

XXIV ORDINARY TIME – 16th September 2018

YOU ARE THE CHRISTTHE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS. – Biblical Commentary by Father Alfredo Maggi OSM

Mark 8,27-35

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.”

Jesus rebuked his disciples. Saying to them, “*Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?* (Mark 8, 18) despite the healing of the deaf and blind man which were images of resistance from the disciples who did not understand and accept neither who Jesus is, nor his message. So Jesus takes them to the extreme north of the country, to the border of the gentile's land, to see if away from the prevailing nationalist ideology, they can understand something about him. It is what Mark writes in chapter 8,27-35, let's read it.

“*And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi.*” we are in the extreme north of the country, therefore far from the influence of Judea and also of Galilee. “*And on the way...*” here the evangelist already gives us a clue that makes us understand how the narration ends: along the way is where the seed fell and did not bear fruit because the birds came, an image of Satan, and took it away. So this message of Jesus will be ineffective, Satan, image of power, is refractory to the good news of Jesus.

“*...he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”* The disciples, the twelve, went to preach and Jesus wants to see what the result of this preaching was, the total confusion. *And they told him, “John the Baptist;..”* because it was believed that the

martyrs would be promptly resurrected, "... and others say, *Elijah*;" Elijah is the great violent prophet that should of come to prepare the way for the Messiah "...and others, one of the prophets." They had understood absolutely nothing, all the characters were related to the past. "And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" His words are addressed to all his disciples, but only one that is presented by his negative nickname which indicates his stubbornness, hotheadedness and who latter will lead to the denial of Jesus, it is Peter." *Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."* with the definite article. The Christ meant the awaited Messiah of the tradition, he who should come to observe the laws, occupy the power at Jerusalem, this is the Christ. But Mark in his gospel presents Jesus as Christ, but without the definite article, that is, a Messiah that is to be discovered.

In fact, that Jesus does not agree, is immediately seen in his reaction "...he strictly charged them.." and the evangelist uses, the same verb to scold and to drive out the possessed, which appear in this passage three times, Jesus did not like what Peter said to him. "...to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man...." Peter had replied "you are the Christ" the Messiah of the tradition. Jesus is the Son of God inasmuch as he represents God in his human condition and is the Son of Man in that he represents man in his divine condition, that is, the full development of God's plan for humanity, that man has the condition divine.

"...the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected..." by who? Not by the sinners. Those who are hostile to God's project for humanity are precisely those who had to make it known and promote it, religious authorities. In fact the whole Sanhedrin is against the Son of man, they are "... the elders and the chief priests and the scribes" the official theologians "...and be killed," the representatives of the religious institution kill God's project for humanity "...and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter...." and here again is that negative name "...took him aside..." he literally grabbed him "... and began.." exactly like Jesus had begun to teach Peter he began "...to rebuke him." that is, the same verb used by Jesus for the one who was possessed by demons. What Jesus is saying to Peter is not something that comes from God, but from some demon

Here is Jesus' reaction "But turning and seeing his disciples he rebuked Peter.." but the rebuke was for all the disciples because they all had the same mentality "... and said, "Get behind me, Satan!" Jesus defines Peter as Satan, why? Because as Satan tempts Jesus to deviate from his project on humanity and like he nullifies the effect of the word, like the seed fallen on the ground that was immediately taken by the birds, image of Satan, and carried the seeds away. Therefore Jesus rebukes Peter and treats him like Satan, meaning the devil, but he does not turn him away but asks him to get behind him. It is not Peter that must take this road, but it is Jesus "...you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Now for the first time in this gospel the theme of the cross appears and to these disciples that follow Jesus for ambition, to share the power of the throne with him, , Jesus' success makes it clear that following him means going towards the contempt of the people and the rejection of society. *"..calling the crowd to him.."* now the speech widens, *"..with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself..."* that is, renounce these ideals of success, ambition, and power, *"..take up.."* literally carry *"..his cross.."* The cross in the gospels is not given by God, but raised by man, what was Jesus referring to? Not to death on a cross. He refers to the moment in the court in which the prisoner was condemned to a torture which then led to death , he had to carry the "patibulum"(the horizontal axis of the cross.) on his shoulders. Then accompanied, dragged by the executioner through the whole city and for the people it was a moral and religious obligation to insult and beat him. It meant total solitude, rejection and contempt, this is the cross. The cross for Jesus means accepting to lose one's reputation and ideals. It is not an imposition for everyone, but it is a consequence of those who really want to follow him.

"..take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it,.." those who want to realize their own ideals of success, of fullness of their existence, face disaster, *"..but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."* Jesus assures that living for him, even if one passes through contempt and the rejection of society, he will not be a disaster, but it will be the full realization of his person.