

**PALM SUNDAY – 9th APRIL 2017**

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

**Matthew 21,1-11**

*Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying,*

*"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"*

*The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

In Matthew's gospel, the narration of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is rich with quotes from the Old Testament. The evangelist with these wants to retain and sum up the whole history of his people. Let's read this important passage, chapter 21 1-11.

*"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives,"* The indication given by the evangelist is not topographic, but theological. 'Bethphage,' means 'the house of unripe figs' and after the entrance into Jerusalem, there will be the episode of the barren fig tree, the figure of the temple. The Mount of Olives overlooked the temple of Jerusalem and is a place, according to the tradition, where the Messiah will manifest himself.

*"Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village..."* Every time the word village is mentioned in the gospels, it is always a sign of misunderstanding and hostility of the novelty that Jesus brings. So in this passage we must expect some misunderstanding, if not hostile. *"..... immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me."* What is the meaning of this donkey and her colt? As we have said before the evangelist fills this passage with the need to return to the first book in the Bible, Genesis, in Jacob's testament and blessing of his sons *"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes" .(Genesis 49, 10-11)* There is this prophecy, of a figure of the liberator, the messiah of Israel, that it was necessary to fulfil. This then is the meaning of this donkey and her colt.

But it is not finished: *" If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord...'"* This is the only time that Jesus refers to himself in this way : Lord does not mean he who is above everyone and commands , but he who has no one above himself and is free to control his own life. A Lord that does not command, but places himself at the service of others.

*'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."* This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet,.. *" Here again is another quote from the Old Testament, the book of the Prophet Zachariah. But here the evangelist does not quote the exact words. "Say to the daughter of Zion,"* Zechariah began with a more exultant tone *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!"*

(Zechariah 9, 9-10) This is because Jerusalem, from the beginning of the bible had been presented in a sinister light, it was a city of the religious institution, that had always killed those sent from God, therefore it was only to be told .. *"Say to the daughter of Zion,"*

*"Behold, your king is coming to you,"* And the Prophet Zechariah had written *"Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he,..."* The evangelist omits the righteous and the salvation; *"..humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."* Here is where the evangelist wants to arrive. This Messiah that enters, does not have a powerful banner, he is not sitting on a war-horse or even on a royal mount, which was the mule, but on a donkey. The donkey was a mount of normal, humble and simple people. Therefore Jesus asks to untie, to let go this prophesy, that had been put aside because it went against the ideal of vendetta. The revenge of the people of Israel, over the Roman rulers and dominance over all other nations.

*"The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks,"* The cloak is a Jewish symbol, indicating the reality of the person, so the disciples adhere to this non-violent messiah, a messiah of peace, an unarmed messiah: *"... and he sat on them."*

But *"Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road,"* the investiture of the king, in sign of submission, the peoples cloaks are taken and put on the road, and the king passed over them, as an expression of submission to the king. Well the crowd does not want this Messiah of peace, they want a king to whom they submit. *"...and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road."* These branches recall the Feast of the Tents, where according to the tradition, the Messiah would manifest himself. Therefore they want to receive Jesus as a triumphant king.

*"And the crowds that went before him..."* It is not Jesus that leads the procession, but the crowd: as the tempter led him to Jerusalem, to the pinnacle of the temple, so now they follow, the temptations of Jesus continue, and show Jesus the path to take, and what is this path? That of power and of domination. *"..that followed him were shouting,"* Unfortunately Jesus is in the middle of both those preceding him, and those who follow him, shouting, *"Hosanna"* Hosanna is a Hebrew expression meaning "Save us, then," Hosanna to whom? "The Son of David!", That's the big misunderstanding, which will later bring the same people who now shout Hosanna, will shout "Crucify him". They think that Jesus is the son of David, a Messiah like David. David was a great warrior, a great king, who, through a bloodbath, managed to unite the tribes of Israel, this is what they expect. When will they realize that Jesus is not the son of David, they do not know what to do with this Messiah, and they choose Barabbas, and for Jesus, they ask for the crucifixion.

*"And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up..."* The city is in a state of great commotion, now at the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, because it is a city that kills, that kills prophets and will kill the son of God. *"...saying,"* almost with contempt *"Who is this?"*

The holy city does not know the "God with us", as Jesus has presented, because the city's God is another, it is interest, convenience, wealth and the temple's treasure. This city does not only not meet the coming Messiah, but it is also annoyed: Who is this? *"And the crowds said,"* and here is the great misunderstanding *"This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."* Galilee was the turbulent region, where revolutionaries, zealots and those who fought against the Roman domination, were born. Remember Judas the Galilean, in 6:07 A.D. who started two revolts against the Romans which ended with a bloodbath. This is what the city expects. When will they realise that Jesus is not the son of David, but he is the son of God, they will not know what to do with him.