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THE LAST BEATITUDE

*"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." (Rev. 14,13)*

In depth Biblical Study by F. Alberto Maggi
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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..*

Introduction

This year we will deal with the subject of "the death" because, even if we all try to lay it aside, it is a matter we will be involved in, sooner or later, as some loved ones die, relatives or friends.

We always try to forget about the death, it's normal, it's a kind of defense, but at a certain time some loved ones die, and as time goes by we realize that we have more funeral anniversaries than birthdays to bear in mind; so we are forced to think about it.

Some years ago an old friar used to live with me in the convent and he was in the habit of talking about his death, every day at lunchtime, at dinner time, at breakfast, he used to say: bah... maybe today I will die, who's going to cook tomorrow? In the morning he used to say: I wonder if I'll still be here tonight, I wonder if God is going to call me today... One day I told him: listen, is it possible that every day you have to think about dying? He answered: Yes, because the Lord said he will come when we don't expect him...! So, in order to avoid Lord's sudden decisions he decided to think about it every day, he looked terrified at the idea of dying.

After all, the death of a dear person is a drama that marks our life forever, but this tragedy can become even more terrible because of wrong religious ideas related to death. I'm not only referring to all stupid religious expressions like: God called him, God took him, or if it was a young person: he was already mature for heaven... so maybe old people are thick-headed and still not mature...

I also heard something about children or very young people: the Lord wanted the most beautiful flowers for His garden. So the Eternal Father, this crazy gardener cuts off the flowers like a cherub or He wants the most kind children with Him! Could this be the secret for our permanent wickedness? A little wickedness can be the right precaution, the right guarantee against the choices of the Eternal Father.

When we face the death of someone we receive all this kind of expressions, which are even more awful as they come from pious or religious individuals, the ones that know everything about God: the Lord gave, the Lord took away, or this is the cross that the Lord gave you... and so on.

Would the traditional answer "our dearest are in heaven and contemplate God" be enough? The attractive idea (if everything goes right) is that they are in heaven, not in hell or in purgatory, but what are they doing in heaven? They are contemplating God! For how long? For the eternity! This sounds like a life sentence! Are they doing something else? No! The eternal rest... in fact this is what we pray for our dead, a sort of life sentence!

Furthermore there are other gloomy ideas of the past that we are still not able to eradicate. There was a Pope in 1570, Pius V, that inserted a Latin phrase in the funeral

Mass (those of my age will remember it) "*Dies irae*"= the day of ire. In the funeral Mass we use a passage by the Prophet Zephaniah that does not really deal with death, but we use it. Imagine what happens to a person that is devastated by the pain and listens to this passage: "*That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom...*"

Meeting God was something dreadful.

Therefore we are not surprised if some people is supposed to be *mourning and weeping in this valley of tears*.

This meeting of ours is intended to try and see the light of Jesus teaching, of new concepts of life, death and resurrection.

Why this?

The Second Vatican Council (over 40 years ago) already recommended that all teachings should be based on Holy Scriptures, on the Word of God, especially on the Gospel; it was an invitation for preachers, theologians to found their spiritual lives on something really trustworthy, not on the ideas of a single theologian or on fantasies of a mystic.

Therefore our meeting will concern about this new concept of life, death and resurrection founded on Jesus teaching and I assure you it will be wonderful discovering this new concept of death as it is explained in the Gospel, not to such an extent to be willing to get there at the soonest, but at least we will not be afraid anymore. It will change our relationship with the death of our dearest and with ours.

Before analyzing the issue on the hand of Gospels, we have to consider the social matter of the concept "re-taking possession of the death" (even if this is not my field).

Sociologists indicate a precise date when the meaning of "death" has changed in our Western world. The concept of death dates back to 1930, as starting from then, we were not used to die in our homes anymore, surrounded by our relatives and friends, but in hospitals.

Before 1930 we used to go to the hospital in order to follow courses of treatment, but from that time on, we go to the hospital to die; we consider hospitals as the places of our last life hours.

In ancient times death was a more natural phenomenon that was part of our life cycle. If you look at pictures of death scenes of the past you see the entire family gathered around the dying, even children. As of today we don't take children in the room of a dead relative, in order not to upset them.

They weren't upset before, they knew that death was a normal aspect of life.

Before those years the most fearful concept of "death" was the one that today we call for. The sudden one.

