

PALM SUNDAY – March 29th, 2015

PALM SUNDAY – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 11,1-10

When they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it, you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here.

If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, 'The Master has need of it and will send it back here at once.'" So they went off and found a colt tethered at a gate outside on the street, and they untied it. Some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"

They answered them just as Jesus had told them to, and they permitted them to do it. So they brought the colt to Jesus and put their cloaks over it. And he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. Those preceding him as well as those following kept crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come! Hosanna in the highest!"

Palm Sunday raises the question naturally of - how is it possible that the crowd that greeted Jesus cheering His entrance into Jerusalem is the same that will shout "Crucify him"?

Mark tells us why in the first eleven verses of chapter 11 of his Gospel, that relates to Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples are near Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, and Jesus sends two of His disciples into the village nearby. The word "village" is a technical term that in the Gospels always indicates misunderstanding and opposition to the novelty that Jesus brings, because the village is a traditional place, a place attached to the traditional values of the past. Therefore when the word "village" appears in the Gospel it is a key that the evangelist gives us to help understand his narrative and always indicates a misunderstanding and oppression to what Jesus will do, as we will see in this passage.

"«...and immediately on entering it, you will find...»" not a foal, but a donkey, and it is important the exact translation of this term. *"«...tethered..»"*. The evangelist refers to the Prophet Zachariah, chapter 9,9, a prophecy in which the prophet indicated " Behold, your king is coming to you;" to Jerusalem "... righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." It is the image of a Messiah, different from that expected by tradition

We must remember that the royal mount was a mule. The donkey was the mount of the servants. Therefore the Messiah, a king, completely different from that one expected. So, this Messiah, says

Zachariah "...and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations;.." Therefore he is not a Messiah of violence, power, or strength, but a Messiah of peace. This prophecy was ignored and censored. In the selection of texts of the rabbi and scribes, they chose only those verses that indicated a power, a strength, a domination, an supremacy of Israel above all other nations.

Well, Jesus says "*«Untie it and bring it here. »*" so untying this prophecy. The disciples must observe that the figure of the Messiah proposed by Jesus corresponds to the writing in the scriptures. "*«If anyone should say to you, 'Why are you doing this?' reply, ...»*" it isn't "the Lord has need of it," but "*«...The Master has need of it»*". The donkey belongs to Jesus, because it will be Him that realizes this prophecy. They untie it and take it to Jesus. They take the donkey to Jesus, "*..and put their cloaks over it.*" So, the disciples follow Jesus as King and Messiah of peace and service.

"And he sat on it." He did not climb up, but sat on. Jesus sits there. As He will later be presented sitting at the right-hand of God, here sitting on a donkey, meaning that this prophecy of a Messiah of peace and service, is His right "*Many people spread their cloaks on the road,..*". Others make a gesture typical to those in submission to the king (spread leafy branches cut from the fields) So, there is a misunderstanding of Jesus' gesture.

In fact, writes the evangelist, Jesus finds Himself between two fires. He who was presented in chapter 10,32, at the beginning of this journey towards Jerusalem, as He that preceded His disciples, now it is not Jesus anymore that leads the way. The evangelist writes "*Those preceding him..*" there are others that lead the way, that want Jesus to realize their desires. "*...those following kept crying out:..*"

The verb to cry out has been used by the evangelist also for the unclean spirits that for the blind man of Jericho had this image of the traditional Messiah, the son of David. What do they shout? "*«Hosanna! »*", a Jewish expression meaning "come on, save us" and the psalm 118 that was sung to celebrate the victorious generals, "Hosanna, save us!"

«Blessed is he who comes»", here is the misunderstanding. This is in no way the kingdom of God proposed by Jesus, but the evangelist writes "*«of our father David»*". While Jesus has spoken of our father in heaven, they are waiting for the kingdom of "our father David" What means the kingdom of David? The kingdom of a dominator that changes all with force and crushes all resistance. So a kingdom that imposes itself by force and violence.

Jesus has come to announce the Kingdom of God. A kingdom that, for its realization, requires the intimate interior and profound change of the person. A change of values: not to live for oneself, but for others. Therefore the Kingdom of God requires a conversion, another requires strength. This is why they continue asking; "*«Hosanna»*", meaning save us, "*«...in the highest!»*" Asking for the help of God to realize this project.

As soon as the crowd realizes that Jesus is not the Messiah of force and strength, that He has not come to restore the dead kingdom of King David, but to begin the Kingdom of God, this Messiah will be useless.

This is why the same crowd that had acclaimed Him with "Hosanna", will be then shout "Crucify Him!"