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# "GOD AND THE HAPPINESS OF MEN"

In depth Biblical Study by F. Alberto Maggi

Rovigo, December 23-25, 2007

*Transposition of an audio-recording **not reviewed by the author***

**Note:** *the transposition is liberal, incidental errors may be due to the difference between oral and written language and punctuation has been made by ear..*

Were we made for suffering? After all religion teaches that world is a valley of tears. This valley of tears is the personal swimming pool of pious persons, where they daily splash about. They feel very comfortable in the valley of tears, where everyone has its own cross and where they have to sigh and accept God's will!!!

Strangely, the idea of God and of his will are never associated with the idea of happiness. God is easily associated to suffering than happiness. How comes? This is the answer we will try to find through this lecture.

We have a terrible idea of God (religion is accountable for this), for we know a God who forbids all what is pleasant and forces towards what is painful.

We will discover then that man is asked to be completely happy here on the earth, not in the next life. The idea of earthly suffering and eternal happiness is a fraud committed by religion, trying to poisons people's life by promising a hypothetical happiness in the next life.

Jesus has come to expose this fraud. Men' maximum aspiration is to be happy and they can be happy here on earth because God's will perfectly coincides with their desire.

According to Gospels God wants men to be happy and he does all efforts in order to make men happy.

Jesus, the visible expression of this God, God himself, takes care of men happiness and considers men **pleasure** (a terrible word that pious persons always pronounce in a low voice, almost with a sense of sin) **and happiness much more important than precepts or commandments.**

Jesus came then to explain that happiness on earth is possible. In the next life we will certainly all be happy, but the most important thing is being happy in our earthly existence. Our Lord does everything possible in order to make men happy.

If this is true, why then happiness is so rare and is not part of our current teachings? If God seeks our happiness, why are we afraid of him?

This is the key question. Being happy is not possible if God seems almost jealous of your happiness. It quite seems better not let him become aware that things are going well.

When something painful happens - normal things of our life - we often hear people saying: I knew something bad would happen, things were going too well.

It seems that if the Eternal Father realizes we are reaching happiness he gets angry and assigns a big cross, a disgrace... but Lord's will be done!!!! Why does God frighten?

**Because, according to religions, God rewards and punishes: he rewards all those who submit to religious authorities' needs and punishes all those who disobey**

them. Religion and religious authorities introduce a threatening God in order to obtain submission, and promulgate oddball rules, which are impossible to respect. You know that religion imposes laws to people, but such a kind of laws that people having a pinch of intelligence, would never be able to comply with. As these laws are completely irrational, being against men's well and intelligence, are imposed by using threats.

Therefore the individual feels obliged to obey, being afraid of the punishment, a great one, a divine one!!! God's wickedness is never equal to that of a human being. God's perfidy in punishing people has no equal on earth.

I think that a person never appeared on earth, who might be ruthless like the God of religion is.

Please go and read the Book of Deuteronomy, the last of the first five books of the Bible, where God speaks and lists all curses that occur to the one who breaks his law. You see, law is incomprehensible, it is against any reasoning. Religious people or authorities pass this law as God's will in order to obtain people obedience. If I break this law, what will it happen to me?

There are 52 curses, let's read some of them... It's a sort of tragicomic page; people thought it was the word of God, it's Bible and Bible is always right. And people really believed it.

But be careful, maybe in some years people will laugh at our fears!

If I disobey a commandment I will not deserve one curse, but all of them! Fever and inflammation, scorching heat and drought, blight and mildew, madness, blindness and confusion of mind - and notice his fantasy - festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured (Dt 28,15ss).

It might well be the world of God, but it is quite insane! Then the author is worried and thinks: did I forget something? The LORD will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed!

And here comes the ending: you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you! It couldn't be worse than this.

Jesus came to expose all this and make men happy.

First of all, **Jesus exposed the fact that religion invented the sin in order to instill the sense of guilt into individuals and being able to dominate them: this is the crime committed by religion!**

**How can a man be happy if he feels guilty towards God?**

**How can a man feel happy if he always feels the sense of sin towards God? It's a diabolically perfect mechanism: religion is a structure of laws that acts in such a way that a man always feels guilty and is never allowed to feel the plain communion with the Lord.**

Maybe we can smile at this, but the old catechism taught us that in order to be allowed to receive Communion we had to be reconciled, but it seemed to be quite

impossible because even with all efforts, even by going to confession, we might be tempted by saying "OK, I'm reconciled" and we were guilty of pride... a never ending story...

Religion succeeded in creating this devilish mechanism: **make men feel always guilty and, being the only institution to be allowed to take the sin away, dominate people.**

The law of God is never considered to foster people's well-being, but always to defend the wavering theories of religion.

Well, **Jesus states that God's law simply doesn't exist because God is love, and love cannot be expressed through laws, but through loving actions.**

For Jesus there's nothing more important than the well-being of an individual. And he tries to change this relationship between mankind and God. He is defined 'God-with-us' in Matthew's Gospel. If God becomes a man in Jesus, it means that he becomes completely a man - in fact Jesus is completely a man, that is fully human. Jesus will never try to defend the honor of God's religion, but will take care of needs and sufferings of men.

What happened with Jesus?

According to cosmology of that time, God was supposed to be in the highest and men were very far from him. In order to near him, men had to separate from other human beings through prayers, sacrifices, offerings, a sort of spiritualization.

Here comes a perverted mechanism by which God comes down to meet people as they rise to reach God. They never meet each other.

Jeremiah, chapt. 8 says: *'How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?*

That is, you have falsely handled the law at your convenience.

One of these falsifications is the concept of sin. If we go and read the book of the law, we find a series of regulations that man have to respect in order not to sin.

Also Hosea (4,8) rails against the priests: *They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness*".

At that time forgiveness was not given for a low price, maybe 3 our father or hail mary... but you should offer for example 3 goats, 3 chickens, 1 pigeon... Priests earned their living by collecting the offerings that people made in order to be forgiven.

That's why priests made the law impossible to observe; in this way they could keep or even increase the flow of offerings and live.

Let's read Mark's Gospel, chapt 7,1-23.

*"The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus"*

Every time Jesus sets people free, or takes care of them, Pharisees show up. The word "pharisee" means "separate". They separate from people in order to reach God through a very difficult life style. They used to observe something 613 precepts. In this way they thought to be able to reach God, but they went away from him. Despite a great campaign against Jesus, he had many followers.

So teachers were called from Jerusalem. The first time they came they said that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebub.

Pharisees and teachers of the law could represent the Holy See of that time and we might wonder what serious damage Jesus could have caused for having bothered scribes of Jerusalem.

By saying scribes we don't mean those who wrote, but the infallible mastership of that time, the great theologians, whose teachings had the same value as the word of God.

