

XXVIII ORDINARY TIME – 14th October 2018

SELL ALL THAT YOU HAVE AND..... FOLLOW ME : Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfovB2_0Lm4

Mark 10, 17-27

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.’” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”
Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.

In Jesus' community there is no place for the rich, but only for generous people. What is the difference? The rich man is one who keeps all for himself, a generous person is he, even if he has little, gives and divides with others. In the gospels the rich are presented as terminally ill with egoism for which there is no hope of salvation. Let's see the ruthless portrait that Mark the Evangelist makes in chapter 10, 17 -27 “*And as he ..*” it is Jesus “*.. was setting out on his journey , a man...*” an anonymous person “*.. ran up ...*” The person is anonymous, but the evangelist presents someone that runs, in the orient one never ran, to run was dishonourable, here in this gospel the only one to run is the one possessed by the devil, prisoner of something stronger than himself, “*...and knelt before him..*” In this gospel, the leper, the most impure person, knelt before Jesus. So this anonymous person is possessed by something that excludes him from God.

“..and asked him, “Good Teacher,...” that is, distinguished or excellent, “.. what must I do to inherit eternal life?”. But Jesus had not come to teach a better way to have eternal life, Jesus had come to change this reality here, this society. “And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” already there is the teaching of God for eternal life, and Jesus tells the individual “You know the commandments:..” Well Jesus lists the commandments, the commandments were figuratively represented on two tables: on one there were the three exclusive of Israel, the absolute obligations towards God, on the other there were the behaviour and duties towards the men who were a common heritage of any culture. Well Jesus for eternal life does not propose the commandments concerning the obligations to God, but only duties towards men.

Then Jesus lists five commandments *“Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.”* but before honouring your father and mother Jesus puts in it what is not a commandment, but a precept. It is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy chapter 24,14-15 where the legislature says *“You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns. You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it),..”* Meaning to keep the pay for himself. We will see later why Jesus puts in this precept for us.

” And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” And Jesus, looking at him,..” looking at someone meant to enter into the intimate of that person *“.. looking at him, loved him,.”* Jesus’ gaze is always accompanied by love *“..and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; “* And the treasure in heaven is the one that is not consumed and the one that has perennial value while the treasures on earth can be exposed to many risks.

Then Jesus adds an invitation *“...come, follow me.”* Well he had gone to Jesus to have more, to have a gift, some precept to secure to have eternal life and Jesus shocked him because he asked him to give more, not to have more, *“ Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful,..”* He went to Jesus in anguish and the meeting with him did not go well because he was still anguished. Why? *“..for he had great possessions.”* The lesson that the evangelist gives us is that we only possess what we give, what we retain does not possess, but it possess us. This is why the evangelist presented him more impure than the leper and more possessed than a possessed man. Jesus was able to free the demoniac and he was able to cure the leper, but can do nothing for the rich man

“And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God,” . Here is the community of the

kingdom where it does not accumulate for itself, but it is generously shared with others. *“And the disciples were amazed at his words.”* .because once a rich man enters the community and puts him as a condition to get rid of everything there is alarm, "How will we live?". *“But Jesus said to them again, “Children,...”* Jesus speaks to them very tenderly *“..how difficult it is..”* he is speaking naturally of the rich *“.. to enter the kingdom of God!”*

And here Jesus makes a comparison that is typical of a very imaginative oriental culture *“It is easier for a camel..”* the camel was the largest animal known in that culture *“..to go through the eye of a needle:..”* a needle has a tiny opening. Therefore it is impossible. Jesus does not say that it is difficult for a kingdom, it is impossible because to enter the kingdom of God one should get rid of all riches, but this rich man will never do it. Then the teaching that the evangelist gives us is that we only possess what we give, and this helps us to enter fully into the kingdom of God and to have eternal life. Those who keep all for themselves are excluded from the fullness of life.