

XXIV ORDINARY TIME – September 13th, 2015

**YOU ARE THE MESSIAH ... THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER GREATLY - Biblical Commentary
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Mk 8. 27-35

[At that time] Jesus and his disciples set out for the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Along the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They said in reply, "John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others one of the prophets."

And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter said to him in reply, "You are the Messiah." Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him. He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly.

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.

Jesus undertakes a long trip and drives his disciples to the North, in pagan territories, Caesarea Philippi, far from a Judaic and nationalistic mentality, in order to test whether disciples acknowledged the message or not.

But the evangelist already provides a clear advise that makes us understand that this passage will be marked by a lack of understanding. As a matter of fact the evangelist writes *"Along the way he asked his disciples"*. This expression *"along the way"* is the one that also appears in Chapt. 4, in the Parable of the Four Soils, as per indicating an unfruitful sowing.

The seed which fell on the path was immediately eaten by birds and Jesus, in explaining this parable, says these birds are *"Satan"*. The word is therefore unfruitful and is made useless by Satan. In this Gospel Satan is the image of power, of success and ambition, but let's read how the evangelist goes on.

Well then, Jesus asks his disciples: *“who do people say that I am?”* The fruit of disciples’ preaching should be this image of Jesus. But the answer is disheartening; confusion is great. *“They said in reply «John the Baptist »”,* because they believed that martyrs would soon be raised. *“Others say Elijah”,* Elijah is the violent prophet who should set the path to the Messiah, *“still others one of the prophets”.* In all cases these are all ancient characters of the past. The novelty brought by Jesus is not understood.

So Jesus insists by asking *“But who do you”* – the question is addressed to the whole group - *“say that I am?”*

And one disciple, introduced with his negative nickname, meaning that his reply is not correct and his attitude is in opposition with Jesus, answers. *“Peter said to him in reply”,* the negative nickname will be mentioned three times – number three represents ‘what is complete’ – in this passage.

This disciple’s name is Simon and when he is named with his nickname, this means he is opposing Jesus. He replied *«You are the Messiah»”.*

Was his answer correct? It seems it wasn’t, for Jesus *“warned”* them – this verb *“to warn”* (lit. to rebuke) is the one used to free people from demons – *“not to tell anyone about him”.*

Peter didn’t answer correctly. In this Gospel Jesus is presented as ‘Messiah’, not ‘the Messiah’. The determinative article ‘the’ indicates that he the one awaited from tradition, the one who will arrive to restore monarchy and enforce law. Jesus is a Messiah, but not ‘the Messiah’ of tradition. Therefore Peter is wrong.

So, as they didn’t understand, Jesus *“he began to teach them”,* not speaking of the Messiah, but of the Son of Man, that is the man in his fullness, the ideal of man created by God, who *“must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes and be killed”.*

God’s plan on mankind is that man reaches the fullness of divine condition, meaning the Son of Man – that man who reaches a divine condition and is therefore rejected by religious institution which perceives him as a menace to its existence.

“And rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began...” It is very interesting to notice that, as Jesus starts speaking, Peter begins. It is the image of the seed fallen on the path, immediately taken by birds.

The ideology of Satan, of power, prevents Peter from welcoming Jesus’ message. *“Began to rebuke him”.* Just like Jesus had rebuked Peter, so Peter is rebuking Jesus, as if the words he has spoken were devilish.

“At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples” – he looks at his disciples but is addressing to Peter, meaning that the entire group has Peter’s ideas – *“rebuked Peter”.* Here comes this verb *“to rebuke”* for the third time. *“And said «Get behind me, Satan!»”* Jesus addresses to Peter by calling him ‘Satan’. He is Satan as he tempts Jesus by defining him ‘the Messiah of power’ and also because he nullifies the Word.

The Word is given but immediately Satan comes. Jesus is addressing to Satan, but doesn't want to break off with him and says "*Get behind me*" – literally "Go back behind me".

It is Peter who has to follow Jesus, not the opposite.

And then Jesus "*summoned the crowd*", and delivers a dramatic notice "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself*" – that is deny his ideals of success and power, "*and take up his cross*". Cross is not given by the Lord, it is taken up, lifted. It is the individual who, in order to follow Jesus, voluntarily accepts the stigma of shame given by society.

Jesus says to his disciples who follow him cultivating dreams of glory that, if they want to follow him, have to accept to be considered the "dregs of society".