Key religious matters are always ridiculous, but only those who live outside religion realize it.

Let's find out the serious problem that the scribes are facing: "*saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were 'unclean', that is, unwashed*".

Did you catch it? They went to the trouble of coming from Jerusalem because of the unclean hands of the disciples; it's not something pertaining to sanitary regulations, but a specific ritual that involved severe penalties if not properly carried out.

Jesus followers didn't observe this rule because Jesus, a man completely free, taught them how to be free.

Every time that people demonstrates to be free, the religious institution, that is against freedom, becomes alarmed: individuals have to be always submissive to his authority.

Mark explains: *The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders,*

Jews believed that God had instructed Moses on how to implement all rules he gave him on Mount Sinai (the Law - the first 5 books of the Bible).

On Mount Sinai God delivered 2 laws:

1. A written one, the so called Bible
2. An oral one, that will be written after Jesus and will be called Talmud (literally 'teaching').

They've both the same value and represent the ancient tradition,

Mark says that Jews didn't eat without washing their hands. It was a ceremonial washing, that suggested the kind of water to be used, the exact quantity, the way it had to used and the prayers that had to be recited during hand washing.

They thought that this was the will of God.

Mark goes on: *When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.*

Some residues of this tradition also pertain to Christianity. Do you remember the famous 'Easter cleaning'?

It was an Hebraic tradition, during Easter time all should be perfectly clean.

**Pharisees and scribes wonder why the disciples didn't attend the tradition and used to eat without washing their hands.**

Religion is averse to life, it dirties life; it is the one that distinguishes what is pure and what is not, not only regarding things, but also regarding individuals. Religion discriminates people by dividing them into praiseworthy and not.

God, on the contrary, loves them all, no matter how they behave.

After Peter meets the Roman centurion, he understands that God doesn't discriminate and states: *God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.* (Acts 10,28).

Going on with our analysis, Jesus replies: *"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you..."* and one imagines something positive, something they do and disciples do not...

*"...hypocrites"*

The term 'hypocrites' means actor (Greek ὑποκριτής); it will then assume the meaning of duplicity or falseness.

*"as it is written: " 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*

*They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."*

This is the matter, what has been presented is not God's will, but precepts of men.

How can we verify whether something comes from God or not?

It is very clear: **Jesus says that all what contributes to happiness comes from God; all what makes men unhappy or sad, doesn't.**

Religious persons poison your life by presenting impossible obligations, just in order to increase their domain.

*"You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."*

Pharisees were talking about traditions of the elders; Jesus says, no! Traditions of men. The crime of religious institution is not only that of imposing false obligations in order to dominate, but also that of 'neglecting the command of God' which is love to others. Between the well of man and the law of God, religion doesn't hesitate, it chooses the law, which is its own well. Religion let men suffer.

Jesus says the opposite, when you have to choose between the two things, always choose the happiness of men.

*Moses used to say: 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'*

We always understood this in the wrong way. It's not a matter of respecting the mother and the father, but financially supporting them. It was the duty of the first son.

*But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."*

This is a terrible condemnation made by Jesus.

Power and domination get along with profit. Jesus was a dreamer, he said " *You cannot serve both God and Money*". Religious persons always succeeded in combining the two, they used God to make money.

Going back to the phrase, Jesus says: Look, if you tell your parents that the amount saved for them will be devoted to God, you will lose that duty. It was something awful to say to the parents: I would like to support you, but I choose devoting those money to God, which is more important. This was a diabolical mechanism, called Corban. You could give a small percentage amount to the temple and you were not obliged to support your parents anymore. Honoring God you were allowed to dishonor your parents, your dearest ones.

Jesus not only accuses scribes and Pharisees, but also makes something sensational, so much as to be forced to escape in order not to be murdered. We often state that it's not surprising that Jesus was killed, but how did he succeed in living so longer. He did because he was always escaping.

*Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone and understand this", Jesus is claiming attention and is giving a very important truth which will completely change the relationship between God and men and among men themselves.*

*"Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'"*

If you go and read the Book of Leviticus, chapt. 11, you find a series of animals and food which are considered very unclean.

But why? It's like that. But how can an animal be impure? We don't know; law must be obeyed, not understood.

The difference between Jesus and religion: religion issues a command and people must obey; Jesus offers suggestions.

Why does religion impose its rules? Because it is aware that they don't belong to the heart of people, they are incomprehensible.

Jesus, on the contrary, knows that his message is nothing else than the answer to people's desire of fullness, so there's no need to impose; offering or suggesting is quite enough.

Therefore Jesus states that there's nothing outside a man that makes him unclean by going into him: Jesus is saying something really disconcerting.

In the Book of Leviticus, chapt. 11, there's a series of animals that man cannot touch, otherwise he becomes unclean. Unclean means that, from that moment on, he has no relationship with God, he has to purify, to make offering in order to become clean again.

If you read the complete list of food or animals, it is really incomprehensible. Pigs are unclean, if you eat some ham, God is terribly offended and hasn't got anything to do with you anymore.

Should you wonder why... maybe for sanitary reasons... no, just because pig is unclean. The same is for rabbit. If you go on reading you also find that grasshoppers and crickets are clean! I hate grasshoppers, I'd prefer some ham. Noway, pig is out of discussion.

Jesus states that nothing external can make a man unclean; it's what comes out from him that may jeopardize his relationship with God.

*After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable.*

But pay attention! Jesus didn't tell a parable.

Parables are narratives that are used to explain something and Jesus didn't. Why do disciples ask him about the parable?

Do you remember the two laws? The oral one and the written one? The disciples, having been affected by Jesus' freedom, had abandoned the oral law, but the written one remained incontrovertible: Jesus is questioning the written law, the Word of God, and they think it is a parable.

*Are you so dull?" he asked. You are obtuse, too?*

*"Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'?"*

Relationship with God is not determined by what enters a man, what he eats! And Jesus extends this concept: sin doesn't come from any external element. Sin isn't



determined by obedience to laws, and nothing external can contaminate an individual, in fact he goes on "For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body."

*In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean."*

Now we have to come to an agreement: if Jesus is right by saying that all foods are clean, then the Book of Leviticus is wrong, at least chapt. 11 is.

Not only Jesus demonstrates that Pharisees and scribes tell lies, but the same Word of God teaches something not corresponding to God's will.

We understood that religion invented sin in order to instill the sense of guilt in people, in order to dominate them. Sin is related to law; if you don't obey, you commit a sin.

Sin is, therefore, something external and Jesus doesn't agree.

Jesus goes on by listing 12 attitudes, 6 in plural and 6 in singular: these are the sins that make a man unclean.

