

9. March 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN “The unthinkable happens”

Jn 18:1-11

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When he said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he; so, if you seek me, let these men go.” This was to fulfil the word which he had spoken, “Of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one.” Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s slave and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?”

The unimaginable happens... Unfortunately, we sometimes get so used to the evil in the world that things that should never happen become part of our lives. As time goes by, they become less frightening and evil no longer shocks us as it should.

The unimaginable happens: the Son of God, who came to earth to proclaim the goodness of His heavenly Father through His words and deeds, to free people from the dominion of darkness and to bring them salvation, is imprisoned.

The unimaginable happens: Judas, one of His disciples, betrays Jesus and comes with the cohort, the servants of the chief priests and the Pharisees, to arrest Him like a bandit in the garden of Gethsemane.

The unimaginable happens. At the third station of the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem, there is a representation of angels with horror written on their faces as they see the Son of God on the way of His Passion. In their purity, they feel the full horror of the unimaginable happening.

Jesus knows what awaits Him. He is prepared for this hour. His disciples were not able to bear with Him the suffering that befell Him in the Garden of Olives, as described in the Gospel of Luke (22:39-46). It was too heavy for them.

Thus the Lord had to accept the "bitter cup of suffering" according to the will of the Father, without human help or companionship. We know that He did so when He said to the Father: *"Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done"* (Lk 22:42). Then *"there appeared to Him an angel from heaven and comforted Him"* (v. 43).

Now Jesus goes out to meet His persecutors and reveals Himself to them in order to protect His disciples. They recoiled and fell to the ground. Peter wanted to defend his Lord with his sword, to prevent them from taking Him prisoner. But the Lord stopped him and said those significant words, which Peter did not understand at the time: *"shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"* It was not and is not easy for people to understand that God voluntarily accepts suffering in order to redeem humanity. Jesus is not forced into this situation, powerless and at the mercy of His enemies who want to capture Him. He Himself had said to Peter: *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Mt 26:53)

The answer of the almighty God, who does not inflict the deserved punishment on all men, who does not destroy the earth and purge it of wickedness forever, is unimaginable to us at first. But our Father is different. He suffers for His children who turn away from Him and turn to false gods.

We can only understand His ways when we open ourselves to God's love and come to know Him as He really is. Then we will see the Father in everything Jesus says and does, and we will understand that He came into the world to reveal to us the love of the Heavenly Father. God Himself wants to wipe away the guilt of mankind and is willing to pay the ransom price for them.

Peter must understand that Jesus does not want to avoid the suffering that awaits Him. He wants to drink the cup that the Father offers Him. This will become for us the "*cup of salvation*" (Ps 116:13). It is the suffering that God willingly accepts in His Son, who cleanses us from our sins with His blood and does it again every time we come to Him in repentance.

Peter will understand this. Soon he will have to face the limits of his capacity to love, and then he will repent deeply.

But not only he, but all of us are called to understand more deeply the immeasurable love of God. Then we will realise that God has responded to the unimaginable that has happened with the greatest act of His unfailing love. Only in this way could He save us all!