Once, it was the most fearful; there was a prayer that used to say: *Lord, free us from a sudden death*. There were also books with instructions to get prepared for that moment (the so called "set for a good death"). It was part of the natural horizon of people, when grown old, they started reading those instructions in order to be prepared for the passing away.

Today death is a taboo, we are not used to talk about it. The ancient taboo was sex, we could not even pronounce the word; as of today even children are aware of sex, but not of death. Nevertheless it's rare that one loses his grandparents when he's still young because life is longer, so children are far away from the concept and the reality of death.

We need to recover the concept of mortality. What does mortality mean? It's simple: the human being is mortal, transient.

Even if we die when we are very old, we try and find a reason for death: a sudden illness, a mistake of the doctor, etc. We are also used to stage a gruesome play: the dying one shall not know he's dying. So we build up a quarantine line around him in order to disguise the reality. Why? Because we want to prevent him from being afraid.

It happened to me many times to be called and asked to visit a very sick person; the relatives usually tell me: "Father please, don't let him understand he's dying, he thinks he has a gastritis, otherwise he could be frightened".

Then I entered the room and, once shut the door, the dying one says "I know I'm dying, don't let my relatives understand this, otherwise they get frightened".

Please, reach an agreement! Let the person live this very important moment of the existence.

This person really needs to be taken to fully live the most important moment of his life. Death is the fulfilling of the existence and is a gift, a present to be given to those who remain, to help them understand they have to better live the fact of dying. Actually the only experience of death we have is other's death.

Last July I officiated at the funeral of a young woman, 42, who died of bone cancer; she used to attend our meetings on Gospel. She lived this illness and the death with a great clearness, an incredible peace of mind. She had prepared everything, her funeral, the souvenir picture and on the back she wrote (to her husband and her 8 years son): *death is nothing, I just went to the next room. What I used to represent for you I will ever be. Talk to me as if I was there. Don't be sad, go on laughing for the things we used to laugh together. Pronounce my name without sadness, as you did before. Life has always a great meaning, our tie is not broken. Why should I be out of our mind? Only because you cannot see me? I'm not far away, I'm just on the other side of the path.*

Death can be a gift: this woman, Christine, prepared her own death as a gift to her son and to her husband, to her parents e to the entire community.

So, we die for the others, for those who remain, who are witnesses of the most solemn and important moment of our existence. Death becomes a positive experience if the dying one in his last moments doesn't think of himself but of other's sake, so **death is given as a present.**

In order for this to be possible we have to gain the right concept of death.

Unfortunately many Christians are unlearned on religion; most of people keep the teachings of catechism, which usually is refused because it is imposed and not freely chosen.

Parish priests tell me that 90 children out of 100 disappear from the day of their confirmation; 10 remain, usually the dullest ones.

Well, for many of them the only religious teaching is the one they got from catechism and the ideas about death remain very vague.

There are some who believe that death is the one of the ancient Hebraic spirituality, that is we resurrect the last day.

There are others who believe that death is the one of the Greed philosophy, that speaks about the immortality of the soul.

Some others made a mix of the two: we resurrect the last day, but the soul is already immortal.

The new concept of life, death and resurrection is introduced by Jesus in *Gospels*, in the New Testament, through the images that we will see later on, about the living that are dead and the dead who are living, instead.

In the New Testament there are people who are physically alive, but as a matter of fact, according to Jesus, are already dead. These are the ones that aspire to power.

The God of Jesus, the Father of Jesus, is the one that instills life to human beings and serves them. His enemy is power that controls people lives and takes it away from them.

So, those who belong to the category of power, according to *Gospel*, are physically alive, but in fact already dead: we talk about both those who hold political/economic power and religious power (the one we usually don't consider at all).

In the sphere of death we find these three categories: power, richness and religion. Let's give some examples:

1. The first category: **death as power and power as death.**

Erode Antipa was one of the "living dead", according to the evangelists. Who was he? We know he was a son of Herod the Great, the one who arranged the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem and the one who ruled when Jesus died, but he above all is the one who commanded beheading of John the Baptist because he had

reported the relationship between him and his sister-in-law. By describing this scene, the evangelists specify it was the day of his birthday. Herod organized a big party and invited all court notables, but in Greek language the word "birthday" can be written in two different ways, according to whom this birthday refers.

