

WHOEVER DOES NOT TAKE HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME. - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 10,37-42

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

New wine in new wineskins, this is Jesus' announcement. What does this mean? The new relationship that Jesus came to propose with God, is incompatible with all existing religious, social and family systems, which were based on obedience and power, and Jesus, with his announcement, with this new relationship he proposes with God, is no longer based on obedience and laws, but on the welcoming of his love and it affects the three sacred values on which society was based: God, country and family. And Jesus starts right from the family, where the power of the husband over the wife was undisputed, and of the father over the children. This is why Jesus, citing the prophet Micah, had announced that the messiah's activity was to divide, divide the man from his father, the daughter from the mother, the daughter-in-law from the mother-in-law, that is, the new is divided from the old, who resists this novelty.

And in the verses of today's reading, Jesus states: “ *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* ” What does this mean? The first message of Jesus is addressed to the children, and then to the parents, but they have the same meaning: to free people from those relationships, which are called bonds, bonds, because it is precisely those relationships that bind. Jesus does not want bonded people, Jesus wants people to be free.

Then the first message is to the children, to untie those bonds of obedience, of dependence with parents, who prevent them from growing, from realizing themselves. And then Jesus also addresses parents, who must detach themselves from those ties with their children that make them forget that, even before being parents, they are husband and wife, therefore Jesus invites us to full freedom. Of course, anyone who accepts this message from Jesus is considered a madman, he comes rejected by a society that owes its existence to these values of obedience, to these sacred values. Then the persecution begins..

That is why Jesus, and it is the first time that appears in the gospel of Matthew (Mark), says “.. *whoever does not take his cross..* ” the cross is not given by God, the cross must not be accepted, the cross must be taken by man. Jesus refers to the horizontal axis, which the condemned man, at the time of the sentence, put on his shoulders, to then be taken to the place of execution. The cross

meant the refusal by God, by the people, therefore it means the total loss of one's reputation. Well Jesus wants free people, capable also of losing their reputation.

And here for this Jesus continues saying *Whoever finds his life..*” meaning to keep one’s live for himself “..*will lose it,..*” in fact “..*and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*” what does Jesus mean? Where there is love without limits, there is life without limits, therefore whoever thinks of himself is ruined, whoever thinks of others fully realizes himself

And then, here is a surprise announcement of Jesus: “*Whoever receives you receives me...*” Jesus is talking about the person who accepted the cross, who takes up the cross in his life. Well the one who carrying the cross is not, as religion believed, cursed by God, but the visible manifestation of God himself. Here is why, says Jesus “..*and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*” Therefore welcoming and taking up this cross, i sto be considered cursed by God, rejected by society, but actually it shows the presence of God

Then Jesus, in a typically rabbinic language, says that. “ *The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward,..*” also for the righteous, and is expected in the end when he says “*who welcomes*”, giving a glass of water means welcoming, a disciple like disciple, has the reward of a disciple, and instead here is the final surprise of Jesus “*And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water...*” *little ones* the Greek term is micron, it means invisible, so being part of the group of Jesus means being the marginalized, the rejected by society “..*because he is a disciple..*”, it is the disciple who took the cross upon himself, “..*truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.*” Whoever welcomes a disciple will not have the disciple's reward, but the very presence of Jesus and the Father.

The message of this passage of the Gospel is very, very clear: no connection, Jesus has need of free people. No connection even with God, because God does not absorb man, but he empowers them, God does not bind people to himself, but frees them, God does not retain individuals, but pushes them to go with him and like him towards humanity.