

STAY AWAKE, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW ON WHAT DAY YOUR LORD IS COMING – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 24,37-44

“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

The reading for the first Sunday of Advent, is not an easy one and to understand it, it must be placed in its context, that is chapter 24, the beginning of Jesus' last discourse to his disciples before being arrested.

This chapter begins with Jesus, who had left the temple and in front of the disciples, that had admired the splendour, says: *“...there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”* Why does he say this?

There was the story of the widow who offered all she had to the temple treasury. So for Jesus, an institution that, other than help the weak, were maintained by the weak and exploited the weak in the name of God, had no right to exist.

For this Jesus declared the end of all this: *“...there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down”*

But this is only the beginning of an upheaval, of a change that will take place in history and humanity. And Jesus goes on to say, using the prophetic language, that the sun will not give of her splendour. The sun in that culture represented the pagan gods. Jesus, with this action of change for humanity, asks the collaboration of his disciples. The proclamation of the gospel of the true God will bring an end to false gods, and Jesus says, the stars will begin to fall.

What are these stars?

The stars were the representatives of kings, of the powerful, of the emperors, that based on this divinity their power. When the announcement of the gospel darkens this divinity, here is when these kings, princes, one after another will fall. So it is the beginning of a change of humanity and, Jesus says, *“ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man,”* (Matthew 24,30)

What is this son of man? It is the title that appears in the gospels, together with the son of God and always said by Jesus.

The words come from the Book of Daniel, in chapter 7, where the prophet, in a dream, sees four beasts coming out of the Mediterranean sea. The beasts represent the political power, known for their ferocity, one more brutal than the other. The first beast represents the 'Babylonian empire, then that of the Medes and the Persians. The fourth is so horrendous that the prophet does not even know how to describe it, and represents Alexander the Great.

Well, God will destroy this inhuman political power, and give his power to the son of man, meaning mankind. Meaning, God's action for mankind is to eliminate everything that is inhuman, for the triumph of humanity.

So, when Jesus speaks of himself as the son of man, what does it mean?

Jesus represents the son of God, he manifests God in his human condition, but he is the son of man, as he represents man in his divine condition. And this divine condition is not a privilege exclusive to Jesus, but is an offer to all those that welcome him and that want to follow him.

In the announcement of the passion, Jesus will say that all the hate, resentment, ferocity of the religious institution will not be against the Christ, the Messiah, because the Messiah is one, and once eliminated, the institution will be at ease. But it will be against the son of man, and this is dangerous, because it is not only Jesus, but all those who follow him. Remember that the order to arrest was not only Jesus but for all his disciples.

The doctrine is dangerous.

So Jesus, when he made the announcement of the passion, says that the son of man that will be condemned, will be killed, but then he will rise again.

This offer of the divine condition is not Jesus' privilege, but an offer to all those that follow him. But, Jesus says, to be careful, and here refers to the days of Noah. What does Jesus say? *".. in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking,"* all normal actions. But one has to be careful that this offer of the fullness of life does not become a distraction from what is the daily routine. The fact of the flood was not the end of the world, but the beginning of a new humanity.

Jesus has need of collaboration so that this new humanity can begin.

Jesus is the son of man, the person fully and completely human, it is the humanization of the society. The powers, all those that dominate, are inhuman, so Jesus' actions are the humanization of this humanity. For this, as for him, will not be without pain.

This is why Jesus warns his disciples; be vigilant and watchful. It is the same invitation that he will give to his disciples, at the moment of the agony of Gethsemane, because it is clear that the powers will not stand by seeing their system erode, and then they will let loose with ferocity, there will be persecution as for Jesus.

But Jesus assure them: God is among those who persecute and who is persecuted is always on the side of the persecuted.

And the evangelist encloses in this teaching what he had announced with the Beatitudes: those who choose to collaborate with Jesus in the Kingdom of God, even if the persecution is unleashed, well, this will be a blessing, which will confirm that God is on their side.