

**JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM - Biblical
Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Luke 23,35-43

And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him,[d] saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

There are no impossible or irremediable situations. Even for those human events that seem most disparate without hope, there is the certainty of the love of God, as writes St. Paul in the letters to the Romans; “God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.” (Romans 11, 32)

From heaven, according to the Book of Genesis, a sinner was thrown out, so the image is of a God that punishes sinners. Well in Luke's Gospel the first person to enter into heaven with Jesus will be an anonymous rogue, a thief, and from that moment, heaven's doors, meaning salvation, will remain open for all those that accept Jesus as king, He who takes care of them, whatever their past, also repentance at the last minute.

Why? Jesus as He said Himself, has come to search and to save those who were lost. And this evangelist, Luke demonstrates this at the beginning of his Gospel. At the beginning, when the shepherds, that were considered sinners, that feared the wrath of God, are not surrounded with the wrath of God the reduces them to ashes, but the glory of God, the light of God, and they

hear an angelic chorus announcing, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”* (Luke 2, 14). God’s love is for all humanity. Up to the last pages of the Gospel Jesus assures the thief, crucified with Him that he will enter into heaven without doing any penance, without having repented, without having to stay a while in purgatory, Jesus says to him, *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”* (Luke 23,43)

The early church found itself ill at ease with this episode of this unconditioned love, because it conflicted with its rigor. So it was decided to water it down a bit. So the announcement of the angels to the shepherds *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”* therefore a love for all, was changed into *“.. among those with whom he is pleased!”* The category of gift expressed by the evangelist was immediately transformed into the category of merit, that merit that Jesus had come to eliminate.

The good news is this: Jesus presents a Father that is kind to the ungrateful and wicked, to which he gives his love not for the merits of man, but for their needs, not for their virtue, but for their necessities, but this was intolerable for the early church, so the expression *“...on earth peace, good will toward men!”* gets transformed into *“.. among those with whom he is pleased!”*, to those that deserve it.

Also the final episode, that Jesus had assured this delinquent a place in heaven, did not go down well. So they tried to play down a little this image that had created the figure of a good thief, but nothing in these verses talks of the goodness of this thief. So a name was invented and created - Dismas, Saint Dismas, with even a day to celebrate him, 25th March, the feast of Saint Dismas, the protector of thieves – hopefully at least repentant - the dying and gravediggers.

Let’s see this splendid page of Luke where the evangelist does not describe Jesus’ failure, this man nailed to a cross, but the triumph of love. Jesus had everyone against Him. The people, the leaders, soldiers and even the criminals crucified with Him. And that which is common to these characters is the renewal of the devil’s temptations in the desert.

In the desert, the devil had said to Jesus: *“ If you are the son of God, use your capacity to save yourself”*. Jesus had refused, and the devil said he would return at the right moment. Here he is. Jesus is weak, crucified with everyone against Him and they even mock Him and the soldiers despise Him, and even one of the criminals is against Him and all say: *“...save yourself!”*

They have not understood that Jesus had not come to save Himself, but to save others. In all this the person furthest from God, a sinner, thief, and a delinquent, crucified with Him, turns to Jesus – with an undoubtedly unashamed faith – and says, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*

So the person that is thought to be the furthest from God, excluded by God, a person that must be punished by God, sees in Jesus a hope also for himself. But he does not dare much, only to be remembered. But Jesus goes further than expected, than the desires and the hopes of mankind and replies : *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Jesus will not remember this thief when He will be in heaven, but guarantees that this day he will be with Him in heaven. It is the only time that Jesus says the word "heaven" When he speaks of the eternal life he uses other words; the only time is to oppose the theology expressed in Book of Genesis when God punishes a sinner and throws him from heaven. With Jesus it is the contrary : the sinner actually enters with Him in heaven.

Why? Because the theology of Luke, the expression of Jesus' good news; God does not look at the merits of the people, but at their needs, not their virtue, but their necessities, Jesus has come to search and save those that were lost. Therefore there are no impossible and desperate situations, but salvation is for all those that accept Jesus as their liberator and as their king.