

## 1 SUNDAY OF ADVENT – 3rd DECEMBER 2017

**BE ALERT! YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN THAT TIME WILL COME - Biblical commentary by Father - Alberto Maggi OSM**

### Mark 13,33-37

***Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.***

***"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"***

Chapter 13 of Mark's Gospel is undoubtedly the most difficult and complex of all his gospels.

The evangelist himself is aware of this and writes in verse 14 " - let the reader understand- " because he knows that he is saying something very complex.

To complicate the picture there are the incomprehensible choices of the liturgist who, for example, in today's passage, changes the first verse that helps to understand the whole passage. Therefore let's read chapter 13 of Mark's gospel but beginning from verse 32 that has been left out by the liturgist.

Jesus after having spoken of the end of Jerusalem and the end of the powerful that crushed and humiliated mankind and for this asked for the collaboration of the disciples, announces the individual end of each of his disciples. And says " *But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" (v. 32) The words " that day" so far in Mark's gospel appear three times and always in relationship with Jesus' death and exaltation, meaning his victory over death. This time, however, it applies to the disciples to make it clear that even the death of the disciples will not be an end, but a beginning, not a defeat, but a victory.

Well, Jesus says "... *but only the Father (knows).*" This knowing, is not a simple knowledge, but a working knowledge. At the moment of one's own end, though dramatic and traumatic like that of Jesus, there will be the Father who will come to help his own.

Therefore it is a passage that invites full trust, to not be preoccupied. It is not important knowing the moment of one's own end, but to know that moment is in the Father's hands. So Jesus' message is very positive and invites full trust. Having said this Jesus with two imperatives says: "*Be on guard! Be alert!*" "Being alert" means giving up sleep. Sleep in the gospels is the image of renouncing activity. Therefore the invitation is to stay active, because, even if you know your end is in the hands of the Father, nevertheless to encourage you to collaborate with an activity that is faithful to the message of the good news.

And here Jesus gives this picture: "*It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts...*" meaning "giving the same authority to his servants" Here the owner, of the house is Jesus after his death. He has no servants, he has said in this gospel "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve,*" (Mark 10,45)

They are servants, meaning the members of a community that put themselves at the service of others. Well, Jesus, to them that put their own lives to the service of others, grants the same authority. What is this authority? Authority in Mark's gospel is the capacity to practice a divine function with which life is communicated.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit Jesus communicates his authority and this Spirit also to his disciples. *".. each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch."* The verb to tell appears only once in this gospel and it refers to Moses' commandments, here instead is Jesus' commandment. It is the new relationship with God, that is no more based on the law of Moses, but on the welcoming of God's love.

And what is the commandment? The commandment is given by the doorman, who in that culture was the one who was responsible for the safety of those behind it. He is a collective figure that concerns the commitment of the whole community. *"... and tells the one at the door to keep watch."* The verb "to tell" is repeated three times and as we know means that which is complete, so a close watchfulness.

Jesus invites the members of his community to exercise a permanent function of service that makes it recognizable. Not a service every now and again, but a service that is the trademark of the community. If there is this, the end should not give preoccupation, because the Father comes to help.

And Jesus continues: *"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house...."* This man is opposed to the owner of the vineyard that Jesus had spoken of, where the vineyard was the image of Israel. Well, now it is no more the Vineyard, the image of Israel, but there is the house, a familiar image, of humanity, because Jesus' message is no more limited to one population, one nation or religion, but it is a universal message, and the house is an image that all mankind can understand.

Then here Jesus divides the night into four parts (the evening, midnight, the rooster's crow and the morning) according to the Roman use and not in three parts as is the Jewish use, to make it understood that this message is no more limited to a nation, but to all humanity. It is a valid message for all mankind in every condition and every latitude.

And again a new warning from Jesus: *"If he comes suddenly,..."* suddenly means an irruption that leaves no time for a change of attitude – *"...do not let him find you sleeping."* As happened at the moment of Jesus' capture in Gethsemane, disciple sleeping, unable to help Jesus in the most important moment of his life.

And the conclusion: *What I say to you, I say to everyone: ..."* the message that Jesus has left to his disciples is a message for all humanity. Service for Jesus must be the trademark that makes the person recognizable, the disciple in a permanent and habitual way, it is the service that allows the Father to take care of his own when the time comes for the end.