

II LENT– 28th February 2021

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON.... – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 9,2-10

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean.

Mark the Evangelist in the temptations of Jesus in the desert by Satan did not intend to present an episode in the life of the Lord, but all of his life. And in the course of the Gospel the evangelist will reveal who is this Satan. . When Jesus announces for the first time to his disciples that he does not go to Jerusalem to seize power, but to be killed by power, there is the violent and reckless reaction, and one of the disciples, Simon, to whom Jesus put a negative nickname, indicating his stubbornness, Peter (Pietro), hard like a rock or stone, grabs him and says to this disciple terrible words calling him "Satan". He does not ask him to leave, but says “ *Get behind me Satan!*” Simone, nicknamed Pieter for his stubbornness, that will then lead to betraying Jesus, so he is identified as the tempting Satan by Jesus and the evangelist.

But it is not for nothing that he is called Peter, here he still continues to tempt Jesus and, immediately after this confrontation of Jesus with his disciples, who do not accept the fact that the Messiah can die, Jesus shows them what is the condition of man who goes through death. It's today's reading, known as the episode of the transfiguration, Mark's Gospel, chapter 9. Which begins with a very important indication “ *And after six days...* ” The sixth day recalls the day of the creation of man; so the evangelist presenting to us what is the man created by God: the man who does not succumb with death, but who begins a new luminous existence with death. “ *And after six days Jesus took with him...* ” and takes with him the three most difficult disciples to whom he has put a negative nickname that indicates their character: Simon, who is called Peter, the stubborn one, and then James and John, who defined in Aramaic "boanerges" that is "the sons of thunder", for their violence, and ambition, who will then risk ruining and dividing the group.

“*..and led them up a high mountain..*” that indicates a divine condition “*And he was transfigured before them...*”, Jesus shows what the condition of man is who passes through death. Death just doesn't destroy the individual, but frees all his energies and empowers him. For this the evangelist uses an expression that may seem trivial, he says “*and his clothes became radiant, intensely white,*

as no one on earth could bleach them.” Which means that it is not with human effort that this condition is reached, but through the divine energy that is communicated to man.

At this time Elijah appeared to them with Moses. What we call the Old testament in the Jewish world was divided between the law, the law that was passed down through Moses, and the greatest of the prophets, the one who violently enforced the law, the prophet Elijah, they do not speak with the disciples, but with Jesus. Elijah and Moses have nothing to say to the disciples of Jesus, if their message is not filtered through the teaching and works of Jesus.

And here again Simone continues his action as a strange tempter. In fact, writes the evangelist, *“And Peter, ...”* using his negative nickname indicating his stubbornness *“...said to Jesus..”* and he calls Jesus exactly like Judas later on *“Rabbi,..”* an expression of respect used towards the scribes, those that taught the law. *“.. it is good that we are here..”* and here is the temptation. *“Let us make three tents,..”* Why three tents? There was and still is a holiday in the Jewish world between September and October which commemorates the great liberation from Egyptian slavery. To celebrate this anniversary for a week, people live in huts and tradition says that the new liberator of Israel will arrive in the memory of the ancient liberator, so the new messiah will manifest himself in the memory of Moses.

So here is Peter’s temptation: he wants Jesus to manifest himself like this, how? And this is what Peter says *“Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.”* When there are three characters, where is the most important? In the center. At the center for Peter there is not Jesus, there is Moses. Here is the Messiah that I want, the one who lives according to the law of Moses and makes it observed according to the violent spirit of the prophet Elijah. It is the temptation to be a Messiah of power.

But, writes the evangelist, he did not know what he was saying. And here is God's intervention through the cloud, a divine image, and his voice says *“This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”* They no longer have to listen to either Moses or Elijah and their teachings must be filtered and interpreted according to the teaching and works of Jesus. Here is the imperative invitation *“listen to him”*.

“And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them....” They are still looking for Moses and Elijah because it is tradition, that gives them security, and they find only Jesus and they feel lost. And Jesus commands them not to talk about what they have seen because they have experienced what it is the condition of man who goes through death, but do not yet know what this death will be, the infamous one of the cross.