It can be the birthday of a living person and the word γενέθλια, is used, but in Greek world, when a person died, on the anniversary date of his birth they were used to go to the cemetery and remember him with a small ceremony. This has another name in Greek γενέσια.

Well, on Herod's birthday, evangelists don't use the word γενέθλια (the first one) because Herod represents the power and power is death. Power lives in a death ambit. So a person who holds the power, on his birthday, doesn't celebrate his life but is overcome by death.

Therefore the evangelists, in order to describe Herod's birthday, utilize the word γενέσια that we can translate with "his funeral anniversary" (Mk 6,21; Mt 14,6). In fact, in the text we find the description of his birthday party, with many guests. But what does he offer them to eat? A tray with the head of a dead person. To say it with a modern expression, it's a sort of zombie party,

The evangelist is very clear. **Those who hold the power, a power that crushes others' life, those who dominate others' life, already are in a death world.**

Immediately after this gruesome scene, the evangelist introduces a completely different one, the episode of *Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand* (it would be better saying that Jesus teaches how to share food) (Mk 6,30-44; Mt 14,13-21)

While Herod (the dead), offers the head of a dead person, Jesus, who's a living, turns himself into bread, turns himself into life for others.

2. **Richness.** The other is the one in the Gospel of Luke, after Beatitudes, chapter 6, where the evangelist says: - **woe to you who are rich**, it seems like a threat.

But Jesus doesn't threaten. Jesus is the visible display of Father's love and gives love to everyone. He address to all rich a kind of funeral lament. The word that has been translated with "woe" derives from the cry that ancients did in front of a dead body. In Greek is οὐαί, that recalls the Jewish sound *hōi, hōi*, the typical funeral cry. Jesus doesn't threaten, but cries.

In chapter 6 of Luke's Gospel we find Jesus saying: *Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.*

"Rich" belong to the same category as the "fed" or "those who laugh"; well Jesus pities them in spite of the fact that they believed to be blessed by God.

At that time the idea of next life was not clear. The ancients believed that God blessed the good. Which blessings? A noble wife, a long life, richness, etc..

Jesus doesn't see richness as a blessing, but as a disfigurement of an individual, instead. According to Jesus rich are already dead and consequently we have to feel sorry for.

Why? Rich aren't grown up. They are like a child who keeps everything for himself and doesn't want to give to others. A child is not able to think about others, his parents have to teach him how to share a toy with other children.

There's another beautiful picture in the parable "The rich man and Lazarus" (Lk 16,19-31). The rich is not described as a wicked. Lazarus was certainly poor, but the fact the rich was bad doesn't appear in the text. He is condemned not because he rages at the poor, but because he didn't notice that outside the door of his villa there was a person starving.

The image that Jesus provides is: *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day* (Lk 16,19).

Which is the exact meaning? **The rich is poor inside, so he tries to hide his inner poverty with an external splendor.**

To bring this concept up-to-date we could better translate: he was a person who followed the dictates of fashion, who needs to show off in order to hide his inner poverty.

So he is not grown up. **A person grows up if he's able to devote himself to others.** This is the only way to reach maturity: turn one's life into a gift for others. That's why Jesus is very severe and clear: in his community there's no place for rich, in fact he says *"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"* (Mk 10,24-25; Mt 19,23-24; Lk 18,24-25).

Why is he so severe? Jesus community is a community in which love is offered and where Jesus, the Lord, calls everyone to enter lords' category.

Which is the difference between a "rich" and a "Lord"? A Lord is the one that gives and everyone is able to be a Lord. Everyone but the rich, **because he is the one who keeps everything for himself.**

In Matthew's Gospel (6,23) there's an expression that perfectly describes rich persons: *if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.* A bad eye, in that world, used to indicate a stingy person or a miser.

Why? If you look into a miser's eyes you will certainly notice he is very suspicious because he feels under threat, he is afraid to lose what he owns.

If you meet him in the street and say "Hallo" to him, smiling, he panics: "he said hallo, he smiled at me, what does he want? If you want to make him feel desperate, do a favor to him, he will be depressed and ask himself "what does he want from me?"

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus sentences *"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"*. (10,39)

Devoting oneself to others takes the individual to the fullness of his existence as he belongs to the same love project of the Father, achieving the real condition of "son". Where unlimited love exists, unlimited life is present. Where unlimited selfishness prevails, unlimited death rules.

