

I ADVENT – November 30th, 2014

**STAY AWAKE FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE WILL COME -
Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Mk 13.33-37

At that time Jesus said to his disciples, "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore stay awake- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

Chapter 13 of Mark's gospel is undoubtedly the most difficult and complicated of his entire gospel. He himself was aware and writes in verse 14 "*let the reader understand*", because he knew that, he was saying something very complicated.

To complicate the whole there is the choice of a language incomprehensible to liturgists, for example, today's reading, by changing the initial verse, helps in the understanding of all the whole reading. Therefore, we begin by reading verse 32 of chapter 13 in Mark's gospel, which has been left out by the liturgists.

Jesus, after having spoken of the end of Jerusalem and the end of the powers that dominate and humiliate mankind, and for this He asks for the collaboration of the disciples, announces the individual end of each of His disciples.

He says, "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The expression "*that day*" up to now has appeared in Mark's gospel three times and always in the context Jesus' death and glorification, meaning Jesus' victory over death. But in fact this time it applies to the disciples to make them understand that also their deaths will not be the end, but a beginning, not a failure but a victory.

Well Jesus says, "not to worry, because the Father knows" This knowledge is not just to know, but a knowledge to operate. In the last moment, even if dramatic and traumatic as that of Jesus, the Father will come to the aid of his people.

So, it is a passage that is full of faith, not preoccupation. It is not important to know the moment of one's own end, but to know that moment is in the Father's hands. Therefore, Jesus' message is fully positive and is an invitation to complete faith. Jesus saying this uses two imperatives: "*Be on guard, keep awake.*" To be on guard means to stay awake. Sleep in the gospels is looked upon as renouncing activity. So it is an invitation to remain active, because even if your end is in the Father's hands, it is up to you to collaborate with the faithful task in the message of good news.

Then Jesus gives this example. "*It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge,*" Here the man, the master of the house is Jesus after death. Jesus does not have servants, He has said this clearly in the gospel "*...came not to be served but to serve*",

They are the servants of the community, meaning those at service of the others. Well, Jesus, to those that put their lives at the service of others, concedes His own authority. What is this authority? Authority, according to Mark's gospel is the capacity to perform a divine act with which to communicate life.

Through the gift of the Spirit of Jesus His authority begins, this Spirit also have His disciples. "*... each with his work, and commands ..*" the verb to command appears only once in this gospel, referring to Moses' commandments, here to Jesus' commandments. It is the new relationship with God, which is no more set on Moses' laws, but on the welcoming of God's love.

What is this commandment? The commandment He gives to the doorkeeper that in the culture of that time was he who was responsible for the security of those inside. It is a figure that concerns the collective commitment of the whole community "*commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.*" The verb "to stay awake" appears three times and we know that number three means that which is complete, therefore a strict surveillance.

Jesus invites the members of His community to practice a permanent service that will make them recognizable. Not a service every now and then, but a service that will be the insignia of the community. If this comes about there is no need to be preoccupied because the Father will come to the rescue.

Jesus continues: "*Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come...*" this master of the house is different from the owner of the vineyard, where the vineyard was the idea of Israel. Well, now the vineyard is no more but there is the house, the image of familiarity and humility, because Jesus' message is no more limited to a people, to a nation, a religion, but it is a universal message, and the house is an image that all humanity can understand.

Then here Jesus divides the night into four parts, (the evening, midnight, when the rooster crows and morning) according to the Roman use and not in three parts according to the Jewish use, to allow to understand that this message is not limited to this nation, but to all humanity. It is a message that is valid to men of any condition or place.

And again a new warning of Jesus, "*... lest he come suddenly....*" suddenly meaning that there is no time for a change of attitude - "*..and find you asleep.*" As unfortunately happens at the capture in

Gethsemane, when these disciples will be asleep, unable to help Jesus in an important moment of His life.

And the conclusion: *“And what I say to you I say to all: ...”*ⁿ The message that Jesus leaves with His disciples is for all humanity. Service, as an insignia that makes possible the reorganization of the person, the disciple, in a permanent, regular and distinguishable way, it is that which allows the Father to occupy himself with his people when the end will come.