

I ADVENT SUNDAY– 1st December 2013

**.. YOU ALSO MUST BE READY; FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COMING – Commentary
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Matthew 24,37-44

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

To try to understand the verses of the Gospel the liturgy gives us this first Sunday in Advent, it must be inserted into the right place, therefore we go back one or two verses. Beginning with verse 33 of chapter 24 of Matthew's Gospel.

The evangelist writes: "So also, ", says Jesus "when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates."

Jesus has announced the destruction of Jerusalem and, with the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, the home of the Jewish religious institution, begins the time when the Kingdom of God ceases to be exclusively for the people of Israel, and is extended to all mankind. So, Jesus does not see it as a misfortune, but as the elimination of what was an impediment to God's plan for all people.

God cannot be monopolized by any one, nation or religion. God's love is universal, therefore at the end of the kingdom of Israel, for Jesus, it coincides with the beginning of the kingdom of God. And Jesus had assured: *Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*" (Matt. 24,34), in fact the generation that Jesus talks of is the year 70

when the Roman invasion destroyed the temple of Jerusalem. And Jesus assures: *"Heaven and earth will pass away,"* a way of saying everything, *"but my words will not pass away."*

So Jesus guarantees that which He had said at the end of the sermon on the mount, assuring that until the earth and the heaven do not pass away, the law will not change, until all is fulfilled, and indicates that the promise concerning the Kingdom of God will surely be done.

At this point, Jesus states: *"But concerning that day and hour,"* here he is talking of the end of the individual, not of hour of Jerusalem, *"no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only."*

For every generation that passes there is an end of time, but only the Father knows this. Here Jesus inserts an example of Noah's time, not as a reproach to the contemporaries of Jesus, when He says *"For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,..."* Jesus is not blaming such behavior, but wants to say, all those that are so taken up with ordinary day to day life that they will not realize what is going to happen.

So, with the normal life, of the day to day routine, they are unlikely to be aware of the nature of what is happening. So, Jesus says: *"Then two men will be in the field; one will..."* the word used here means "taken" in the sense as when the angel said to Joseph "to take" Mary as his bride. Therefore one *"will be taken"*, to be saved, and the other *"one left"*, and it will be like this also for the women.

What is it that Jesus wants to say? The arch built by Noah did not welcome all, but only those that realized the imminent disaster. Likewise the kingdom of God is a proposal of salvation for all, but it is not for all because to enter into the kingdom is the result of a free choice in favour of the beatitude of poverty. Jesus had said in this gospel *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matt. 5,3)

Many are chosen to be received, and many are not chosen and are left. And Jesus continues saying: *"Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming"*. This invitation to the vigilance will be repeated shortly in the dramatic moment in Gethsemane. Therefore the coming of the Lord is associated to the vigilance and indicates this is the moment of the persecution and the killing of his followers.

Jesus in the beatitudes, the first one, that permits the realization of the kingdom of God, is associated also to the last beatitude, the unleashed persecution. So, Jesus says not to be unprepared in front of this. And says *"But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."*

Jesus' followers know that as peacemakers for others, their own peace is always insecure and, at any moment persecution can suddenly breakout, that will be much more violent and unexpected in its provenance. Jesus had said that *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child,..."* (Matthew 10, 21)

So, Jesus invites us to renew the choice for the Kingdom of God, keeping present that this choice brings persecution, but with the assurance the Jesus' God, the Father, is always on the side of the persecuted and never those that persecute.