

**PALM SUNDAY– 5th April 2020**

**BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD! - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

**Matthew 21,1-11**

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."*

*This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

*The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"*

*When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

The narration of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is rich, in Matthew's gospel, with quotes from the old testament, with which the evangelist wants to enclose, summarize the whole history of his people. But let's read this important passage, chapter 21, 1-11.

*"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives..."* . the indications of the evangelist do not want to be topographical, but theological. Bethphage means "house of the figs" and, after the entry of Jerusalem, there will be the episode of the sterile fig tree, figure of the temple. The Mount of Olives is the mountain where, according to tradition, this mountain that overlooked the temple of Jerusalem, the Messiah would appear.

*"Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village..."* Whenever this term "village" appears in the Gospels, it is always in the sign of the incomprehension of the novelty brought by Jesus, therefore we must expect, in this passage, something of incomprehension, if not of hostility. *"..at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.* what is the meaning of this donkey and this foal? As we have said, the evangelist writes this passage with quotations, here we must go back to the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis (49, 10-11), in the testament that Jacob makes, and the blessing over his children. It says *"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch;..."* here is the reference. There is this prophecy, about this figure of the liberator, of the messiah of Israel, which needed to be dissolved. Here then is the meaning of this donkey and this colt.

But he has not finished: *"If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord..."* It is the only time that Jesus refers to himself like this; "Lord" does not mean the one who stands above the others,

the one who commands, but the one who has no one above him, the one who is free to dispose of his life, a gentleman who does not command, but puts his life at the service of others. *"..needs them, and he will send them right away."* This happened because of what was said by the prophet was accomplished", here is another reference to the passages of the old testament. So in the first quote, Jesus said: *"untie it"*, that is to make this prophecy current; the second is taken from the book of the prophet Zechariah, which the evangelist does not repeat exactly, however, and says: *"Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!"*, actually the passage of Zachariah began in a more exciting tone, in fact it said: *" Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!" (Zechariah 9, 9)*. No, there is nothing to celebrate. Jerusalem, from the beginning of the gospel, was presented in a sinister light, it is the city symbol of the religious institution, which has always killed the envoys of God. The prophet Zechariah wrote *"See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious,.. "* The evangelist leaves out the *"righteous and victorious"* Righteous means the faithful observant of the law, victorious the one who triumphed, and Jesus will not triumph through weapons, through power. *"... lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."* This is what the evangelist wanted to intent. This Messiah who enters, does not have the insignia of power, does not sit on a war animal horse, or even on the royal mount, which was the mule, but on a donkey. The donkey was the normal mount of humble and simple people. So Jesus asks to free, to dissolve this prophecy, which had been put aside, because it went against the ideals of revenge, of revenge of the people of Israel, over the Roman rulers and of dominance over all the other nations, therefore it was a prophecy that had been put aside. Jesus wants to untie, to be free of the prophesy and to make it current. *"The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them.."* cloaks, in the Jewish symbolism, indicate the reality of the person, therefore the disciples adhere to this image of non-violent, peaceful and un-armed Messiah, *"...for Jesus to sit on."* But *" A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,.."* at the investiture of the king, the cloak of the person was laid on the road, and the king passed over it, it was an expression of submission to the king. But this crowd does not want this Messiah of peace, they want a king to submit to. *".. while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road."* these branches cut from the trees recall the feast of the huts, the feast where, according to tradition, the Messiah would have manifested himself, therefore they intend to welcome this Jesus as the triumphant king.

*"The crowds that went ahead of him.."* it is not Jesus who leads the procession, but there is a crowd that precedes him: as the tempter brought him to Jerusalem on the pinnacle of the temple, so now they follow. The temptations of Jesus continue, and show Jesus the way to go and what is the way to go? That of power and dominion. *"..and those that followed shouted,"* unfortunately Jesus is put in the middle: both those who precede him and those who follow him cry out *"Hosanna .."* In hebrew it means "Save us". Hosanna to whom? *"..to the Son of David!"* Here is the great misunderstanding, which will then lead the same people who now shout Hosanna, to shout: *"crucify him"*. They think that Jesus is the son of David, that is, a Messiah like David. David was the great warrior, the great king, who, through a bloodbath, managed to reunite the tribes of Israel, this is what they are waiting for. When they realize that Jesus is not the son of David, they will not know what to do with this Messiah, and they will choose Barabbas, and, for Jesus, they will ask for the crucifixion.

*"When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred.."* the verb used by the evangelist is that which indicates an earthquake. The city is shaking : as at the beginning, at the announcement of the birth, it was disturbed, now, at the entrance of Jesus in Jerusalem, it is disturbed, because it is the city that kills prophets, and will also kill the son of God, "*and he said*", almost with contempt: , "*Who is this?*" The holy city does not know "*God with us*" as Jesus was presented, because their God is another, it is interest, convenience and the treasure of the temple. This city does not only not welcome the entrance of the Messiah, it is even annoyed: who is this? "*The crowds answered,..*" and here is the great misunderstanding "*This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.*" Galilee was the turbulent region, from where the revolutionaries, the zealots, those who wanted to fight against Roman rule, were born. Remember Giuda the Galilian, who in 6 and 7 AD, started two revolts against the Romans which finished with a bloodbath. Here is what the city expects. When they realize that Jesus is not the son of David, but is the son of God, they will not know what to do with him.