

III ADVENT – December 15th, 2013

**ARE YOU THE ONE WHO IS TO COME OR SHALL WE LOOK FOR ANOTHER? –
Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Mt 11.2-11

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is he of whom it is written, "' Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Today's reading takes us to the profound crisis in which John the Baptism will fall. He, even if he recognized Jesus as the Messiah, begins to doubt it. Why? John the Baptist was the heir of a spirituality, a tradition and a religiosity, that hoped in a nation of the righteous, as the prophet Isaiah had prophesied: *Your people shall all be righteous;* (Isaiah 60,21)

And he was disconcerted by Jesus' behavior that says that He did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners. He had presented a Messiah that would have punished the sinners and unbelievers and hearing it said that Jesus did not announced God's wrath, but God's love for this category.

So John is in crisis and he sends Him an ultimatum that seems like an excommunication. "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" In His reply Jesus lists the works of

the Messiah as it was written in the book of the prophet Isaiah, they are six works, corresponding to the six days of the creation, which communicate life for those that did not have it.

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers^l are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” But Jesus censures the last work of the Messiah, the vendetta against the gentiles, the vendetta against the rulers.

Jesus does not speak of vendetta, but only of God's love. He does not present God's punishment, but the way of God, that of love, in order to let everyone grow. And there is a warning from Jesus, that is present more than ever, *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

What does this mean? The people of that time naturally trembled at the image of the God presented by John the Baptist, a God that punished, a God that takes offense. But he was the God that they knew, this is why they trembled, they were frightened, but not scandalized. On the contrary they were scandalized with Jesus' God.

The same people that were not scandalized hearing the talk of a God terrible in his vendetta and punishment, were actually those that were scandalized hearing Jesus' announcement of the God that loves everyone regardless of their conduct and behavior. This to the pious ones, the religious ones, today as then, brings always confusion. It is intolerable, unacceptable that God pours his love on people regardless of their merits or their conduct.

Well, once John's disciples went away, Jesus praises John in front of the crowd. And He does it with two important comparisons . He says: *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? “,* meaning John. *“A reed shaken by the wind?”*, that is an opportunist that bends to every wind of power, that puts himself in the service of every power.

“What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.” Jesus is warning His listeners, John is the messenger of God, but the messengers cannot be opportunists, always floating with the powers that be .Those sent by God cannot be courtiers, living in the palace, and eating at the table of the powerful, but they must be with those that expose the atrocities of the powerful.

And lastly Jesus concludes saying: *“ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

What does Jesus mean by saying this? As Moses was not able to enter into the promised land even having guided his people, John the Baptist had announced the Kingdom of God, but he could not enter because his was killed. Here is the greatness of John the Baptist, but those of the Kingdom will be even greater than John, sent by God.