

**PALM SUNDAY—14<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD ! – Biblical Commentary by  
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**Luke 19,28-40**

*And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."*

The reading of Palm Sunday presents us with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, according to the gospel of Luke, chapter 19, 28-40. To understand what the evangelist writes we must keep in mind the prophecy in the book of the prophet Zechariah, chapter 9 verse 9.

Let's read the prophecy that will help us understand what the evangelist tells us. *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!"* that is Jerusalem, but indicating all the population *"..Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation..."*

And up to here there was the awaiting of the King, the Messiah, the liberator of Israel, but then Zechariah presents a novelty, a clamorous image. *"...humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."* The usual regal mount was a mule or horse. A king riding a colt had never been seen. The prophet wants to indicate that there is a completely new way to be Messiah different from the expected one. A modest Messiah, humble, that rode a mount that was that of the people, but not only. *" I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; "* The chariots were war chariots, *"...and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations;"*

This was the prophet Zechariah. But a prophecy that had been set aside, almost forgotten, because the Messiah who was to come was to be the son of David, one that, like a great king was able to unify all the tribes of Israel, through power, force and violence, restoring the dead reign of Israel.

Now let's read all this as the evangelist presents it to us.

*"And when he had said these things,..."* - referring to the parable of the talents, in which there is a group of people that do not want someone to be nominated their king. Then there is the refusal of royalty, anticipating what will be the refusal of the people of Jesus as king.

*"..he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem."* It is the final stage of his journey. *"When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany..."* It is a characteristic of all the evangelists of never alluding to the death of Jesus without putting a reference to his resurrection. If Jerusalem will be the city in which Jesus will be killed, Bethany will be the place of the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus.

*"..at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you,"* The village in the gospels has always a negative significance, the village is a place of tradition, where novelties are always regarded with suspicion, so this image of the village is that of a place that has remained in the past and that refuses the new.

*"..where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat."* (literally never mounted by man) *"Untie it and bring it here."* It is important in this reading the use of the verb "to untie" that will be repeated a good four times. What is the significance that the evangelist wants to give to this that seems illogical, What must be untied? The prophesy must be untied, that had been set aside, tied up, because they did not want a modest Messiah, a Messiah of peace. This must be untied. But first it is the disciples that must be convinced of this.

*"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them."* We have said the speech seems unreal, illogical. They arrived there and untied this colt and, so the evangelist writes, *"And as they were untying the colt its owners said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' And they said, 'The Lord has need of it.'" "Okay good!"* Therefore the speech is urea. But the evangelist, through this illogic of the narration, wants us to understand the significance: Jesus unties this prophesy that had remained tied-up because no one was interested in such a king.

While the owners tied up, the Lord Jesus is the one that unties.

*"And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt,.. "* a cloak in the Jewish symbology indicates the person, the identity of the person, so the disciples accepted this Messiah of peace and they set him on the colt, this vehicle of peace. *"And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road."* There are others that do not understand this, so they refer to the act of enthronement of King when the people spread their cloaks – the cloak as we have said indicates the person – on the road and the king passes over, or on a horse or on foot, meaning submission.

This ambiguity in the text will bring to Jesus' tragic final when he will be abandoned. When they realise that there is no king, Messiah, liberator, winner with violence, the same people that acclaim him now, will be those that will cry later: "Crucify him!"

*"...already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying..."* Here there is a quote from a psalm, it is psalm 118, that of the enthronement of the Messiah.

*"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"* And then the evangelist adds for us the announcement that the angels had made to the shepherds indicating the birth of Jesus.

*"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* Jesus is a Messiah of peace, a Messiah that is a gift of God. This acclamation on behalf of the disciples causes the furious reaction of the Pharisees. *"And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples."* The verb rebuke is used for the demons, the possessed. For the Pharisees it is as if the disciples were possessed with a ideology demoniacal acclaiming a non violent Messiah, they do not accept this.

*" He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."* It refers to the known prophecy, that of the prophet Habakkuk in which the stones cry out against injustice. Injustice will be the death of the liberating Messiah.