

**HE SET HIS FACE TO GO TO JERUSALEM. "I WILL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO"- Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Luke 9,51-62***

***When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.***

***As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."***

Jesus' disciples accompany him but they do not follow him. That is even if they are near him physically, they are distant because they continue with the idea that the Messiah is a conqueror and triumphant. In chapter 9, 51 of Luke's gospel there is an important passage that unfortunately the translation is inaccurate and inappropriate. In fact, if we read this Gospel it is written that..

*"When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him,"* Then we find him in a Samaritan village that does not welcome him. Why? Let's try to literally translate the text and see that this inconsistency actually is not.

*"When the days drew near for him to be taken up,"* so Jesus is presented by the evangelist as already on his way towards the city of the prophets, where they will kill him. And here the evangelist does not say "he made a firm decision" but writes *"..he set his face to go to Jerusalem."* This is an expression that also appears in the Old Testament that means going against someone.

So this expression that the evangelist uses: *".. he set his face to go to Jerusalem,"* means that Jesus goes against Jerusalem, he goes to contest this city that pretends to represent God but in reality it was the killer of all the prophets sent by God.

But the disciples do not understand. *"And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans,.. ".... knowing the rivalry and enmity that there was between the Samaritans and the Jews, they hated one another, it was a centuries-old enmity. "..to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem"* But they do not say how Jesus was towards Jerusalem, they say that Jesus went to Jerusalem, but the Samaritans thought that, being thought of as the Messiah, he went to Jerusalem to take power and then to conquer the gentiles and also the Samaritans.

This is why they do not receive him. It was the disciples that had not understood Jesus' intentions. And who had not understood can be seen in the reactions of two disciples, the most fanatic, James and John, that Mark in his gospel calls "the sons of thunder" for their authoritarian character, and they ask: *"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"* It refers to the Prophet Elijah that in an episode in Samaria, burnt the emissaries and soldiers who had left him, fifty at a time.

Therefore they think that Jesus is a kind of Elijah, a man that, with violence, respects God 's laws and the will of God. But Jesus *".. turned and rebuked them."* exactly as he had with the demons.

*"And they went on to another village."* Still in Samaria. Therefore the misunderstanding, the hostility of the Samaritans is because of the misunderstanding on the behalf of the disciples. And also in Samaria there are three individuals – one of these is directly invited by Jesus - that ask to follow him. Number three is not only a number and indicates totality, fullness. So they are the rules for following Jesus, the same for all. *"..someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus.. "* gives the conditions, makes it clear: *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests,.. "* Foxes and birds are the most insignificant of animals, *"but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

So Jesus is saying: "Look out! You want to follow me? Do not think of honour, career or success. But worse than the most useless and insignificant animals, I have not even a home, no place to lay my head." In the middle the evangelist in fact presents an individual that Jesus invites to follow him.

*Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

*To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus' reply may seem brutal " "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of*

*God.*” Jesus’ reply is not brutal. The father represents the past. Burying the father means to hold in high esteem and great respect for the past.

Jesus no, Jesus asks for a radical break with the past. The new wine cannot be put into old wineskins, therefore “ Let the people live in the past – the dead – bury their own dead. You go and announce the novelty”

And then the third. *“I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”* In the Bible there was a known episode of Elijah who allowed Elisha to go and take leave of her own family. Jesus no.

The urgency of the Kingdom of God does not allow nostalgia for the past, but needs a radical break. *Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

These words of Jesus does not mean to have a distant and inhumane relationship with their family, nothing of the sort, but that the announcing of the good news, the Kingdom of God, is so important that you cannot have any nostalgia for what appears only as the past.