

XIX ORDINARY TIME– 11th August 2019

YOU ALSO MUST BE READY – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 12, 32-48

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants! But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master’s will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

In Luke’s gospel chapter 12 the evangelist presents the new reality of the kingdom. If the disciples take care of their brothers that will allow God, as Father, to take care of their needs and well-being. Here now the evangelist presents to us the final verses of this chapter.

Luke writes: *“Fear not,..”* so Jesus takes away all anxiety and preoccupation *“..little flock..”* It is tiny. The word used is micron, so something really small. *“... for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* The evangelist contrasts the smallness, the very small -microscopic flock, the community that follows Jesus, with the greatness of the Kingdom of God, of God’s project for humanity.

Then Jesus with three imperatives goes on to define the characteristics that make the reality of this possible Kingdom. The first is: *“Sell your possessions,..”* It is not an invitation, it is a command. Therefore sell all your possessions *“..and give alms..”* that is, with what you have obtained do good to those who need it, and then here is the change, the new reality of the Kingdom, *“.. provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail,..”*

We know that the *heavens* in the language of that time meant *in God*. What does Jesus want to say? Jesus says that, as the believer experiences that giving does not mean losing, he puts his trust in the Father, it frees him from material worries and fills him with a growing trust in the Lord's action. Therefore “*..a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.*” Then it is beyond concern. And then here is the clear affirmation of Jesus. “*For where your treasure is,...*” (that is where faith is put, that gives security) “*... there will your heart be also.*”

The heart, in the Jewish culture, is not the place of affection as in our western world, the heart means the mind, conscience, so where your thought is - says Jesus - there will also be your life. So where you have directed your thought, there will be your whole life, if instead you think of the good of others this will be your sure wealth.

Then Jesus again uses an imperative - and here it is very important that if well understood, the relationship with God changes and consequently the relationship with others - “*Let your loins be girded...*” Why does he say this? The common dress of men in Palestine was a tunic that reached to the ankles. When they were walking, but above all when they worked this tunic was awkward, so it was gathered and knotted at the waist.

Then Jesus asks that this characteristic, that which distinguishes his community of disciples, his emblem, is this attitude to service. Not a usual service, but a service that becomes the emblem of person and community.

Then Jesus adds “*..and your lamps burning,...*” Why this reference to the lighted lamps? The reference it is in the book of Exodus where the presence of the Lord was in a tent, and it was requirement that one lamp must always be on. With this precious indication, Jesus says that the individual and the communities that manifest themselves in service are the true sanctuary where God manifests his presence.

“*..be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast,...*” Like Jahvè was the bridegroom of his people, Jesus is the bridegroom of the new community “*..so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks.*”

Jesus does not behave like the master of the house who enters, opening the door wide. He knocks. It is a great sign of respect and delicacy towards others.

And here Jesus proclaims something inconceivable for the culture of that time. Jesus proclaims “blessed”, that is extraordinarily and completely happy, “*Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes;..*” So this attitude of service is not something that is worth every once in a while, it is an attitude that continually makes the community distinguishable.

“*..truly, I say to you, he will gird himself.*” What Jesus asked of his disciples was to have as distinctive, service as the emblem. Jesus, in his community, is the one who serves. And here is something unheard of. Jesus presents himself as the Lord, the owner of the house and, instead of sitting down to eat and being served by his servants, he will serve. Jesus says “*..have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them*” This is the novelty of Jesus. Jesus, in Luke's gospel, makes this statement at the last supper: “*I stand among you as one who serves.*”

This image of the evangelist is an allusion to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is not a cult, but it is a chance given by Jesus to rest for community that is always and continually in an attitude of service, to be refreshed and recharged with a new fulfilment of his love.

Jesus himself goes on to serve, this is the image that the evangelist presents to us. So not a community at the service of God, but God who puts himself at the service of the community. So the worship of the Christian community is not directed to God, to the Father, but from the Father, through Jesus, he passes to mankind because he is constantly manifested through this attitude to serve.

And Jesus continues with this attitude of availability that makes his community recognizable saying: “ *But know this, that if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into You also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour.* ”

This presence of Jesus in his community, his sudden appearance does not have a deadline, it is without warning. What does this mean ? Whenever there are situations of need, of need of others, the community must always be ready. But there is also the other side. Jesus says that if in the community, instead of serving one another, if in the community one is not treated with love and respect, but with arrogance, for the desire for power, others are enslaved for their own comforts, Jesus uses a tremendous expression. Saying “ *...shall receive a severe beating.* ” So Jesus warns that those in the community, that instead of serving and putting oneself at the service of others, want to command, dominate and act with arrogance, for Jesus they are traitors who have nothing to do with his reality.