*He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'*

Sin is not something you do against God, but against others: 12 actions never related to religion, worship, liturgy or God himself.

**Sin is something by which you voluntarily harm somebody else.**

When we read this passage we usually verify if there's something we normally do among the 12 actions listed by Jesus, and we feel relieved because we don't recognize those actions as something pertaining to us!!

*"Evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and*

The last one is something very important, but which I never heard in 32 years of confessions...

*"Folly"* which doesn't refer to a stupid or a fool man, but to someone who accrues for himself without worrying about others. Jesus states: this man has completely nullified his existence.

*"All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"*

**According to Jesus a believer is not the one who obeys God by observing his laws, but the one who is like the Father, by practicing a similar quality of love. God's love, according to Jesus, must only be welcome and then offered to others.**

That's happiness, because we don't feel afraid of God anymore. God doesn't punish: when Jesus discloses this concept, happiness begins.

When we experience a sort of fear of God, let's get rid of this image, because it is not the real image of God.

Many years ago, in Rome, at the Pontifical Gregorian University, attended by priests, brothers, nuns and catholic lay people, they used to provide a questionnaire with this question on it: should you be able to chose who would you prefer to be judged by in the last day of judgment? And a list of characters followed.

On top there was Our Lady, than came Pope John XXIII, at fourth place there was S. Joseph, than there were some other saints...

What about the Eternal Father? He was at last places. This is a sort of blasphemy. For sure Our Lady and pope John were good people, but it sounds strange that a creature is thought to be more good than the creator himself!

Therefore, we have to recover this aspect of the Father of Jesus: a Father that doesn't strike fear.

If our image of God is something we are afraid of, let's get rid of it, as it is not the right one; that's the image of the God of religion.

In synthesis, in order to express the content of Jesus message in Gospels we could say: **meeting Jesus makes each one of us more happy to be born.**

The only thing that the Lord wishes: **act in such a way that every person you meet feels more happy to be born, after having met you.**

In one expression there's the entire message of Jesus. This message was proclaimed on the mount of beatitudes, it is a real treasure, which hasn't anything to do with 'the opium of the people' or any other spiritualized expression, far from Matthew's text.

Gospels were written in Greek, but as times passed by this language started to expire and other languages took over. In our West world Latin took over and Gospel was translated, but translations never render the richness of the original meaning.

In passato sapete che il vangelo è scritto in greco, ma già un secolo dopo il greco cominciò a

Now let's briefly have a look at beatitudes, particularly the first one.

At the time of Jesus, happiness was due to what one owned. The much you owned, the more you were happy. This is just a false theory, because the more one owns, the more one wishes to own and he remains unhappy. In this overview Jesus proclaims something very strange. In a passage of Acts (20,35) Jesus says: *'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

This is the essence of his message. We are all made for happiness, this is God's will.

Happiness cannot be imposed, it is **conveyed by contagion. Only a happy person can convey happiness.**

Jesus states that happiness is possible here on earth. But how?

For most of us happiness is related to what others do for us and we are often quite disappointed, because others usually cannot imagine our real desire. They don't know we expect them to call us or to visit us.

If our happiness depends upon what we receive from others, we will always be disappointed. Jesus says **NO! Happiness doesn't depend upon what others do for us, it arises from what you do for them.**

He expresses this concept in one of the pearls of Gospels, both for grammatical syntax and for theological richness.

From Matthew's Gospel, let's analyze the first beatitude.

*"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside"*

The English translation is not completely correct. According to Greek text (τὸ ὄρος) there should be the definite article before 'mountainside', not the indefinite one. That is important because the meaning changes significantly. In this case this mount is the one already known - the Sinai. The place where Moses received the laws by God.

The evangelists omits the name, but clearly indicates the Sinai, the divine mountain on which God used to reside. Here a new alliance will be proclaimed, not one related to laws or commandments, but something very different.

*"and sat down."*

We may think that it doesn't really matter whether Jesus was sitting or standing, but in Gospels every particular is important. Literally in this passage the evangelist states that Jesus settles in (Greek verb καθίσαντος).

Why does he settle in on the mountain? In ancient times mountains were the closest places to divinities; that indicates a sort of divine condition.

Jesus, who is plainly God, settles in on the mountain.

*"His disciples came to him"*

Religion taught that men cannot reach God, as they don't deserve it.

In the Temple of Jerusalem, there was a space in which everybody were allowed, also pagans. There was a 15 metres balustrade with a marble plate quoting a phrase (in three different languages: Hebraic, the language of people; Greek, the commercial language; Latin, the language of rulers):

- **The one (pagan) who gets ahead of this barrier is responsible for his own death.**

Pagans, therefore, could enter up to a certain point, women up to another one, then priests and only the High Priest could enter the room where God was supposed to be present. There was an abyss between God and people.

Jesus sits on the mountain, he experiences the divine condition, but disciples are allowed to approach him. He proclaims then a very precious text: the beatitudes.

The evangelist is very precise and calculates exactly not only the number of beatitudes, but also the number of words to be used for their composition. I sometimes become very frustrated, because in 32 years of my activity, I never found a place where people know beatitude. This is tragic!

If I ask: how many commandments are there, the answer is correct, and I also get right answers about which they are. Even if sometimes there's a little confusion, number 6, number 7... It seems that women have one commandment less than men have... "you shall not covet your neighbour's wife", what about neighbour's husband?

If I ask: how many beatitudes are there? Can you list them? The first is quite easy to remember: blessed are the poor.. then a real mess comes out... it's something like blessed are the dull... But let's skim over.

There are 8 beatitudes. Why? Jesus raised on the first day after Saturday. Saturday was the seventh day. So we are talking about the eighth day. In ancient Christianity number 8 indicated a life that overcomes death. In Roman architecture we have baptisteries which used to have an octagonal shape. It was not a chance, but a specific theological indication.

The evangelist in this case calculated the number of words to be used for beatitudes: exactly 72. Why 72?

The evangelist dissociates himself from the covenant of Moses and suggests something new. The covenant of Moses ended by saying: *Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

**Jesus ends the concept of following the words of law and, through the beatitudes, he announces a never ending life, not only an earthly one.**

Commandments were addressed to a specific people, the elected one: Israel. **Beatitudes are intended for the entire mankind.**

The first beatitude is the key one: it is the premise for all the others.

Jesus says: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".*

We used to explain this beatitude by saying that poor go to paradise. But also all the other go to paradise. In fact, Jesus is saying something different. First of all Jesus never states that poverty is a good thing, it is not in God's plan.

