

I LENT – February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015

**JESUS, TEMPTED BY SATAN, WAS SERVED BY ANGELS – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Mk 1.12-15**

***At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among the wild animals, and the angels took care of him.***

***After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"***

The simplicity of the Mark's description of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is surprising. Mark writes: *"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan"* According to Mark, Jesus does not pray or fast. Mark does not even list the number of the temptations as both Matthew and Luke do in their gospels. What is the evangelist trying to tell us?

"Immediately" connects to the temptation in the episode of the baptism, when Jesus received the Holy Spirit, being God's love. Jesus' reply to the love of the father is love for humanity that He has come to liberate. This Spirit drives Him, the Word has an imaginative force, of almost violence towards Jesus. It drives Him into the wilderness for forty days. The wilderness and the forty days recall the forty years that the people of Israel remained in the desert before entering the Promised Land.

So, the evangelist is trying to tell us that all of Jesus' life has been a journey, across the desert towards the fullness of the liberation. What the evangelist is describing to us is not the episode of Jesus' life, but a synthesis of His whole existence.

Well in this desert for forty days He was tempted by Satan. It is the first time, in this gospel that the word "Satan" appears, to reappear in chapter 8, 33 said by Jesus towards one of His disciples, Simon Peter, that Jesus will call "Satan" "Get behind me, Satan!...."

It is the first and last time that Satan appears. In the episode in which Jesus refuses Peter and calls him Satan, Peter does not accept Jesus' death, he wants power for Jesus. Satan reappears in the parable of the sower in the image of the birds that gather the seeds as soon as they are sown and the evangelist indicates that it is the power.

Who has the ideology of power is resistant and hostile to Jesus' announcement. Then it will reappear in the controversy when Jesus will declare, "a Satan that is divided against himself is destined to end"

So Satan appears very few times. But that which the evangelist helps us to understand, the actions of this Satan and his significance is above all the verb "to tempt, to test" which will appear another three times in this gospel, on the behalf of who we would have suspected, the Pharisees.

These people very pious, very devote and observant of every detail of the laws, the evangelist identifies them as devils, as instruments of Satan, because they are the ones that tempt Jesus, and all the three times that they tempt Jesus they are the flag bearers of division. Satan, the devil, is he that divides. Therefore, the Pharisees that believe to be nearest to God are in reality instruments of the devil for dividing.

The first time that the verb "to tempt or to test" appears is when Jesus divided the bread not only in the land of Israel but also in the land of the gentiles, to indicate that God's love is for all humanity, This was unacceptable. The evangelist writes in chapter 8, 11 "*The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him*".

That which Jesus is doing is absurd, God's love for the gentiles! They want a sign on God's behalf. They want to divide God from the gentiles, but God's love is for all humanity. The turning point will be "*And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"*" They want to divide the man from the woman.

A man has a superiority of the rights that a woman does not have. And Jesus refers to the plan of the creation and confirms the unity between man and woman and the perfect equality. Finally the third time, will be when Jesus will say "*Why does this generation seek a sign?" (Mark 8, 12)* They have asked is it lawful or not to pay taxes, Caesar's tax and Jesus does not fall into their trap and will say that Caesar and the Pharisees have taken the place of God.

The Pharisees have divided God from the people. And Jesus will say "*..render to... God the things that are God's.*" that is render the things to his people. Therefore the Pharisees, these spiritual leaders, these representatives of spirituality, the most saintly, that the people looked to with admiration, the evangelist from the being of his gospel, denounces them as instruments of the devil. The devil is he who divides, creates the phenomenon of division.