3. **Those who keep everything for themselves.** In Gospels this category is represented by Judas the betrayer. John, in his Gospel, defines him as a thief. Why? Because he takes for himself what belongs to others.

Stealing others' belongings is like stealing others' life. The one who steals others' life causes a sense of death, and the one who causes others' death causes his own death. That's why Judas at the end is overcome by darkness. Jesus, on the contrary, shares all what he owns and what he is with others. In this way he teaches us how to free our energies in order to reach fullness, so that when we die we go beyond death, as we already live the eternal life, in terms of quality.

4. **The last one is a very unexpected one:** those who hold the **religious power**, the most dangerous ones.

He refers to Chief Priests, to Teachers of the Law and Pharisees who will be his bitter enemies. How comes that those who were the spiritual élite detest Jesus so much as to unleash the anger of the crowd against him?

Jesus will be killed with the aid of wrongdoers, not directly by them. Jesus will be killed not because it is Father's will, but according to Chief Priests' interest. So the Chief Priest, the representative of God on earth, when God reveals himself through Jesus, sentences this is a blasphemy.

Who were Teachers of Law? They were not simple scribes as we can imagine. They are the ones who spent their life studying the Word of God, the Old Testament and the orally tradition of Talmud. At the age of 40 they received the Spirit of Moses, through a special consecration . From that very moment they became infallible executors, the owners of the infallible mastership, the holy doctrine. Their word had the same value of the Word of God.

Who were Pharisees, instead? The word "Pharisee" means "separated". Why? Pharisees were lay people who practiced all the slightest details of the law, we are talking about 613 rules to observe, 365 commandments and 248 prohibitions (so crazy!). By applying that lifestyle they were separated from others. They were the religious élite in Israel. They didn't recognize Jesus, so why did they hate him so much?

Teachers of Law and Pharisees are the ones who will decide to kill Jesus.

The High Priests will pass sentence towards Jesus.

In order to fulfill Jesus message, we have to **make sure that among a Christian community there is nobody who holds the power.** When a person wants the power and wants that others obey him he separates from the sphere of God's love, as God is Love that devotes itself to mankind.

God doesn't require obedience to his laws, but he is a Father who requires likeness to his love. So, when among a community there's someone who wants to be superior to others or lavish with his belongings, while others are lacking of them or where the law replaces the love of the Father, every sort of aberration is possible. The most ill-fated individuals described in Gospels are religious and pious persons, who, in order to honor God, sacrifice humans. Jesus is really unmerciful with them. Think for example of the description he makes of the priest in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10,25-37).

There's a man who fell into the hands of robbers; they stripped him and left him half dead: no hope, unless a good soul passes on his way. He seems to be lucky, a priest happened to be going on the same road. We might think the man is safe! But: *when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side*".

Why did the priest pass on the other side? Because for him the most important thing was obeying the law, not helping a man. He was not cruel or ruthless: he simply was religious. Religious persons have no doubt: God's law is the most important thing, even if it sacrifices a man. Law was clear: a priest cannot touch a wounded, because blood is an unclean element.

This priest spent a week in Jerusalem, serving the Temple; it's a condition of ritual purity and if he touches a wounded he loses it. But the man in the parable needed his help, this is much more important than the law!

Jesus teaching was completely different. When we have to chose between the law and the sake of people, Jesus is very clear: people come first.

There's also another episode in John's Gospel, the one of the "Man Born Blind" (John, 9).

There was a person who was born blind and Jesus gave him back his sight, but poor us, he did this on Saturday when every activity was forbidden.

So the religious heads sentenced that the one who healed him was not from God, as he was a sinner.

They want to convince him that it would be better for him to remain blind rather than be healed by a sinner. So that man, who is not an expert of theology but is quite clever says: "I'm not a scholar, I'm not an expert, but I was blind and now I can see! I'm satisfied. You may say that this man is a sinner, that it would be better for me to remain blind, but I'm happy now!".

Men happiness comes first.

We were talking about the *dies irae* or the valley of tears, the face of the Father has been forgotten and we associated it with suffering, trials, not with happiness; usually with sacrifice, never with pleasure.

Pleasure, happiness, cheerfulness are words that never belong to the vocabulary of religious persons. There are very good persons that are in state of crisis because they serve as volunteers but they like it, so they ask themselves if this might really be good if they don't live it as a sacrifice. Will this be valid in front of God?

