

JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM - Biblical Commentary by Father 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, 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."***

The episode of the temptation in the desert finished with these words: *"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time."* (Luke 4,13); and now it is the opportune time: a moment of Jesus' great weakness. Jesus is crucified and is already in agony, on the cross, and in this moment of maximum weakness again the temptation of power presents itself. Let's read what Luke the evangelist writes, in chapter 23.35-43; Jesus whose only mission had been that of bringing life, to save the people had already pronounced the words to the Father, a prayer of forgiveness: Father forgive them for they know not what they do; and the evangelist writes: *"And the people stood by, watching.."*

These people that had followed him, this crowd that were fascinated with his message now are subject to the decision of the leaders, they do not take any action, there stand by watching. In fact the leaders mock him; without the minimum sense of humanity, or compassion. After all Jesus, even if in their eyes is guilty, he is a man in agony on the cross, this terrible torture, well they are heartless, they mock him saying: he saved others... and here is an echo of what Jesus said in the episode of the Synagogue in Nazareth when he said: *"Physician, heal yourself."* (Luke 4,23) *"He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"* ... here the temptation returns.

This phrase: *"..if he is the Christ of God,"* will be repeated three times and we know that three times in the Jewish symbolic numerical system means that which is complete, so the devil returns with force, with his temptations at Jesus' most weakest moment. So the leaders mock him, they do not have the minimum compassion and say if he saved others, he can save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the chosen one. The chosen one who is abandoned.

One of the proofs that Jesus was not the Messiah, the Christ of Israel, is that the Messiah could not die.

Even the soldiers, they are Roman soldiers, mock him, they make play of him, a joke, they go to him and offer him vinegar. While wine is the image of love, its opposite vinegar is the image of hatred. There is

psalm 69, 21 that says: "...for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink." And they said "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" here is the temptation again.

But Jesus came to save the lost, Jesus did not come to save himself, but to save others and the evangelist comments: "There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." It is a very derisive inscription, and is the only known inscription of Jesus in his life, to mock him. This is the King of the Jews therefore it is an inscription that indicates great contempt, towards this population that the Romans have suppressed; but here is where the evangelist wants to take us; "One of the criminals.." The cross was an instrument of torture reserved for the dregs of society, to the most vicious criminals, so to end up on the cross meant that something tremendous had been done. "One of the criminals.." who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" And here for the third time is the temptation "Save yourself" It is the devil's temptation, to use the power to save himself.

But Jesus does not use his strength of love for himself, but for others "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;" So this individual crucified with Jesus is a criminal. "... but this man has done nothing wrong." Here this bandit crucified with Jesus recognises Jesus' reality, that reality that Peter said in the Acts of the Apostles "Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." (Acts 10,38)

So this criminal recognises that Jesus is innocent, and he turns to Jesus and asks him: "Jesus, remember" This verb "to remember" is part of the Jewish language used in prayer, to remember means to ask God to intervene in favour of one who prays, so it is a request; "...remember me when you come into your kingdom." or better according to a variant of this verse; when you come into your Kingdom, that is, when you come as King remembered me.

Well, Jesus' reply surprises everyone, all the listeners, readers of that time, and surprises even us, because I repeat: it is not that the story tries to lighten this episode of the two good thieves. This is a delinquent, a criminal, and as he justly said merits this tremendous punishment. Well Jesus' reply: "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." Whilst the thief had asked to be "remembered" when Jesus enters his kingdom, not immediately, Jesus' reply is immediate: today; not tomorrow, not in time, but today, immediately, "...today you will be with me in paradise."

It is the only time that Paradise appears in Luke's gospel, Jesus when he must speak of life that continues after death speaks of eternal life, indestructible life, he never uses the word paradise. Paradise in a Persian word which means literally "garden", it was that intermediate place where souls waited for the resurrection.

Why does Jesus speak of paradise? The evangelist wants to compare Jesus' actions with those described in the book of Genesis. In the book of Genesis, God drives out the sinner from Paradise; with Jesus the first to enter with him in Paradise is none other than a sinner.

What the evangelist wants to say is that what has been said throughout his gospel, the love of God is not aimed at people for their merits, but for their needs. What merit has this bandit to enter paradise? He does not have any merit, but he needs to go, the love of God looks at the needs of people. For the power of his love, cases impossible do not exist for Jesus, that the love of God or love of Jesus cannot win.