

XXIX ORDINARY TIME – October 20th, 2013

GOD WILL GIVE JUSTICE TO HIS ELECT – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 18.1-8

At that time Jesus told a parable to his disciples to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.

And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.

And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?, Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The first verse of this passage, Luke 18,1-8, the first eight verses, says that Jesus “*..told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*” Well this verse may deceive and mislead the reader’s attention : it is not a teaching on prayer – or on insistent prayer- a theme that Jesus has already spoken of - but on the realization the Kingdom of God.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer, in chapter 12 of this Gospel is very clear. “*No need to worry, as the gentiles do, but to be always fully confident of the Father’s acts of love. Jesus had said Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.(Matthew 6, 31-32)*

Therefore there is no need to ask the Lord because the Lord will not meet our needs , but actually proceed them. But what Jesus has in His heart is “*Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.*” (Luke 12, 31)

This is in Jesus’ heart, and this is the theme: the realization of the Kingdom of God. Why? Once free from of every preoccupation, these disciples are asked to work to realize the Kingdom of God, that is the alternative society where instead of hoarding one shares, where instead of

commanding one puts oneself at the service of others and because of this there is no need to be superior to other people, but to lower oneself. This is the Kingdom of God, the alternative society that is part of God's project for humanity.

For this Jesus put into the only prayer he taught, Our Father, saying " your Kingdom come", which does not refer to something that is to come, but something that grows and spreads. Actually, from the moment where there is a community of people, of disciples, women, that welcome the beatitudes, the Kingdom is there already .

Jesus had said "*Blessed are you who are poor,*" those that had chosen the alternative society, "*.. for yours is the kingdom of God.*" He does not say that there will be the kingdom, the kingdom is already.

So it means amplifying, still expanding the effects of this Kingdom. Well, this Kingdom must expand thanks to the efforts of the believers that work for God's project for humanity, that is - as sung in the Magnificat - *he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty*" (Luke 1. 46-55).

This is what Jesus wants and what the disciples must realize, This Kingdom of God. This is the reason Jesus replies to the Pharisees whom mockingly ask Him: " When will this Kingdom come?" because they think that it will be an utopia, "*The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed,*" it is not something clamorous, sensational, that appears for above , "*..... nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.*" (Luke 17,20 -21)

There are small communities of believers that have accepted Jesus' message and begin this work of liberation of humanity. Therefore the passage in question, Luke 18, the first eight verses, represents an encouragement to the Christian community, the community of the Kingdom, that could be discouraged, dishearten finding themselves alone, fragile in front of the enormity of the injustice of the society around them.

And pray is aimed at the realization of justice in the Kingdom of God. This is the meaning of the insisting of praying . Jesus reassures: the Kingdom of God and its justice – the word justice appears four times in this passage – is the central theme - will be realized.

But, for this to become reality, the disciples must break with societies false values ,which they have not yet done. For this the passage concludes with Jesus' skepticism "*...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*"

Jesus had spoken of the coming of the Son of God, coinciding with the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus had said: "*...so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed,*" (Luke17, 30) in the destruction of Jerusalem, in the destruction of the temple God comes as liberator and so permitting them to go towards all humanity.

Well the disciples, when Jesus will show Himself, will they still be working for the realization of the Kingdom of God? At the end of Luke's gospel it is doubtful. The disciples have still not

broken with the values of society, they frequent the temple – this is how Luke's Gospel ends – that temple which Jesus had said was a den of thieves and the disciples at Emmaus still recognize as “our authority” Jesus' assassins.

Therefore the whole passage is an invitation – not to be discouraged to follow what He has said, in another Gospel, that of John, “.. *take heart; I have overcome the world.*” (John 16, 33) Who works in favour of life will always be stronger than death. Who works in favour of the light will win over darkness.