

YOUR REDEMPTION IS DRAWING NEAR - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 21, 25-28, 34-36

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

State attenti a voi stessi, che i vostri cuori non si appesantiscano in dissipazioni, ubriachezze e affanni della vita e che quel giorno non vi piombi addosso all'improvviso; come un laccio infatti esso si abatterà sopra tutti coloro che abitano sulla faccia di tutta la terra.

The gospel for this Sunday, 29th November, the first Sunday of Advent, is of words of great encouragement that Jesus gives to his community. A small community, unarmed and defenseless, that may feel discouraged by the powerful structures that dominate the society.

So Jesus' words are of great encouragement.

Every power is built on sand and is bound to collapse eventually. However, let us read and see the meaning of this Sunday's gospel.

It is Luke's gospel, chapter 21 verses 25 to 36. Jesus says: "*And there will be signs..*" Jesus answers the question put by the disciples. Jesus had announced the destruction of Jerusalem's temple. Why? The religious institution that had used God's name to exploit the people and the poor had no right to exist.

God communicates life, not to be taken from the people. Jesus' God is a father that does not absorb the energy of humanity, but communicates his energy to them. Well, a religious institution, which instead exploits humanity, has no right to exist. Therefore, Jesus had announced the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, image of this institution.

So the disciples had asked him: "*...what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?*" (v.7) Here is Jesus' reply:"... *there will be signs..*" and here Jesus uses the language of the prophets, in particular the prophet Joel, sign with which announced the arrival of the Lord. Let's see them. "*.. there will be signs in sun and moon and stars,*" The sun and the moon, in the culture of that time, in the gentile world, were the gods that were worshiped by the people. And who are the stars?

At that time all those who held power considered themselves residents in the heavens; the Pharaoh was a god, the Roman emperor was a god or the son of god. All those who held power considered themselves as stars.

So, Jesus ensures that, thanks to the announcement of the gospel, all these structures of power will fall, one after another. "*.. and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,*" It is the fall of the dominant empire, but they gave security and order. The same Saint Augustine, when he heard of the breakup of the Roman Empire, this portentous structure, said: "*The end of the world has arrived*" It was unthinkable of a world without the structure of the Roman Empire.

Well, the people are afraid because that which seemed eternal, stable and true, is not anymore. And above all in the religious field that which seemed sacred in reality was not. And Jesus announces: "*For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*" Who are these powers of the heavens? According to the gospel in the heavens, there is the Father, the Son of Man and there are the angels.

Therefore who are these usurpers that are in the heavens? They are these powerful that arrogate the condition divine to dominate and exploit the people. In the letters of Saint Paul these powers of the heavens are referred to as, "thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities," all images tied to power and domination.

So, "*..the powers of the heavens..*" these powerful that hold the power, that dominate and exploit the people "*..will be shaken.*" The announcement of Jesus' good news will demonstrate the true God and the false divinities will lose their splendor and those kings, those powerful ones that place their power on this divinity, will see the end of their domain.

"*.. then they will see ..*" It is interesting that Jesus does not say "you will see". Who are those that will see? These great powers, in the moment that their powers fall apart and crumbles, they are the ones that in the moment of the fall, will see the Son of man. The Son of man is a way with which Jesus

indicates himself, the man in the fullness of the divine condition. “.. *coming in a cloud ..*” the image of the divine condition. “.. *with power and great glory.*”

When the powers will be shattered, the power of the Son of man will be affirmed, the kingdom of humanity will be inaugurated with Jesus and all that is inhuman is destined to disappear. “..*great glory.*” The glory of the Son of man is the unconditioned love of God for his people.

And here, words of great consolation, of great hope and great encouragement. “*Now when these things begin to take place,*” this image must not be frightening, but must bring joy. In fact Jesus adds: “..*straighten up and raise your heads,..*” the head represents the dignity of the person “..*because your redemption is drawing near.*”

All the civil and religious powers, that should serve humanity, but dominate and exploit them, are destined to disappear. Then here there are verses that strangely the liturgists wanted to omit, but they are important.

“*And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.(v.29-31)* And here is the central point, “ *So also, when you see these things taking place,..* ” therefore the end of Jerusalem and the beginning of the undoing of all the systems that dominant the people, “..*you know that the kingdom of God is near.*”

The alternative society proposed by Jesus, with the advent of the Kingdom of God will become reality. And even the gentiles will be allowed to enter. Then Jesus cautions with a warning “..*But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life,..*”

What does Jesus want to say? If the disciples are integrated in the unjust society those that must disappear, will have the same fate as this society, So, Jesus’ final phrase. “.. *But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place and to stand before the Son of Man.*” Jesus tells us not to conform to an unjust society because this is going to disappear.