

**YOU ARE THE CHRIST OF GOD. THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS  
- Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Lk 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 sharing of loaves and fish was a clearly messianic gesture. The new Messiah was thought to repeat the same gestures of the first one, the first emperor, that is Moses.

As Moses brought down manna from heaven, so the Messiah was to repeat something similar. So let's see the reaction both of disciples and crowds when facing this sharing.

Luke writes that "*He was praying alone*", highlighting his loneliness. Jesus was seen as praying in the most important and difficult moments of his life. Here it is clear that prayer is for his disciples as they don't understand him at all.

"*The disciples were with him*". The disciples don't join Jesus in his prayer as they accompany him but in fact do not follow him. "*The disciples were with him*", and Jesus takes the initiative and addresses them this question: "*«Who do the crowds say that I am?»*"

Jesus had sent them to preach the kingdom of God, now we see the outcome of this preaching, what the crowds had understood.

The result is disappointing. *“They answered, «John the Baptist»*”, but John the Baptist already died; it was Herod who was obsessed with the idea that John the Baptist was risen. *“«Others say, Elijah»”*, Elijah was the warlike zealous prophet who had to come before the Messiah. What unites both characters is a religious image of God, that of a dark one, an executioner, the one who punishes.

*“«And others, one of the prophets of old»”*. Due to the negative preaching of disciples, people didn't understand the news brought by Jesus. He'd sent them to speak of God's kingdom, but they did not understand. Then Jesus takes the initiative and asks them, *“«But who do you say that I am?»”* That is “at least you know who I am?”

*“And Peter answered”*, he's the disciple whose name is Simon. When the evangelist needs to highlight his opposition or contradiction to Jesus, he mentions him only with his negative nickname. Therefore we already know that Simon's answer is not correct.

*“But Peter answered, «The Christ of God»”*. Jesus had been announced by angels to shepherds as 'Christ the Lord'. What is the difference? The Christ, with the definite article in Greek, means someone who is already known. So Peter answers “You're The Christ of God”, meaning the son of David, the one expected by tradition, the king, the Messiah who would inaugurate the kingdom of Israel through violence.

That Peter's reply was not correct is being seen through Jesus' reaction. *“And he strictly charged”*, the evangelist uses here the same verb as the one utilized for the possessed in order to liberate them from their fanatical ideology. What Peter said is not in line with Jesus, who treats him as a possessed. The verb is “to rebuke”. He doesn't only rebuke his disciples, but the entire group who agrees with what Peter said.

*“And commanded them to tell this to no one”*, for Jesus is not the Christ awaited by tradition. Jesus is the Messiah, but he is in a completely new way. He will never go and hold power or take away life, but giving his own life. So Jesus, patiently, explains again *“«The Son of Man»”*, Peter said Jesus was The Christ of God, Jesus speaks of The Son of Man, instead. Son of Man is the one who has a divine status.

Jesus is the Son of God for he represents God in his human condition, and he is The son of Man as he represents man in his divine status. *“«The Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected...»”* and here the evangelist is introducing the Sanhedrin, with by 71 members, formed by *“«the elders»”, the economic power, “«chief priests and scribes»”*, the official theologians.

*“«Be killed»”*, the religious institution is the enemy of God's plan for mankind, that is man becoming his son, getting his divine status; religious authorities feel this as an intolerable crime, so *“«be killed and on the third day be raised»”*.

Number three indicates what is complete and definitive. And here comes Jesus' warning to his disciples who accompany him but do not follow him. "*«If ...»*", this is a proposal, a suggestion, "*«... anyone would come after me ...»*", the message is addressed to Peter and to disciples, who are not following Jesus, but opposing him, "*«... let him deny himself...»*", that is giving up the ideals of triumph and nationalism, and literally "*«...take up his cross»*".

What does this mean? When the offender was sentenced to death by crucifixion, he had to raise himself the horizontal scaffold, and then, from the seat of the court, had to pass through two wings of crowd whose religious obligation was to insult him and beat him up; a complete loneliness.

Jesus is not talking about the death on the cross, he says actually, "*«take up his cross daily»*", he's referring to the loneliness he's experiencing – let's bear in mind that at the beginning of this passage Jesus was completely alone – which is the one of the followers of God's plan, that will be rejected by those who were supposed to receive it.

Thus Jesus is not giving the image of the cross as a pain or suffering, as it is said nowadays, but as an acceptance of loss of reputation that inevitably leads to utter solitude. "*«And follow me»*", the message of Jesus is addressed to his disciples.

And here comes the final "*«Whoever would save his life»*", that is whoever wants to be realized, "*«will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it»*", according to Jesus this doesn't mean losing, but whoever wants to be realized through success or power meets the disaster. Whoever, following Jesus, will offer his life for others, will not lose it, but find it fully again, instead.