

PALMS – April 13th, 2014

**BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Mt 21.2-11**

*Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Beth-phage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."*

*This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.*

*And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

It is known as Palm Sunday, but it could be also the Sunday of the great deception or the great illusion. For Palm Sunday the liturgy presents us with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, as is written in the first eleven verses of chapter 21 of Matthew's Gospel.

The evangelist writes that Jesus sends two disciples into the village in front of them. The village in the Gospels is always a place of tradition, a place that is reluctant to the novelty brought by the Lord. And Jesus says that they will find "«...a donkey tied, and a colt with her»". Why this reference? When Jacob blessed his twelve sons and nominated Judah as their leader, he says that " *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him*" and he described as he who " *Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine*". This is found in the Genesis chapter 49, verse 8-11.

Well, Jesus, asking them to untie this donkey and her colt, wants to make it understood that this prophecy is now accomplished, He reveals it in His own person. And, Jesus informs, “*«If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,'»*”. It is the only time that Jesus refers to Himself like this. So, the evangelist, in Jesus’ action, sees the realization of what the prophet had written, but censors some aspects of the prophesy that are not appropriate to Jesus. Zechariah’s prophesy begins by saying “*Exult daughters of Sion*”, in fact the evangelist borrows this time from the prophet Isaiah the expression “*Tell the daughters of Sion*”.

Jerusalem does not have anything to exult, nor to celebrate, it is only informed. “*Behold, your king is coming to you..*”, and here the prophet Zechariah had written the word “just”, that is he who observes the law, and “victorious”, and the evangelist eliminates both, “just” because Jesus has not come to observe the law, but to propose a new relationship with God, based on love, and “victorious” because He will not be a victorious Messiah.

What remains is that He is, “*.. humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden*”. They are not animals of war, as were the horses, they were not regal mounts as were the mules, but they were a normal way of transport for the people of that time. Therefore not a warrior Messiah, but He presents Himself as a messenger of peace. We do not know of any equestrian monument with the rider on a donkey!

Well the disciples do as Jesus had asked, they bring the donkey and colt, and here is the first important and symbolic action done by the disciples, “*... put on them*”, on both the donkey and the colt, “*.. their cloaks*”. The cloak, the language of the Bible, indicates the person. So to put the cloak on the donkey and colt, indicates the full support of Jesus’ undertaking to be a Messiah of peace.

“*Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road,*”. When there was the anointment of the king, and he was named so, the people, as a sign of submission and of acceptance of his royalty, spread their cloaks, that is a symbol of the real person, on the road and the king passed over them. It is a sign of submission on one side and the other side of domination.

The crowd do not intend to be liberated by Jesus and they do not intend to follow a Messiah of peace, but expect to be oppressed and dominated. And the evangelist underlines “*.. others cut branches from the trees..*”. This was done for the tent feast, an important feast that indicated the coming of the Messiah liberator. “*And the crowds that went before him and that followed him..*”, Jesus is taken like a hostage. It is not Him that indicates the way, but the crowd that goes before Him, they are in front of Him and others follow Him. And He is in the middle.

As the tempter had taken Jesus into the Holy city to propose the power of Israel, this crowd had taken Jesus as a hostage and indicate to Jesus which is the road to take: that of power, that of domination. In fact what do they shout? They recite psalm 118 where it says “*Hosanna!*” Hosanna is an expression that means, “*Save us, then!*” But for whom is the Hosanna? The son of David.

Here is the great deception, the great illusion of the people. They have confused Jesus, son of the living God, with the son of David. Son, in the culture of that time, meant he who is like the father because he

behaves in a similar manner. So the son of David was the Messiah that, like David, through power and force, would have launched the Reign of Israel.

This is what the crowd are waiting for, this is the temptation that they propose to Jesus: to be a Messiah of power, a Messiah of violence, But Jesus is not the son of David, Jesus is the son of God, He has not come to take life, but to propose His own. Here is why, so soon as they realize the mistake, the same crowd that cried "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" will be that that later will cry "*Crucify Him, Crucify Him!*" They do not know what to do with Messiah of peace!

*"And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up"*, the evangelist uses a term that indicates a shock, the same turmoil that had stricken Jerusalem at the birth of Jesus. There is no welcome. They do not go towards Him, but the inhabitants of the city ask: "*Who is this?*" The Holy city, seat of God's presence and of the glory of God, do not know Jesus, the God with us because his God is another.

In fact , between the first action that Jesus does on entering the holy city, will be to tear down the temple in which the Father was no more worshipped, but the real god of the temple, is money, interest.