It is important to clearly understand the meaning of words. Jesus says: poor in spirit, (Greek, τὸ πνεύματι), which can be translated in 3 different ways:

1. Jesus says that blessed are those who lack in spirit, the stupid. It's impossible. Stupid must be looked after, welcome, etc, but Jesus never invites us to become stupid.
2. The second one has always been the most considered: those who are poor in spirit, that is, those who are rich, but withdraw from their richness. I never succeeded in understanding what this really means. I'm rich, but I don't care of my money... I'm spiritually poor. Jesus really didn't mean this sort of hypocrisy.
3. The third: poor through the Spirit. Jesus is not saying blessed to those that we made poor, but to those who voluntarily, through love (the Spirit) decide to enter the condition of poverty, by sharing everything with others.

In other words: those who decide to lower their way of life in order to allow others to increase theirs, those are blessed. We'll understand why.

**Jesus is inviting us to share what we are and what we have with those who don't be or don't have. It's not like charity.** Charity supposes a benefactor and a beneficiary, in two different positions. Only by sharing, we become true brothers.

Jesus says: those who voluntarily and freely, for love, want to share what they have and what they are with those who have nothing, will reach happiness immediately. Why? Because theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

Here we are again with this 'Kingdom of Heaven'!

When we read Gospels, we have to understand the culture and the mentality of that time, but first of all, the theological plan of the evangelist.

Matthew is the only one who uses the expression 'Kingdom of Heaven'; the others use 'Kingdom of God'.

Blessed Matthew, why do you use 'Kingdom of Heaven' that means for us 'the next life' and don't you use 'Kingdom of God'?

Matthew addresses to Jews and they never mention or write the name of God. Therefore, in order not to hurt their feelings, he prefers to use 'heaven'. We use to say: it is Heaven's will. This doesn't mean the atmosphere, it means God. The same happens for Matthew, he never indicates the afterlife, a subject that Jesus ignores. **Jesus didn't come to indicate the best way to reach the next life, but the best path in order to fully live this earthly existence.**

Therefore, in this first beatitude Jesus wants to teach: those who freely and voluntarily, for love, give what they have or are, those will be happy, because God will take care of them. It's an extraordinary change. I don't need to worry about my life or happiness anymore. Jesus speaks at a present tense, not tomorrow, but immediately, today!

The more I take care of others' needs, the more I let the Father take care of mine.

In the Book of Revelation (14.13) we read: "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*" "*Yes,*" says the Spirit, "*they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.*"

When we finish our earthly existence, we leave everything here, all we owned. The only thing that will follow us will be the good we made for others.

This is a guarantee for happiness here, because we let the Father take care of us, and when we will enter the final life, that one will be the store we will take with us and that will enrich our existence for ever.

I want to exhort you to try, because this is really true. At the first opportunity, please give, the double, the triple and surely you will get back much more than you gave!

I'm so much sure about what I'm saying, that I undertake to reimburse you, should I be wrong.

In other Gospels there's a clear image used by Jesus that most people of my age may understand much better: "*With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more.*"

We remember that shops in the 50ies didn't sell packaged goods, everything was sold unpacked. Half a kilo of flour, a quarter of a liter of oil, and there were measure: particular jags that were filled with the good.

Therefore Jesus says: if you give 100, you don't lose it, because it is entirely given back to you. But the Lord cannot be surpassed in generosity, "*and even more.*" You'll get back for example 130 and not only 100; then you give 130 and you'll gain 200... so the person fulfills himself.

The more an individual devotes himself to others, the more he fulfills himself and becomes more and more mature, free and independent. You see, childhood is characterized by "it's all mine". Children are not generous, and rich people are like children, they keep for themselves, "it's all mine".

Maturity means being able to give and share. If this first beatitude is achieved, happiness is full, because to those who take care of others God will provide a happiness even much greater than they can expect or imagine.

Other beatitudes relate to negative situations of mankind, that Christian communities will help to eliminate, and then the individual who lives this beatitudes will be transformed.

The one who helps will be helped, the one who will be helped will realize the presence of God in his existence.

Nevertheless, experience teaches us that people are not really happy during their earthly life. How comes? Among many factors that prevent happiness, the most serious, the one that overcame Jesus himself, is the accumulation of goods: richness.

That's exactly what Matthew says in 19,16-26.

*"Now a man came up to Jesus"*

In order to catch the richness of Gospels we have to read them pretending not to know how the story ends, otherwise we risk not to pay enough attention. Once I asked to a friend of mine: have you ever read the Gospel? No, I know how the story goes.

Oh, you know who is the murder ... I see.

These written texts were initially narrated and evangelist used to enrich texts in order to create a special atmosphere to catch the auditor's attention. So this verse speaks about a man, we don't know which kind of man, an old one, a young, a rich, a poor. Just a man.

*"and asked, "Teacher"*

By addressing to Jesus as Teacher, it either means that he doesn't know him or that he is an enemy.

*"what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"*

He was worried, that's why he approaches Jesus. He wants to know what he must do - pay attention to the verb "must" (ποιήσω) - to get eternal life. We know that in Hebraic theology a concept of merit existed. God's love, God's grace, the eternal life in this case, must be deserved. Jesus gives a blunt reply:

*"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied*

He refuses this kind of approach and goes on:

*"There is only One who is good."*

Jesus refers him to the only good, God. He should already know what to do in order to get eternal life.

*"If you want to enter life,..."*

Please note that the man asked about making something to get eternal life, but Jesus doesn't suggest to do something and doesn't speak about eternal life, just about life. Jesus states that the concept of a life and an eternal life afterwards is wrong.

In Hebraic mentality a man was born, then finished his existence and, for the righteous, there was the resurrection and the eternal life. This eternal life started after death as a reward for a good behavior.

Jesus doesn't agree, there's only life. If this individual wants to enter life (not eternal life) has to ask himself if his earthly existence can be considered a real life. And adds:

*"... obey the commandments."*

Jesus dissociates himself from this man: why are you asking me? There are already commandments to obey, those of Moses. But he asks:

*"Which ones?" the man inquired.*

It seems strange that this individual asks about commandments, for in Hebrew world there was a very clear hierarchy among commandments. They were represented in two tables with unequal value. In the first one there were all obligations towards God, which were specifically intended for Jews. No other people had them.

There were the first three commandments which were clear obligations towards God, and among these, there was the most important one: the Sabbath. For Jews it was the most important, as they believed that God used to obey it too. Which one is the commandment that God obeys? The Sabbath. Disobeying this commandment meant disobeying to the entire law and it was sentenced to death.

The other commandments included in the first table were 7 duties, which are common to other people of the same geographical area and regarded the duties towards others.

But this individual needs to understand which ones he has to consider. Jesus is stating something shocking according to the mentality of those times. The man wants to know what he has got to do to get eternal life, but Jesus answers what must be done to get life: Jesus eliminates the first table.

