

### XIII ORDINARY TIME– 2nd JULY 2017

**WHEVER DOES NOT TAKE HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME. ....WHOEVER RECIEVES YOU, RECIEVES ME.**

**Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Matthew 10,37-42**

***Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."***

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. (Mark 2, 22) This is Jesus' announcement but what is the meaning? The new relationship with God that Jesus has come to propose, is incompatible with all religious, social and family systems, that were based on obedience and power. Jesus with this announcement, with this proposed new relationship with God, that is no more based on obedience and its laws, but on his acceptance and love, he hits out at the three sacred values on which society's, sacred and undisputed values are held: God, country and family. And Jesus begins with the family, where it was the undisputed power of the husband over the wife and children. This is why Jesus refers to the Prophet Micah, who had announced that the work of the Messiah was of division, dividing man from his father, daughter from mother, daughter-in-law from mother-in-law, meaning to divide from the old, who resist this novelty.

And, in this reading presented today, Jesus affirms: *"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* What does this mean? Jesus' first message is for the children, and then the parents, but they have the same meaning: free the people from these relations, that are called ties, constraints, because they are precisely those relationships that bind. Jesus does not want people to be bound, he wants his people free.

So the first message is to the children, to break with the ties of obedience and dependence with their parents, which prevents them from growing and to realize themselves. Then Jesus refers also to the parents, that they must detach themselves from those ties with the children who make them forget that before they are parents, they are husband and wife, so Jesus invites them to full freedom. Naturally who welcomes Jesus' message, is considered like a mad person, rejected by a society that bases its existence on obedience, these sacred values. So the persecution begins

This is why Jesus affirms, and it is the first time that it appears in Matthew's gospel *"..whoever does not take his cross .."* The cross is not given by God, the cross is not accepted, the cross is taken up by man. Jesus refers to the horizontal axis, the scaffold, which the condemned when sentenced, has placed over his shoulders, and then is led to the place of execution. The cross means the rejection on the part of God and the people, therefore the total loss of one's reputation. Well, Jesus wants the people free, able also to lose their own reputation.

And for this Jesus continues saying: *"Whoever finds his life.."* meaning to keep it to himself *"..will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."* What does Jesus mean by this? Where there is love without limits, there life is without limits, therefore whoever thinks of himself is ruined, whoever thinks of the others fully realizes himself.

And then, here is the surprise of Jesus announcement *"Whoever receives you receives me,.."* Jesus is

talking of the ones that carry the cross, those who take up the cross of his life. Well he who carries the cross is not as is believed by the religion, one cursed by God, but the visible manifestation of God himself. Here is why, Jesus says: *"..whoever receives me receives him who sent me."* Therefore taking this cross, carrying this cross, is to be considered cursed by God, the dregs of society, in reality it shows the presence of God.

Then Jesus, with a typical Rabbinical language, says that, *"The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward,."* The same for the righteous, and it is expected at the end when he says *"...whoever gives one of these little ones..."* the Greek word for little is 'micron', meaning invisible, therefore it is part of Jesus' group of the marginalized, the dregs of society *".. even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple"* it is the disciple that has taken up the cross, *"...truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."* Who has received a disciple, will not have the reward of the disciple, but the presence of Jesus himself and that of the Father.

The message of this reading is very clear: no ties, Jesus has need of free people. No connection with God, for God does not absorb man, but strengthens him, God does not bind people , but frees them, God does not hold individuals, but asks them to go with him and like him to humanity .