

XXV ORDINARY TIME – September 20th, 2015

THE SON OF MAN IS TO BE DELIVERED ... IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE THE FIRST, HE SHALL BE LAST OF ALL – Biblical commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 9. 30-37

[At that time] Jesus and his disciples began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him. They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

All passages of Mark's Gospel that we have been analyzing in these Sundays seem to have a common issue: Jesus troubles with disciples. They don't want to comprehend who he is and what his message is.

We read in this passage that Jesus is going through Galilee and is delivering a very precious teaching. "*the Son of Man*" – Son of Man is an expression that refers to a man who reaches his fullness and enters his divine condition; Jesus is the Son of God in the sense that he represents God with his human condition; and he is the Son of Man representing a man with his divine condition. The Son of Man is, therefore, is a man who has the divine condition.

"*The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men*". Here we are, there's opposition between the Son of Man, who has the fullness of life, and other men, those who don't aim at it. Those are the ones who reject him and will kill him "*but when he has been killed, he will rise three days later*".

It's a very dramatic and serious teaching. He's not using parables. But the evangelist specifies "*But they did not understand this statement*".

We already saw that in the episode of the healing of the deaf that he was not facing physical problems, but inner ones – “there is none so deaf as those who will not hear”. A nationalist ideology, the idea of success is so strong as to prevent them from understanding the words of Jesus, which are very clear, instead.

“And they were afraid to ask him”. They were afraid of Jesus confirming what they already understood, but didn’t accept. It’s not that they didn’t understand what Jesus had said; they didn’t accept it.

“They came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house” – it’s a Palestinian house – *“he began to question them”*. They didn’t want to question him, so Jesus did. *“What were you discussing on the way?”* Well, the indication “on the way” is symptomatic; “on the way” is the place of a fruitless sowing. Seed falls on the way, but birds come and take it. Jesus, in his explanation of these images, said that Satan made the Word useless. Satan, in this Gospel, represents power and success.

“But they kept silent”. They were silent because they were feeling guilty, knowing they did something Jesus wouldn’t approve. *“For on the way they had discussed with one another”* – note that Jesus (literally from Greek) asked them what they were talking about, while they were discussing animatedly - *“which of them was the greatest”*, the most important.

This is the pang of disciples, the idea of greatness, their ambition of being the most important.

“Sitting down”, he sits down as the one who teaches, *“he called the twelve”*. It sounds strange; Palestinian houses were small, why had Jesus to call them? The evangelist could have written: ‘Jesus said...’. No, Jesus had to call them. Why? The twelve follow him, but are not with him, they’re not inwardly next to him. Maybe they’re physically near, but their mind is far.

Jesus is the kind of God who serves men. Jesus said that the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve; they only worry about commanding. That’s why Jesus had to call them; they’re too far from him.

“And said to them” – they were discussing about which of them was the greatest, and Jesus rejects this, but he accepts that among Christians ‘a first’ be present, that is the nearest to him – *“if anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all”*. In a Christian community no ideas of greatness; no one is the most important, the greatest, but there might be someone who is the nearest to Jesus. Who are they? Those who serve others. Those who, voluntarily, devote their life to others’ welfare.

While the twelve had to be called by Jesus, he took a child. He was the closest individual. We might ask ourselves why he was in the house with disciples. The word used by the evangelist indicates a kind of boy who is the less important in society, we might well translate it with ‘helper’.

This boy is the image of the true follower of Jesus, the one who is the last of all and servant of all.

“He set him before them” – literally (from Greek) he put him amidst them; that is Jesus’ place. But the Lord puts this boy at his place because he’s the one who serves others. *“Taking him in his arms”*, Jesus identifies with him, with the least of society.

“He said to them «whoever receives one child like this – he means one like him, a ‘helper’ not any boy, meaning the image of a disciple who devotes himself to serve others – “in my name receives me; and whoever receives me does not receive me, but him who sent me”.

Jesus assures that through the one who, voluntarily, devotes himself to others, the presence of Jesus is revealed and the presence of Jesus reveals the one of God.

The individual who serves others is the only true sanctuary from which the love of God spreads.