According to Jesus in order to achieve life and continue it after death, behavior towards God is insignificant. Do you understand why Jesus has been killed? It's not strange he's been killed, it's surprising he lived so long. He had to hide.

**Jesus states that what's really important is not the relationship with God, but the one with others.**

We saw it previously when Jesus clarifies the concept of 'sin'.

In the Hebraic world, 'sin' was defined by a code, the divine law. Obeying this law meant feeling ok with God and disobeying it was clearly a sin. Jesus doesn't agree. Sin is not something external to man, but something that arises from inside. It's something that the individual consciously and voluntarily does to others, the harm he causes.

So, in his reply, Jesus eliminates the first table.

Why?

In the so-called parable of the Day of Judgment Jesus lists 5 commandments and 1 precept. None of these relates to worship or to the divinity.

*Jesus replied, " 'Do not murder, (you do not kill, you do not eliminate an individual) do not commit adultery (you do not eliminate a marriage), do not steal, (you do not take away goods) do not give false testimony..."*

This last commandment needs to be better, it's not something like 'do not lie'.

There were children that used to confess this sin: I told lies. They were being trained for the First Communion and had to go to the first confession, but they usually invented sins in order to satisfy the priest. It's terrible: children might have been the future patients for psychiatrists. Which sin did they confess? I disobeyed my parents. A child who doesn't disobey his parents is not normal, he has to. It's part of his growing process, he has to learn how to develop his own personality.

A 'false testimony' was the one released during a trial, the one by which an innocent could receive a death sentence.

*"... honor your father and mother,..."*



It doesn't pertain to an obvious sense of respect towards parents, but to an economic support. At that time pensions were not provided and the male firstborn had to support his parents. Jesus ignores commandments regarding God, which distinguished Israel from all other people. He ignores particularly the Sabbath and provides a synthesis of the other 7, by summarizing them into 5.

Then he adds another one, which is not a commandment, but a precept contained in the Book of Leviticus:

*"... and love your neighbor as yourself"*

I need to go on a tangent. When you ask believers how a Christian should love, most of them answer: love your neighbor as yourself. This is false. This was something pertaining to Jews, not to Christians. For Jews love for God should be total, complete and absolute, and love for neighbors was quite limited: as yourself, that is I have to love you as I love me. Given that a person is limited, this love will be too.

Additionally, the concept of neighbor in Hebraic world is not the one that Jesus is teaching. Neighbor for Jews was the one who belonged to a clan or a tribe, sometimes it referred to the stranger living in Israel, but it was a limited concept. Jesus changes this concept. **Neighbor is not the one who is helped, but the one who approaches the other in order to help him.**

Jesus will never say 'love your neighbor as yourself'. He provides a new commandment, which is not a real commandment. He names it 'commandment' just to counter it with those of Moses. But Jesus in chapt 13 of John's Gospel says: **'love each other as I loved you'**. He commands the only thing that cannot be imposed: love. He specifies: My command is this, meaning an absolutely new one. In fact in Greek text there's the adjective 'new' that was not translated into English.

In Greek the term 'new' can be expressed in two different ways:

- 1) The first is what we usually mean by 'new', ("néos" - νέος), another one, newly added. If we had 10 commandments we have another one. But the evangelist doesn't utilize this one.
- 2) He uses 'καίριος' which means 'better', that is a new commandment that outclasses all the others.

It's not 'love your neighbor as yourself', but 'love each other as I loved you'. The measure of this love is not the individual, but God's love. And please note that verbs are not at future tense, 'love each other as I will love you'. He's not talking about love that he will express on the cross; verbs are at past tense: 'as I loved you'.

How did Jesus love?

In John's Gospel, chap 13, the evangelist says that Jesus showed the full extent of his love by pouring water into a basin and washing his disciples' feet. In a Christian community love involves service. Love without service is not a true one.

Let's go back to the passage of commandments. We saw that Jesus lists 5 commandments and 1 precept. Previously he seemed to be addressing to an individual, now there's something more specific: a 'young man' (νεανίσκος), a person that still hasn't reach maturity.

Normally in Greek world this period went from 24 to 40 years old and then a man reached his own maturity.

That individual has been introduced in a generic way, now it is said to be a young man, that is a developing one, but not mature, yet. In fact he addresses a stupid question.

*All these I have kept," the young man said.*

The Greek text shows that this person is arrogant, in fact it utilizes the expression *pànta tàuta*" (πάντα ταῦτα), can you feel how, only by pronouncing it, it feels your mouth, like a satisfaction. But, pay attention, this kind of satisfaction doesn't assure happiness. In fact he asks himself:

*"What do I still lack?"*

Why is he asking this? Because he obeys all religious commandments, all prescriptions, but he didn't reach maturity, he's a religious person. Religion, in fact, has to hold the faithful in a perpetual infantilism condition who prevents an individual from reaching maturity. This condition means depending on an adult: father and/or mother.

**Infantilism is what religion desires for the faithful. Persons won't be able to establish what's right and what's wrong, what's good and what's evil, what has to be done and what hasn't. It's a condition totally marked by obedience.**

There's nothing more dramatic than obedience in the existence of an individual. The greatest crimes of mankind, keep this in mind, have been committed by obedient people.

The one who simply obeys, doesn't consult his conscience, he fulfills the order he received. Those people put under trial, always try to justify themselves by stating they were just obeying orders. Religion, therefore, produces small criminals, serial killers who obey without asking themselves if the order is right or wrong.

This is also the **fascination of religion**. Why does religion fascinate people? Because **it deprives them of freedom, but provides a sense of security.**

You have nothing to worry about, just obey. Maybe you're not free, but you're secure.

The message of Jesus, on the contrary, leads people to maturity and independence.

**Jesus-believers are those who welcome his message and become able to think and act in accordance with their own conscience, not that of others.**

**That's why in Gospels the verb 'to obey' (ὕπακούω). is not present.**

**Jesus never claims obedience to him, nor to God, nor to others.**

This expression appears only 5 times in Gospels, but always referring to harmful elements, hostile nature elements: the wind, the tempest, the rough sea, the mulberry... Those are the ones who have to obey.

Jesus states that **resemblance makes people grow, not obedience.**

This is a very important concept, because if you remain a servant of God you will never be able to perceive his goodness, his life fullness.

*Jesus answered, "If you want to be (and we find the word [τέλειος] that is translated with mature - not perfect) perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

This young man was worried for life, for happiness in the next life.

Jesus invites him to look at earthly existence and realize how many unhappy persons are awaiting a gesture from him, a particular one, in order to be able to live more serenely. That's why, being asked about what to do in order to get eternal life, Jesus suggests to reach happiness here in the present existence.

