

THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS- Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 9,18-24

Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen." Then he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

The beginning of this reading of the gospel: *"Now it happened that as he was praying alone,.. "* But in reality Luke does not write like this. This is an attempt to harmonize apparent incongruence that there is in this reading. So let's read the original Greek text as the evangelist writes. Actually Jesus is not nominated.

It begins saying that *"Now it happened that as he was praying alone,"* Not in a solitary place, Jesus prays alone. Why does the evangelist write: *".. the disciples were with him."* So he cannot pray alone if the disciples were with him. But in reality the evangelist wants to indicate, as he had at other times, that the disciples were with him, but they did not follow him.

So, Jesus is alone. The disciples even if they are with him, they are not supportive. Well, Jesus asks them *And he asked them, "Who do the crowds..",* The crowds to which Jesus had sent his disciples for the announcement of the novelty of the news of the kingdom of God, *".. say that I am?"* it is a kind of exam

that Jesus does to see if the effect of the disciples preaching had been successful. The result is a total failure.

“And they answered, “John the Baptist.” Why John the Baptist? He had already been killed by Herod, but it was believed the martyrs would be resurrected immediately. *“..But others say, Elijah,..”* Elijah was a combative prophet that, through violence, kept the divine laws, *“...and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.”* They are all past personages. On one has understood who Jesus is, the new that God expresses through him.

This confusion is because of confusion that the disciples have in their heads. They accompany Jesus but still they have not understood who he is and above all what is his mission and his destiny.

Then he said to them, “But who do you say.. “ turning to all the group *“.. that I am?”* As often happens Peter replies for all of them, believing to be the leader, the head of the group. *“And Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”* It is not a good answer, so much so that we see Jesus who does not only shout at him, but the evangelist uses the verb, used for the possessed.

Why is it not a good answer? The Christ of God, being the messiah of God, with the definite article, indicates the traditional awaited messiah, the avenging messiah, the liberating messiah, the messiah that would conquest the power and drive out the Romans.

They are the same words that Jesus’ opponents will use when he will be on the cross, when they will say *“Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”(Luke 23,39)* meaning how can this man so powerful end on the cross? That the answer is wrong can be seen in Jesus’ reaction.

“And he strictly charged and commanded them.. “ literally shouting, and it is the same word used to cast out demons, so Peter’s answer is not only wrong, not only that he does not come from God, but it is an answer demonic because it pursues those dreams of power. *“...to tell this to no one..”* because the answer is wrong. If Peter had said Jesus the Christ, Jesus now refer to himself as the Son of man. In the gospels Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of God. The Son of God is God in a human condition and the Son of Man is man in the divine condition.

Here he presents himself as a man that has the fullness of the divine condition. It is this the object of mortal hate of the religious institutions, that can dominate mankind, and keep them in an infantile condition, but when man reaches the fullness of the divine condition –and this is not an exclusive prerogative of Jesus, but a possibility for all his disciples – it is alarming for the institution. Jesus affirms: *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected ..”* and here Jesus indicates the Sanhedrin, the highest legal authority of Israel.

“..by the elders .. “ (the senators) *“..and chief priests..”* (the high priests) *“.. and scribes..”* (the theologians) *“..and be killed,..”* The institution, that which believes to be God’s representative, when God manifests himself in Jesus, not only do they not recognise him, but they also ask for the elimination and death.

"...and on the third day be raised." The third day means in an indefinite manner, a complete manner. Then Jesus to these disciples that have not yet understood and as we said at the beginning they accompanied him but did not follow him..... *"And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me....,"* Jesus had invited these disciples to follow him, *"...let him deny himself, "*

What does it mean to deny oneself? To become a renegade. To those values of society: God, Country and Family, to which Jesus asks to renounce and put in their place of God the Father, in place of Country the Kingdom of God and in place of the Family the community, and so become a renegade for society

".. and take up his cross.. " Here the evangelist uses the verb "to take up" It was the moment in which the condemned had to pick up the cross from the ground, that is the horizontal part of the cross, lift it onto his shoulders, and then, conducted by the executioner to outside the city where there was the vertical part of the cross, there to be crucified with terrible torture.

Jesus does not refer to death on the cross, but at the tremendous moment of the utmost contempt, the utmost solitude, because it was the duty of the relations, the friends, to insult and ill treat the condemned to this terrible torture. So Jesus says: " If you want to follow me renounce every form of ambition and success, accept the loss of your reputation completely, to be completely alone

"...daily .. ", therefore accept every day this refusal by society, especially on the behalf of the religious institution that threaten these people who reach, thanks to the following of Jesus, the divine condition.

"..and follow me." So Jesus places this condition. It must be underlined that the cross in the gospels never refers to pain, illness or sufferance that is encountered in life. God did not send the cross, but the cross is taken up by man as a liberal choice for following Jesus. And to follow Jesus one must be always free.

And who values their reputation, their name and their career is not a free person and cannot follow Jesus. And Jesus concludes: *"For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."* So Jesus concludes stating that who lives for himself destroys his own existence, who lives for others is he that realizes life in full.