices of those affected by sexual abuse?

What other reactions do I experience?

