

PALM SUNDAY– 24th March 2013

BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!– Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 19,28-40

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them.

And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

Even among the prophets some have had more success than others. But inside the same book of the prophets, there are certain parts that have been valued, enhanced, others that have been hidden or buried. This is the case of the prophet Zachariah. In the book of this prophet, a part of Chapter 9 has been abandoned, hidden because it went against the desire for revenge of the people of Israel against the gentiles, against the rulers.

What did Zachariah say – in fact the Lord – in this phrase? He invited Jerusalem to exult. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a*

colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zachariah 9,9-10) The royal mounts were the mule or the horse. A king did not ride on a donkey. In equestrian statues the rider is never seen on a donkey. Here is the great novelty: the Messiah announced by the prophet Zachariah did not have the appearance of a warrior, but rode the mount of normal people, modest people.

At that time everyone had a donkey as a means of travel, therefore *He will be one like us*. But it is interesting how he continues, *I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem*. An expression of strength, of power. *And the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations*; This is the Messiah announced by the prophet Zachariah. But this prophesy went against the nationalistic ideals of the people so it was forgotten.

And this is the prophesy that Jesus frees. This is the meaning of the reading this Palm Sunday in Luke's Gospel ch. 19, 28-40 and it is the contents of Jesus' speech that says: " *Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here.*"

What does it mean? Jesus undoes the prophesy that had remained because no one was interested in a king like that. And Jesus makes His entrance to Jerusalem presenting Himself as the Messiah prophesized by Zachariah. Therefore as anyone that does not stand out for his splendor – riding on a donkey, a symbol of gentleness _ and above all, as it was written in the second part of the prophet Zachariah, absolutely refusing violence.

What was the reaction for Jesus' announcement ? The evangelist writes that they lead the donkey to Jesus and, *"..throwing their cloaks on the colt,"* a cloak in the Jewish symbolism indicates the person, therefore there were some that participated to this image of this king of peace, to this modest king. While others, *"..spread their cloaks on the road."* It was a sign of submission that one did for a king.

So the others still had not understood this king that instead of being served puts himself at service, and therefore puts himself in a submissive attitude. It will be this ambiguity on the behalf of the disciples that will bring them to misunderstand Jesus' death and even to misunderstand His message. Even after the resurrection, although Jesus had proclaimed the kingdom of God, there will be some who will ask: " But the kingdom of Israel?"

So they are coming down the mount of olives, the crowd of disciples rejoice following Jesus, they sing psalm 119, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"* and Luke adds the announcement that the angels made to the shepherds. *"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* A God that wants happiness for mankind. So this exultation for the king that comes in the name of the Lord becomes joined to a king that desires for his subject, and for the happiness of his subjects will be ready to die.

All is well until the Pharisees, that have mixed in with the crowd and are pious people, zealous, that are always spying on any appearance of freedom, of autonomy on the behalf of the people, they will say: *"Teacher, rebuke your disciples."* the verb 'rebuke' is the same as that was used for those possessed, therefore for them it is as if the disciples were possessed with a demonic ideology, acclaiming a Messiah of peace. That was the will of God, a Messiah messenger of

peace, for the Pharisees, scrupulous observers of the divine laws, it is actually a demonic idea and therefore to be exorcised.

So , “... *rebuke your disciples.*” But Jesus replies “*I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.*” Jesus is king and there is nothing that will contradict him. The evangelist has inserted this episode after the parable of the talents where Jesus had told of a king not wanted by a great part of his people.

What is this part of the people that do not want Jesus as king? They are the Pharisees. The people that are thought to be the nearest to God, the more in tune with God, when God wants to realize his plans, they are in fact the people that impede and contradict him.