

XXI ORDINARY TIME – August 25th, 2013

THEY WILL COME FROM EAST AND WEST AND RECLINE AT TABLE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 13.22-30

At that time Jesus went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?"

And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

Jesus overturns the common doctrine according to which Israel is saved and pagans are not and announces a change of values. Let's see chapt 13 of Luk'es Gospel from verse 22 to 30 and learn here Jesus teaching.

"Jesus went on his way through towns and villages", Jesus proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God, "teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem". Jesus is now willing to go to Jerusalem to collide with those in power who had manipulated and disfigured the image of God for their own interest.

“Someone said to him, «Will those who are saved be few?». Salvation was considered a privilege of Israel, the chosen people, to the detriment of pagans. So this individual asks how many will be saved.

But Jesus doesn't answer about how many will be saved, but who are those that will be. “*And he said to them, «Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able»*”.

Here the evangelist does not see Jesus suggesting a model of self-denial ascetic or sacrifices. Whereas many will fail entering this narrow door it is not because it is difficult to pass through, at the cost of some kind of sacrifices or mortifications, but just because it is closed.

Wrong choices made in life will prevent access to this fullness of life. And that's what the evangelist wants to say. Passing through this door is not difficult, but finding it is; and if many will not succeed it will be because it is closed.

As a matter of fact Jesus says, “*«When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us!’»*”.

So they know the Lord, they know Jesus and he will reply, “*«I do not know where you come from»*”, that is “I don't know you”. So they begin to claim an exclusive relationship they had with Jesus, “*«We ate and drunk in your presence»*”, an allusion to the Eucharist, “*«and you taught in our streets»*”, the reception of his message, but they claim an exclusive relationship with Jesus by listing actions addressed to God and never to others.

That's why Jesus said to them, “*But he will say, «I tell you, I do not know where you come from»*”, that is, “I don't know you”. Jesus knows those who put their lives at others' disposal, serving them. He does not care about what is done to him, but only about what is done to others.

For this same reason, by quoting Psalm 6 verse 8, he says, “*«Depart from me, all you workers of evil!»*” So, those who, despite having eaten and drunk together with Jesus – allusion to the Eucharist – having heard his teachings not translating them into positive actions for others, the Lord doesn't know them.

Eating Jesus, who is bread, is not enough then; one has to turn himself into bread for others.

And Jesus says, “*«In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth»*”, a typical expression indicating failure, the failure of one's own existence, “*«When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out»*”.

They thought they had the privilege of being the chosen people and so admitted into this kingdom of God, but just for this same attitude they will be thrown out. Not only that! While the elected are driven out, those who were cast out will be the chosen ones. As a matter of fact Jesus concludes, “*«And people will come from east and west, and from north and south»*”, that is pagan world, “*«and recline at table in the kingdom of God»*”.

Then Jesus subverts the common doctrine according to which Israel was saved and pagans were not, and the kingdom of God is open to all those who devote their lives in serving others. So Jesus doesn't not distinguish pagans or other categories, but his call for the good news is for everyone.

And the conclusion, "*«And behold, some are last»*", that is those who were excluded, "*«who will be first, and some are first»*", that is the elected,"*« who will be last»*".

Then the evangelist will go on, "*At that very hour some Pharisees came*", well some of those first who became last approach Jesus.