

II SUNDAY OF LENT- 25 th February 2018

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi

Mark 9,2-10

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant.

In last Sunday's gospel, the first Sunday of Lent, the reading presented us with the beginning of Mark's gospel with the episode of Jesus' temptation in the desert and Mark wrote that Jesus remained there for forty days tempted by Satan. The evangelist does not intend to present the episode of Jesus' life, but resumes and anticipates all Jesus' existence. Number forty indicates a generation, therefore for all Jesus' life he has been tempted by Satan. But who is this Satan? Satan in this gospel is not an external agent, spiritual, God's enemy, enemy of mankind, but he is a tempter that is part of Jesus' own circle of disciples. In chapter eight, when for the first time these disciples, that have not understood whom they are following, are sure they are following the triumphant Messiah, the son of David, the one who by force will conquer power and inaugurate the kingdom of Israel. They do not know that Jesus is not the son of David, but the son of God, he who with love goes to inaugurate the kingdom of God. That is the universal love for all people and this unfortunately will bring opposition and the persecution of the highest religious institutions that will eventually kill him. So Jesus for the first time announces that he will be killed.

Well, Simon Peter turns on Jesus and scolds him, just as it used to be with the demons, rebuking him for this because the Messiah cannot die. Simon wants Jesus to conquer the power. Well, in the dramatic episode before Jesus turns to the disciple saying "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Mark 8, 33) This is who Satan is: he who opposes God's design of love for humanity.

So, in this episode of the second Sunday of Lent there is the episode of the transfiguration closely related to what we have just seen. Let's see what the evangelist writes.. "*After six days.*" The number is important the sixth day is the day of the creation of man, it is the day in which God on Sinai manifests his glory. Jesus manifests himself in the full realization of God's design for humanity

“Jesus took..” and takes the three disciples to which he had given negative nicknames. Simon was given the name of *“Peter,”* meaning “stone” headstrong and stubborn, who would always be in opposition. And then the two disciples *“James and John”* fanatics, exalted, arrogant, and ambitious, who were called the “sons of thunder”. They will, for their ambition in wanting the first places in Jesus’ reign and risk breaking up the community.

“.....and led them up a high mountain..” the mountain indicates the divine condition, and there *“..there he was transfigured before them,”* Jesus shows that the passage through death is not destruction, as they had thought and opposed the death of Jesus, but the full realization of the person. The evangelist writes, it may seem naive, *“...whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.”* What does this mean? That this condition is not the result of human effort, but the effect of divine action. So death is not a destruction, but an empowerment of the person.

Well, at this moment *“..there appeared...”*, writes the evangelist *“Elijah with Moses;”* who are these two? Moses as we know is the great lawmaker, that of the alliance between God and his people, and Elijah is the prophet that with violence imposed obedience to this alliance. These have nothing to do with Jesus’ disciples. In fact *“..they were talking to Jesus.”*

And here again is Simon, who has the nickname of Peter, headstrong and stubborn continues in the satanic tempter. What happens? *“And Peter said to Jesus, “Master,...”* it is strange that he calls Jesus master. In this gospel two traitors call Jesus master, Judah and Peter. Master means he who teaches according to tradition, he who teaches the observance of the laws. He continues *“.. it is well that we are here; let us make three shelters ,...”* Why three shelters? What is the temptation? There is a feast in the Jewish world and there still is to this day, the feast of the tents (shelters) that remembers the old liberation from the slavery in Egypt and for a week one lives in a tent. Well, it was believed that the Messiah, the new liberator, would manifest himself on the day in which the old liberation was celebrated. Then the role of Peter as Satan’s tempter says to Jesus: this is the Messiah that I want, which must manifest himself.

And says *“..let us make three shelters one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah”* Jesus is not in the middle, there is Moses. When there are three people, the most important is always placed in the middle. Well for Peter Jesus is not in the middle. The temptation that Peter is doing to Jesus is that Jesus is the Messiah that he wants, the Messiah according to the laws of Moses imposing with violence as the prophet Elijah had done.

At the moment that the satanic tempter, Peter, continues to tempt Jesus *“..a cloud appeared..”* it is God’s presence, *“..a voice came from the cloud:”* the voice of God *“This is my Son, whom I love”*. Meaning he that is like God, then *“Listen to him!”* do not listen neither to the law of Moses, nor Elijah, nor the prophets, but only to my son. What does this mean? All that which is written in the law and in the prophets that coincides with the teaching and the life of Jesus naturally must be listened to, but everything else, must be left out.

Well, what is the reaction of these disciples? It is dismay. *“Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus”*. They are still looking for their points of reference, they are still looking for tradition, they are still searching for Moses and Elijah and in reality there is only Jesus. And this disappointment of Jesus who distances himself from the law, distances himself from violence, will be what will later lead Peter, unfortunately, to deny completely his teacher.