

XIV ORDINARY TIME – July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011

**I AM GENTLE AND LOWLY IN HEART – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Mt 11,25-30***

***At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.***

***All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

***Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

After Jesus' lament of the refusal of the message of the kingdom in the cities of Galilee, they refused it because the cities are dominated by the synagogue, by the teachings of the chief priests and Pharisees, Jesus blesses those that welcomed it. Matthew's Gospel chapter 11 verse 25.

"At that time", therefore the evangelist connects this with what came before Jesus' lament, "*Jesus declared, « I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children»".*

Let's make it clear straight away that Jesus does not take a position against knowledge, against culture, anything but. The learned and the scholars are the doctors of law, the official teachers of Israel, those that have already condemned Jesus as a blasphemer. Why does Jesus say that the Father had hidden these things from them? Because the God of love is hidden from the "law-lovers."

Who is used to relate oneself to the situations, to the happenings, to people, on the basis of a code, on the basis of a law, is not able to understand the figure of a God of love, a God that created mankind and loves and defends his creatures. Therefore the criterion of the interpretation of the scriptures, of the Bible and of the word of God, must be for the good of mankind. Who instead makes a doctrine, a law, in the observance of commandments, of rules, more important than the good of mankind, well then, these people risk having a veil in front of his eyes that obstructs them from discovering the design of God's love for mankind.

"«...and revealed them to little children; »". The term indicates the simple ones, that is people that do not have difficulty in welcoming a God of love, because it is this that they need. "«..yes, Father, for such

*was your gracious will»*”. Therefore God has decided that the criterion for knowing him is love, not the law, not the doctrine.

*“«All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him »”*. What does Jesus want to say with this so important phrase? Jesus has been presented by the evangelist from the beginning of his Gospel as the ‘God with us’, a God that there is no need to search for, but to welcome.

And welcoming this God going with him and like him, not towards God but towards mankind. Therefore with Jesus, God is made man, and this is the only sacred value, the only important value, the only goal in the life of a believer. And because Jesus says that no one knows the Father if not the Son and to whom of the two the Son will be revealed? The verb ‘reveal’ means to take away that which obstructs one from seeing, that is the law. The law obstructs the knowing of the Father’s love.

And also the criterion to welcome Jesus and to understand the Father is to put in one’s life as an absolute value, as a the only sacred value, the good of mankind. And saying this Jesus, after having taken His distance from the learned, the scholars, that make the laws a pillar to dominate the population, Jesus turns to those very ones who are dominated, the oppressed.

And it is an strong invitation, of incredible tenderness. *“«Come to me,..»”* Jesus invites everyone *“«all who labor and are heavily laden, »”*. For what reason do they labor and are heavily laden? Because of the burden of the laws, that they are unable to observe all the rules, all the doctrine, all the taxations. And this is the labor, oppression because of observing all these regulations, that they are unable to practice, they feel always at fault, always in debt towards the Lord.

And here the announcement of Jesus: *“« ....and I will give you rest»”*. The word used by the evangelist ‘give rest’ which means ‘repose, end of labouring’. That is to get your breath. It is Jesus that says “I will give you rest”. Therefore all those that are oppressed with a relationship with God that are unable to go ahead because of the too many laws and regulations, Jesus says “ welcome me , I will be your relief. I will be the one to give you breath”

In fact, Jesus continues: *“« Take my yoke upon you,.. »”*. The yoke, we know, is the tool that is put over the animals to guide them at work. Well then, the observance of the divine law was called ‘a yoke’. It was a law impossible to observe. Even Peter in the Acts of the Apostles 15,10, when they want to impose these to the pagans, Peter says *“Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”*

Therefore it is a failure. This doctrine, this imposition has been a failure because no one could follow it and this made mankind always feel guilty, in debt towards God. And when there is a sense of guilt his love cannot be experienced.

Then Jesus says: *“«Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,.. »”*. Jesus here is not saying to imitate His quality of character – it is impossible to have the character and

quality of Jesus. The meekness and humility of Jesus do not refer to His character, to the quality of a person, but the social condition.

In the beatitudes 'blessed are the meek', they were the underprivileged, the dregs in society and the humble, in Greek 'tapinos', they were those of insignificance. Jesus made a choice: He placed Himself with the dregs, the invisible, the insignificant people. Therefore this can be done. What does it mean? Do not exclude anyone from the range of actions of your love.

Do not search for the important people, those in pole position, but put yourselves beside the lowly ones, because it is there where I am. Therefore, "*«...learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls»*". So Jesus invites us to orientate our lives to the service of others and in this there is breath, that which gives soul and strength to the existence of the believer.

And Jesus concludes renewing the invitation. "*«... my yoke..»*", therefore not the 'yoke' of the law, but His yoke, the yoke of Jesus are the beatitudes, that is an invitation that is needed to fulfill the full happiness of mankind. "*«...my yoke is easy, »*", literally 'good', "*«..and my burden is light. »*". And it is a light burden because there are no regulations to observe, but only love to welcome.

Not a doctrine to accept in one own existence, but a Jesus that asks to be welcomed to merge with mankind, giving him His own capacity of love.