

BY YOUR ENDURANCE YOU WILL GAIN YOUR LIVES - Biblical Commentary by Father. Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 21,5-19

And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

To understand the Gospel passage that we are now about to examine, we need to refer to an episode that took place about seven centuries before, when Sennacherib, the powerful king of Assyria in 701, after having put fire to as many as 46 cities, also surrounded and sieged Jerusalem and Jerusalem was lost. With great surprise in the morning, when the battle was about to begin, Sennacherib's camp was deserted. What had happened? Probably King Hezekiah had paid his tribute, but tradition thought that God had intervened. This led to the belief that, in the moment of great danger for Jerusalem, there would have been the divine intervention that would have saved her. This was also celebrated in the Psalms, for example Psalm 46, where it says, “*God is in the midst of her;(Jerusalem) she shall not be moved;*”

Well, the passage we are now examining is Luke's gospel chapter 21, 5-19; the context is after the episode of the widow, who offers everything she had to live for to the temple. And God does not tolerate that a religious institution, instead of helping the poor, should be kept by the poor by sucking the very blood from the veins.

We read, “*And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings,...*” the temple was one of the most magnificent of the time, it had been begun to be built by Herod the Great with an unimaginable splendour “*.. he said, As for these things that you see,.*”

the Greek verb used means "admire"; therefore the disciples have not yet broken with this institution. Yet Jesus had denounced the temple as a den of thieves. "...*the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*" It is what will happen in 70 after Christ, with the siege of the Romans that will undo all this stupendous construction.

Well, at the announcement of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the disciples not only do not seem frightened, but almost excited, and in fact they ask "*Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?*" Exactly why? Because they knew that in the moment of maximum danger, God would have intervened in defence. But, for Jesus, God does not intervene. Any institution that demolishes, destroys, rather than helps the person is not in God's plans and therefore only deserves to disappear. And Jesus responds, and it is an imperative "*See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!'*" that is, claiming to have the divine condition, to be messiahs, "*and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them*" There will be a time when many will claim to have divine messages, to do what? To restore the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of Israel is now dead. Jesus did not come to revive the kingdom of Israel, but to inaugurate the kingdom of God.

And Jesus, using the typical language of the prophets when they describe the great epochal upheavals, speaks "*And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified,...*" Jesus' message is in no way a message of fear; so that the end, there is no liturgical passage, but in verse 28 the evangelist writes that Jesus says "*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" So it is not a message that wants to terrorize, but it is the announcement of a liberation, a liberation that unfortunately will not be painless, "*.. for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.*"

And then Jesus says, using the precise language of the prophets, "*Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences*". It is the image of what comes suddenly, the earthquake and every war brings famine and pestilence "*And there will be terrors and great signs..*" not in heaven, but "*..from heaven.*" all the phenomena from heaven, great flashes of lightning, were seen and interpreted as divine signs. Well, all this will be part of that process of liberation from humanity. Every power, based on domination, on the exploitation of people, especially in the name of God, is destined to disappear.

But Jesus warns "*But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you,...*" Why is the adherence to Jesus by his disciples with the radical subversion of values a crime so serious as to be able to attract the hatred of whom? Of those sacred institutions that were the foundation of society: God, homeland and family. Well, Jesus denounces that these, which were considered sacred values, are actually diabolical values because they are opposed to and enemies of the

creator's project on humanity. And now Jesus says “...*they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues..*” to religion “..*and prisons, and you will be brought before king and governors...*” the nation and country “...*for my name's sake.*” Jesus even says “*You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all....*” What does this mean? God, country and family are the three areas where absolute power is exercised: the power of God through the religious institution, the power is of the king or of the rulers in the homeland and also in the family, where the male was the absolute master of the components, from wife to children. Well, Jesus came to denounce and replaced these values that are not sacred. In the place of God he will speak of a Father, if in the name of God one can take the life of someone, in the name of the Father one can only give one's own life; the homeland instead he will replace with the kingdom of God, that is, that space without borders, walls or limits where everyone will be accepted. And also the family will be replaced by Jesus with a community of ideals, no longer linked by the value of blood, but by the same ideal of love. Therefore in power Jesus replaces the three sacred values that are distinguished by the generous love that is put at the service of others.

Al posto di Dio parlerà di Padre, se in nome di Dio si può togliere la vita a qualcuno, in nome del Padre si può soltanto dare la propria; invece la patria la sostituirà con il regno di Dio, cioè quello spazio senza confini, senza muri, senza limiti dove tutti possono essere accolti. E anche la famiglia sarà sostituita da Gesù da una comunità di ideali, non più legata dal valore del sangue, ma dallo stesso ideale d'amore. Quindi al potere Gesù sostituisce i tre valori sacri che sono distinti dall'amore generoso che si mette al servizio degli altri.