The young man asked something for himself, Jesus invites him to take care of others. The power of Jesus message is that **while law is imposed through fear, the message of Jesus is proposed through love. Being his message pure love, it cannot be nothing else than a proposal. When love is imposed, it's a violence, maybe a rape.**

We already explained that there's a correct way of interpretation: **when God is introduced as the one who frightens or punishes, let's get rid of this image for it doesn't represent the Father of Jesus.**

In the same way: when a doctrine is imposed, when we feel obliged, it's not something pertaining to the Lord, because Jesus doesn't impose, his message includes no obligations. Love cannot be imposed, it only can be offered.

Jesus proposes, he says "If"... it's a proposal.

He knows the power of his message! Which is this power? The Gospel, which we call the good news, is the exact formulation of the desire of life fullness that each creature needs to pursue.

In each of us there's a spark of the Divine, there's this footprint of God and this desire that we call happiness and represents the fullness of life.

Gospels, the message of Jesus, just express this desire. So he doesn't need to impose, he just has to propose. If the individual has his heart free from rubbles that can prevent him from welcoming this message, he will promptly answer.

I've been carrying out this popularization service for long years and do you know which is a common expression that I hear everywhere, from North to South? "I always felt this, it's something I've always imagined, but now I can hear it completely formulated.

Inside each of us there's a desire of fullness; Jesus just formulates it.

So he says 'if' you want to be perfect (τέλειος); please note that it is a perfection concerning age. In Greek-Roman world, people reached maturity around 40 years old. There's first a young man, then a mature man. Jesus feels that a religious individual that observed all precepts (remember "pànta tàuta"), has not achieved maturity. Therefore Jesus states that if you want to become mature, to evolve:

*"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

This passage must be interpreted according to the culture of that times.

Jesus is not asking to give up all properties, but to share what we have with somebody else. Each of us can clothe another one without remaining naked.

It's not a matter of achieving a poverty-stricken life, but of taking care of others.

The evangelist is simply introducing the content of the first Beatitude. Not just through charity.

**Charity is not a Christian virtue, for it implies a benefactor and one who is helped, but the two are far away.**

Charity is not enough, a real sharing is needed.

So Jesus states: go, sell your possessions (a young man tends to keep all what he owns, Jesus asks him to take care of others), give to the poor (those who have nothing) and you will have treasure in heaven.

"Heaven" is an Hebraic expression that stands for "God". That is, please take care of others' happiness and your treasure will be the only one who gives confidence and life power, God himself.

It's an extraordinary Exchange. You feel responsible for the happiness of others and the Father will take care of yours.

You can test it. When we happen to give, let's give the triple of what we intended to, we will realize we will not lose anything, but we will be given much more than what we gave, **because God is unsurpassable as for generosity. The Father gives life to those who gives life to others, that is loving others as one is loved by the Father means transmitting an unlimited love.**

We already understood that: **we only own what we give.**

**What we keep for ourselves is lost. What we give is what we own... then we go and follow him".**

Experiencing the message of Jesus makes you even more happy to be born and requires you to do the same: **make every person you meet more happy to be born.** The aim of Jesus is to enlarge this circle of happiness so that his proposal can reach everybody.

*"When the young man heard this, he went away sad..."*

Please remember that Jesus met an anonymous, the evangelists then states he is a young man. Jesus suggests him to grow, to become mature and he renounces. He didn't grow at all, there's something more strong that prevents him from evolving and welcoming the message of Jesus. What could this be? We'll find out at the end of the scene.

The young man went away sad... Meeting Jesus is not always worthwhile. Meeting Jesus makes men more happy to be born, but this individual is not; he is sad. Why?

*"... because he had great wealth"*

He was very rich.

The young man, being asked to chose the full happiness, prefers to remain sad, because he had many properties. This is tragic. What should have guaranteed happiness (such as richness), was a source of sadness. He declared always to have loved the neighbor, but having been invited to demonstrate this love by sharing what he owned, he is not able to. Maybe poor were not included in the category of neighbor to love.

Jesus invites him to become 'a man' but he remains a 'young man'. He thought he owned many goods, but, in fact, he is owned by them. He is the real 'possessed' in Gospels: he's the one that Jesus cannot free. By acknowledging this fiasco Jesus says:

*"I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."*

I want to remind that 'Kingdom of Heaven' is not the next life, but a Hebraic expression meaning 'Kingdom of God', that is the Christian community begun by Jesus. Among Jesus community there's no place for rich, but only for lords. Which is the difference? A rich is the one who keeps everything for himself, a lord is one who gives to others. We cannot be all rich, but we can all be lords, because we can give what we have or what we are. Jesus is not talking about the next life, but the earthly existence. In order to be even more clear, he repeats:

*"Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

There's a great disconcertment among disciples. They were those who abandoned everything in order to follow Jesus; a rich one finally arrives in the community and they were happy! But after the last statement... He has to get rid of his richness... they protest.

*When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"*

Pay attention, this doesn't pertain to the eternal salvation, for the rich enters it too, by simply obeying the commandments. This is something about the physical salvation. The verb 'to be saved' (σώζω), literally means escape a danger, referring here to the hunger of the group, the support of the group.

If the Lord suggests to get rid of money before entering a community, how can they go on?

*Jesus looked at them and said*

In Matthew's Gospel we find the verb 'look at' (ἐμβλέπω) only 2 times; in this verse and in the famous Sermon on the Mount by saying: "*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?*" (Mt 6.26).

Among all animals Jesus takes birds, which were considered the most harmful, those not to bless the Lord for. He says: look that also animals you define useless are fed by the Lord. No doubt the Father will take care of you!

This verb 'to look at' comes again here and represents an action by the Father:

*"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Which is the real meaning of this concept of salvation?

Men think that happiness is in what they own, what they keep for themselves, the more I own, the more I'm happy, and this is very easy to understand. But with God this is different; he is generosity that shares and all this is really achievable.

The great fiasco of Jesus is not having succeeded to help the rich, because richness closes you to others and makes you un happy.

I would like to add a beautiful image given by Luke regarding a rich man. (The Rich Man and Lazarus).

The trait that the evangelist gives about the rich is that of one who is not condemned because of his wickedness towards the poor, but for having ignored him.

He lives in such a luxury that he doesn't realize the poor exists.

*There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.*

It's a sort of psychological nicety. He was rich outside in order to hide his inner poverty.

On the contrary: the more an individual is rich inside, the more he is sober outside.

This man used to live in luxury every day. Was he really so hungry that he had to eat that much every day? No, he is always hungry because he keeps everything for himself, never sharing it with others.

All the evangelists state the same message, maybe using a different language or different images: God is love, love must only be welcome; and once you welcome it, you start growing until you reach full maturity.

