

II EASTER – May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

**EIGHT DAYS LATER JESUS CAME – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Jn 20.19-31***

***On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."***

***Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."***

***Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

All Jesus' disciples are hiding in the house for fear that they will come to the same end as their master – the warrant of arrest was for all the group, not only for Jesus, because Jesus was not the only dangerous one, but His message, and if there is someone around announcing it, the religious institution will not sleep peacefully.

Well, while all the disciples are in hiding, as writes the evangelist *"..for fear of the Jews"*, that is the religious leaders, there is one that does not have all this fear, and for this he is not present when Jesus shows Himself to His disciples. He does not have fear, he is not hiding with the others because he is the disciple that, as we said in the episode of Lazarus, he is willing to die with Jesus.

This disciple is Thomas, and after Simone Peter, he is the most important in John's Gospel. He is nominated a good seven times. This Thomas is known as "Didymus ", meaning twin. Who is this twin? He is Jesus' twin. Because he is willing with Jesus and like Jesus to give his life for the others. And this is the one most like Jesus.

So, he was not with the other disciples when Jesus showed Himself and when they tell him *"We have seen the Lord."* He does not deny the possibility, but shouts his desperate need to believe and experience it. When

Thomas says: *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."* , it is not the present, but the future, it is not the denial of the Jesus' resurrection, but the desperate need to believe it.

It is then when we, in our language, say "I can't believe it!". It does not mean "I don't want to believe"...it does not mean to deny the evidence of the fact, but it is so wonderful, so unexpected, that we say ""I can't believe it!". Or when we say "But it's not possible!" Not meaning denial, but meaning that what we have been told is so wonderful that it seems impossible.

Therefore Thomas does not deny the resurrection of Jesus, he only shouts his desperate need to experience it. And here now are the *"Eight days later"*, that is when the community finds itself for the Eucharist – because Jesus does not allow private or particular manifestations – Jesus shows Himself in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, when received love transforms itself into communicated love, there the presence of the Lord manifests itself.

*"Jesus came"* and *"stood among them"*. Jesus is always in the middle of the community, He again announces peace, the invitation to the fullness of happiness, as He had done on the first appearance, and invites Thomas to do what he had said, that is put his finger and hand into his side and in the wounds. And he invites him to not *"«... disbelieve, but believe»"*. Well, Thomas takes a good look.....unfortunately artists have done a bad service – to put the finger into the side of Jesus or in His wounds.

Thomas takes a good look, but bursts forth in the highest, absolute expression of faith contained in all the Gospels. Thomas turns to Jesus recognizing Him *"«My Lord and my God! »"* When Philip had asked Jesus *"Show us the Father and that will be enough for us"* and Jesus had replied *"Who has seen me has seen the Father"* this now is realized in the experience of Thomas.

Thomas turns to Jesus knowing Him as Lord and as God. That God that no one has ever seen, as John has written in his Prologue, he manifests himself in the risen Jesus. Therefore Thomas not only is not surprised, but explodes in the greatest profession of faith of all the Gospels.

Well now. Even after this Jesus replies: *"«Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed»."* The experience of Jesus' resurrection is not an privilege granted two thousand years ago to a small group of people, but those that with them welcome His message and, with Him and like Him, live for others, have the experience of the risen Christ. And, while there is need on the part of the people to see something to believe, Jesus proposes the contrary:

*"Believe and you will become a sign that the others will be able to see"*. And this is the second beatitude with which the Gospel of John closes.

The first was that of the practice of the washing of the feet, that of service, when Jesus had said: *"You are blessed if you do this"* It is the service to others that permits the experience of the presence of God – God is he that puts himself at the service of mankind – in the existence of each individual.