

X ORDINARY TIME– 9th June 2013

YOUNG MAN, I SAY TO YOU, ARISE! - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 7,11-17

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!”

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

The prophets had represented the relation between God and his people through the image of a marriage. God was the bridegroom and Israel was the bride. But, because of many infidelities, the betrayal of this population, this marriage ceased to exist and the population considered themselves widows, one without a husband (the husband gives protection and security to his family.)

It is in this cultural context that we must read an episode that only the evangelist Luke has, in chapter 7,11-17, and it is the revival of the widows son.

Let's see what the evangelist says. “ *Soon afterward..*” The evangelist writes this after another important episode, when Jesus is called, to help a centurion. It represented the pagan world that asks Jesus to intervene. It needed only one word from Jesus to go to meet and help the centurion, and Jesus amazed, praises him: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

Immediately after, the evangelist, shows us what the situation is in Israel, this population now without faith. Let's read. “ *Soon afterward..*” therefore in relation with the episode of the centurion, “.. *he went to a town called Nain,*” Nain is a land that probably means “pretty, likeable”, and it is near Nazareth. “...*and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.*”

The evangelist often likes to compare two groups, one of life and one of death. He had already done this at the moment of Jesus' presentation in the temple, when His parents went to the temple to observe the law and out of this group comes Simon who tries to prevent this unnecessary ritual.

Also here there are two contrasts that meet. One, that of Jesus with His disciples. He is the carrier of life, whilst from the city comes a procession the carrier of death. The evangelist writes .”*As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow,..*”

It is a tragedy. A tragedy because the mother is a widow, therefore has no husband, has no other children, on one who can provide for her so this also is a death for her. *"..and a considerable crowd from the town was with her."* So, Jesus carrier of life, goes towards this city, from which death comes out. The people do not know other than to repeat the ritual of death that of the religion of death.

"And when the Lord saw her,.." For the first time the evangelist uses this expression, indicating already the risen Christ,.... *" he had compassion.."* In the Jewish world there is a difference between to have compassion and to use mercy. To use mercy is an attitude of mankind, but to have compassion is only a divine action. It is the action with which one communicates, one gives back life to who does not have life.

In Luke's Gospel we find this three times, this is the first time, then in the parable of the good Samaritan where Jesus actually attributes it to a man, also a heretic, because he acts like God and therefore communicates life, and finally in the parable of the prodigal son , when the father, seeing the son, who he thought dead, was moved with compassion.

So, this "to have compassion" means a divine action with which one communicates, and returns life to who does not have it. *"hesaid to her, "Do not weep." Then he came up and touched the bier.."* In the previous episode with the centurion a word from Jesus was enough. Why did Jesus touch the bier? Because it was forbidden. The law forbade the touching of the bier, the bier was a simple stretcher and the corpse was wrapped in a sheet. Therefore it was forbidden to touch the corpse or stretcher because it was impure.

So then Jesus show the falsity of this law, disobeys and touches the bier, He wants to make understood that the cause of the death of this population is the observing of a law for its own sake, a law that does not serve for the good of the people, but only to the priestly chaste in power. The law was an instrument for domination, to overpower the people and as a result the people were dead.

..He... touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak,.." Speaking is the evident proof of the return to life. *"Jesus gave him to his mother."* Therefore Jesus revives hope for His people and ensures its future. *"..and Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!"* Why a great prophet?

The evangelist has constructed this narrative on an episode from the first book of Kings, chapter 17, where a very great prophet, he who was waited for to pave the way for the Messiah, the great Elijah, he had raise from the dead the son of the widower of Zarephath. So, as Elijah had raised from the dead this boy, Jesus did the same.

So the people see Jesus as the new Elijah, he who must pave the way for the Messiah *".. and "God has visited his people!"* At the beginning of the Gospel, in the prophesy of Zechariah, Zechariah the high priest worshiped the Lord saying: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people"* .The Lord's visit is to free Israel, therefore the population see in Jesus' action a sign aimed at a revival.

Here the true revived one is not so much the young boy, but the people that were already in a condition of death, of darkness, and Jesus, the liberator, has come to revive them.

“And this report about him..” literally meaning His message, it is the message that this episode contains, *“..spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.”* The evangelist prepares Jesus’ reply that He will give to those sent by John the Baptist.