Another very important element is that religion spiritualizes individuals, that is separates them from others in order to make them able to approach God, who is supposed to be very far. The devout and pious person, through prayers, devotions and religious worships is separated from other people. With Jesus, God leaves that far heaven and becomes a man.

For that reason religious persons are almost atheistic, because they think they have to go up to meet God, but he came down to meet men: the first go up, the last came down, and they never meet.

Speaking about happiness: **when a man becomes deeply human he discovers his own divine essence because God is not reachable through spiritualization, but through humanization.**

If we give our life with Him and like Him for others' sake, He is there. Our existences intersect and we discover the wonder of a God that wants to merge with man.

In John's Gospel this reality is very well expressed. It's a very important chapter, the one that, if exactly understood, can completely change the relationship between a man and the Lord, and consequently, between a man and his fellow men. (John 15,1-8)  
*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener".*

When Jesus uses this formula 'I am', it's not a simple assertion of existence. 'I am' in the Old Testament was the name of God. In the episode, known as The Burning Bush, Moses asks the name this entity answers: *"I am who I am".*

Jesus is claiming his plain divine condition.

I remind you that John's Gospel opens with the so called 'prologue' which ends with these words: *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known*

That means: all what you think about God, all what has been taught to you, all what you believe about him must be compared to Jesus. If what you learned doesn't correspond to Jesus action, get rid of it, because those are false images that disfigure God's face.

Gospels teach us that we must focus on Jesus, and we will discover who God is, because Jesus reveals him and many ideas or beliefs we have pertain to superstition: Jesus has the full divine condition.

Why Jesus says to be the true vine and that the Father is the gardener? Vine is the fruit plant who represented Israel people, but Jesus says that the people of the Lord is not just Israel, but all those who will welcome his message.

He starts to separate the roles, He is the vine and the Father is the gardener; this is important, because they have two different tasks that must not be mixed up.

*"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit"*

The branch is attached to vine and draws up the vital sap, turning it into bunch of grapes.

This is the aim of a branch, but there could be the risk, Jesus states, that this branch (underlining 'in me'), representing the believer, bears no fruit even if he welcomed his message.

Why does he bear no fruit? Because if a branch feeds himself it's a sort of parasite and must be cut off.

Therefore, every branch has to increasingly bear fruits, and the Father (the gardener) is the only one who evaluates its growth; the branch doesn't bear fruits when it doesn't communicate the life it receives to others.

This branch receives the sap by Jesus, but it is not able to transform it into fruit. This represents a believer who belongs to a Christian community, receiving love by the Lord and by others, but doesn't change it fruitful actions for others' sake.

Let's make an example. We participate to the Eucharist, we eat Jesus who turns himself into bread in order to make us able to turn ourselves into bread for others: here's the deep sense of Eucharist!

It's not a stand-alone worship, something for a self holiness or devotion; participating to the Eucharist doesn't end with the Communion, but with the moment in which this Communion becomes the needed strength to turn ourselves into bread for others' sake.

During the Eucharist, Jesus, the Son of God, turns himself into bread, life for us, so that all those welcome him and become able to turn themselves into bread for others, become sons of the same God.

By this image of branch, Jesus alludes to those disciples or believers who eat the bread representing his body, but are not able to turn themselves into as much bread or life for others. They are those who are worried about their holiness that haven't enough time to take care of others, those that always chose a devotion, a prayer, a liturgical service rather than helping a friend: first comes God, then comes the brother, if there's time left.

An example: we talk about those people who, if we tell them we are experiencing a difficult situation and need their help or their support, just say: "I'll remember you in my prayers", leaving you in the very same condition.

Those are very dangerous: **Hands need to be held out to others, not to remain joint for the Lord.** He prefers we recite one Hail Mary less and help the one who's in need.

Pay attention to the passage we read before: the Father cut it, others are not allowed to judge its growth, the maturity of the branch, neither the vine is.

It's not the vine (Jesus) who cuts it off, but the Father. Each of us has different growth rhythms or possibilities and only the Father is able to judge.

First comes the negative situation, the person not able to turn the love she has received in love for others, like a parasite: the Father cuts it off. Then we find the positive one.

*"While every branch that does bear fruit..."*, meaning the disciples, the believers who are joint to Jesus and take the vital sap of his love, turning it into love for others, the Father takes a wonderful action: *he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*

We already saw how it is important to make a correct translation of Gospels, otherwise our life might experience negative effects.



If our existence is based on Gospels, but they are not well translated or interpreted, consequences will be inauspicious. The verb 'to prune' is not exactly translated from Greek. A correct translation would be 'to purify', otherwise this could be intended as a negative action on behalf of the Father, something to be afraid of. It happens that this wrong concept is applied in our bad moments, when we are sad; pious persons, the most dangerous, those who always have a prompt and right answer, those who perfectly know God, what he does, what he things; they come and say: it's our Lord who pruned you.

So this mad gardener sees a beautiful branch and he prunes it; this concept has generated the fear of God, leading us to award all negative situations of existence to him.

The action of the Father is only a positive one. The evangelist doesn't say that he prunes the branch, but he purifies it; he wants every branch to be more and more fruitful and, pay attention, the branch itself or let's say all other branches are not allowed to find or single out negative elements that prevent the branch from bearing fruit, the Father is. And then he purifies it.

Each of us has negative elements, let's call them faults, that prevent us from bearing fruit.

The evangelist says: be careful, don't think you have to remove that fault by yourself, as the result might be disastrous, just make sure you increase your loving ability and you make others happy. Should there be something causing troubles, the Fathers knows which they are and immediately acts in order to purify them.

This completely changes the relationship with God, it's the end of 'examining one's conscience', I did this, I did that, it's a quiet relationship: I have to take care of others' sake, in spite of and beyond my imperfections, my limits and my doubts.

If you try to take away those limits, you would create a disaster: you would just be focused on yourself!

When an individual is focused on himself, he prevents this vital nourishment from reaching others, and remaining focused on himself, on his limits or needs, he doesn't realize the needs and expectations of others. It's risky, because he might damage his existence trying to take away what he thinks to be a fault, but maybe it's not before God. It depends on what we acknowledged from the current moral teachings. But who really knows what the Lord really thinks about it?

In the first letter to John, the narrator utilizes a very nice expression: *our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything* (1Jn 3.20).

If we are oriented towards the sake of others, should there be something negative, the Father will take care of eliminating it. Should he leave it, it surely means that it doesn't stand in the way.

By using the image of the branch, Jesus requests the disciple not to focus on the devilish idea of spiritual perfection (there's nothing more harmful than a person who

tries to achieve the spiritual perfection), but on devoting himself to others. Which is the difference? A spiritual perfection is much far and abstract as self ambition is; self-devoting is, on the contrary, something concrete and immediate that allows men to grow.

What do we mean by spiritual perfection? An individual doesn't accept himself because he realizes he has faults, limits, and would like to be different. He places himself on a pedestal. All his efforts are concentrated on this unreal bent.

When he falls down, when he sins, his reaction is out of all proportion, as he feels angry with himself: how could this happen to me?

But, above all, he tries to notice his same fault in others, and then attack them. You know, there isn't a person much unpleasant as the one who displays those same faults pertaining to us but that we don't accept. When a person is unpleasant at first sight, usually is because she acts as a mirror. We find in her those faults we are not able to admit.

So Jesus teaches not to aim at a unreachable and abstract perfection, that leads us be focused on ourselves and prevents us from realizing others' needs, but to devote ourselves to others. Perfection is not real, self-devotion is immediate and concrete. This is what the Father's (gardener) action guarantees and represents a full happiness. Don't be worried about your faults, your weaknesses, God will take care of them, because he wants us to be happy.

We already said that meeting Jesus makes us even more happy to be born and what does he expect from us? That we make everyone we meet more happy to be born. But happiness cannot be transmitted through a document or a text; **it is handed down through "contagion"; only an individual who is overflowing with happiness might be able to transmit it.** Should this person feel troubled by her faults, or hurt about her sins, what will she be able to give?

*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.*

This passage of Chapt. 15 comes after the supper during which Jesus washed the disciples' feet and asked them to do the same. A free and voluntary service to others purifies an individual. Paradoxically washing others' feet we clean our existence, we purify it.

Jesus states that we are already clean because of the message he announced: love turned into service. Is through serving others that we become clean, the action of the Father needs us to cooperate; He cleans and we clean ourselves, not through penitential rites, but concrete actions that lead the neighbor to feel "a lord".

*Remain in me, and I will remain in you.*

Jesus changes our relationship with God. Religion taught us we had to look for God, a very far one, a kind of God we had to implore; Jesus states that we are not required to look for God, but to welcome him. An individual must not be oriented towards God,

but like God and with God be oriented towards others: remain in me and I will remain in you, Jesus says.

Religion implied a temple, where God was present; people had to reach the temple in order to meet God. But not all of them were allowed, those who were considered sinners, the unclean, were not allowed into the temple. So they felt left out of the Lord.

With Jesus the temple doesn't exist as a fixed place, one that only the worthy can enter; the temple is the Christian community.

And the Christian community is the one that welcomes everybody, without excluding people because of their behavior.

Please remember the extraordinary expression used by Peter, as he felt embarrassed towards pagans, but was surprised when the Spirit came on Cornelius, who was a pagan roman centurion. It was shocking! Through this experience he realized that: *no one can be considered unclean.*

There's no one in the world that can be considered unclean or far from God's love, despite his behavior, his personal condition or his morality.

Religion divides people from God, by selecting clean and unclean, worthy and not. Jesus doesn't; Father's love doesn't exclude anybody, apart from behaviors. This presence of God is truly dynamic, goes towards others.

*No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

Like a branch is unlikely to bear fruit by itself while being far from vine, you will be unfruitful far from me.

Serving brothers, according to Jesus, is the only guarantee of remaining in the Lord. *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

Usually a wrong image of an omnipotent God is present, the one who is able to do everything; but this doesn't correspond to what Jesus says. Vine needs branches in order to bear fruit, if you take all branches away, it will bear no grape, apart from the nourishment it has.

By transposing this image to the Lord, God is love, but if people doesn't cooperate, this love cannot become concrete, cannot be expressed.

The branch doesn't bear fruit without vine, but vine doesn't either without branches; we depend on the Lord, but he depends on us, on our cooperation.

Therefore we are very important, each of us is. **The Father needs each of us in order to turn his love into a concrete reality.** The one who doesn't cooperate, belittles the plan of God and Jesus states:

*If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

Why did Jesus use this very example, the one of vine? He could use any other fruit plant, an apple tree or a pear tree. Why a vine?

In the book of the Prophet Ezekiel we read a passage that let us understand the big difference between vine and all other fruit trees.

*how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest? Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred?*

It was useful only to bear fruit. If you ask to your grandparents, when soap didn't exist sheet were washed with ash, but not that of vine, because it stained.

Our existence is just like vine, we have to bear fruit, otherwise it is completely useless.

*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

I never stop being astonished by the eagerness with which we believers simplify the expressions of Jesus, completely changing their meaning, eliminating what seems to be uncomfortable.

When we ask about what Jesus said about prayer, many people answer: "ask everything and it will be given you". We ignore the first part of the sentence "if you remain in me and my words remain in you". We took a short cut, what about the first part?

Jesus states: if you remain in me, that is if you life becomes an extension of Lord's one, a visible expression of God's love, and we are completely devoted to others' sake, be sure that we will be given everything we need.

How can we say we remain in the Lord? If we truly and continuously serve others, even with our imperfections, our faults, it doesn't matter!

We remain in him when we devote ourselves to other's sake and if:

**We are able with Him and like Him to love the one who hates us**

**We are able with Him and like Him to wish someone's well without expecting anything in exchange**

**We are able with Him and like Him to forgive before this forgiveness is asked** (this is the main characteristic of the Christian forgiveness, it is given before the other asks for it).

*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

People has always poured their own ambitions and frustrations in God, trying to build more and more big and luxurious temples, building enormous statues, worshipping him with more and more solemn liturgies...

Here Jesus touches one of the key points of religion, where God's glory means God's magnificence. Jesus doesn't agree at all.

His Father's glory is that we bear much fruit and we will be his true disciples.

God is love and he shows his glory only in and through love. Life won't be the same. What will it happen? In the very moment in which we will be able to make our enemy's sake, our life will be grafted with that of God.

So the God usually worshipped and adored, will not remain an abstract entity, but a real presence in our life.

Just like in Jacob's dream, where he sees a step towards heaven and remains astonished by discovering that the Lord was on earth and he didn't realize it, we know that God is here. Why don't many people perceive it?

If I tell you that there's some lovely music in this room, I'm not crazy! The music is here, but in order to perceive it, a device is needed, maybe a radio. I have to turn it on, but it is not enough as I have to tune it.

The same for God; he is present but not everyone perceives his presence; a device is needed. The only devices we need: **forgive and love the one who hurt us.**

By doing this our life will not be the same, because we will realize the presence of God, a Fatherly presence, who takes care even of the slightest events of our life: we will never turn back.

The Father of Jesus doesn't fulfill his sons' requests, he precedes them.

**This Father doesn't wait for us to ask him, or to obey him, but precedes our requests; therefore our life completely changes; here is happiness that Jesus had announced.**