I always answer them: go there and wear a smaller pair of shoes, in this way you will really serve with sacrifice and it will be valid ...

The greatest aspiration for men is happiness which corresponds to the greatest aspiration of God.

Every time we face a conflict between men' happiness and the divine law we have to chose the first one; God wants the best for all men.

Jesus has terrible words against those who hold religious power. You all know chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel: the moan "woe" is found 7 times. Numbers in the Bible have a specific meaning. Number 7 means "entirety", so they are completely dead.

We find the most lethal attack in verse 23 when Jesus says: "*Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites!*"; the word "hypocrite" (ὕποκριτής), at that time meant "actor", someone who wears a mask and acts. In ancient times actors used to wear a mask, they wanted to resemble to characters.

Jesus asserts that experts and Pharisees seemed to be very saint, their life was full of prayers, all day long; you see, religion is ridiculous, but only people who were far away from it could realize this fact; those who were inside didn't realize how their life might be grotesque, with prayers to be recited at a certain time of the day, one in the morning when they opened their eyes, one when they stood from bed, one when they went to the toilet. There really was a prayer for Hebrews which was supposed to be recited in the bathroom!

Well, Jesus calls them theatrical, con-men, who act to win the applause of the audience. "*Woe to you, experts in the law and you Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of everything unclean!*"

Jesus is referring to a particular custom of Hebraic-Palestinian world. When a person died, the corpse was put in a rock cave; after one year, leftovers, bones were put in a stone box and buried outside of the village, in the countryside. But as all dead were impure, during Easter time they used to whitewash that side of territory, in order to avoid people to unintentionally put their foot over the soil where boxes were buried.

Jesus reveals that experts and Pharisees seem like whitewashed tombs: they are beautiful outside, but full of dirt inside, that is full of death.

So Jesus warns: pay attention to religious people! They are actors, they chose to go on praying even if someone needs their help.

They also exist nowadays! You can test it. When you are in need and someone answers: I'll pray for you. You found one!. They don't help you changing the situation, they are only disposed to save a prayer for you; your suffering remains the same.

Those rich, those powerful, those religious, will inexorably experience **the second death**. What is it? It's a difficult concept.

The second death represents the complete failure of the existence.

Beyond the physical death, which doesn't really interrupt human existence, there's the risk of a definitive death, which puts out all hopes for future. In the New Testament this is called "the second death".

We find this formula in the Book of Revelation, where Christ is introduced as the one who overcame death *"the one who was dead and came to life"*.

In Chapter 2, for example, we read: *"Remain faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown that is life itself. The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will in no way be harmed by the second death."*

In order to better understand what "second death" is, we have to have a look at the theology of New Testament.

In New Testament the word "life" had two different meanings.

One Greek word is βίος, (Bios), which represents the physical life with a natural beginning, a moment of maximum development, an inevitable decline and a end.

But it's interesting to notice that evangelists use a different Greek word ζωή, (Zoé), which represents such a quality of life that doesn't end.

So, inside the same individual there are two different kinds of life: the first, is the biological one, that starts and ends. The other is one of a divine quality; if an individual devotes himself to others' sake, his life starts a transformation process that makes his life "divine", destined to be eternal.

The **first death** is something that nobody can avoid. **The second death, a reality introduced by the New Testament, determines the complete failure of one's life, that is the failure in responding to vital incentives that individuals receive during their entire existence.**

Every good experience that we welcome makes us more mature; love that we share every day, a generous gesture, are something that remain once and for all in our existence and make it eternal.

The risk is that by negative choices, by a systematic refusal of a generous life when the biological death comes, it finds a completely arid person, who is already dead and will therefore remain definitively dead.

In other words, **every positive choice that we make, builds our inner everlasting experience. Every negative choice destroys us eternally.**

If at the end of our biological life we realize we made only bad choices, we are already experimenting death, we are already dead.

In Matthew's Gospel this concept is clearly detailed in chapt. 25,31-46. Jesus introduces God as the one who says to those on his left: *Depart from me, you accursed, (it's a terrible word, and it is the first time in Gospels that God seems to curse somebody), into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.*

This curse doesn't come from God. The text doesn't say that they are accursed by the Father. They're accursed by themselves: the refusal of every positive gesture, every time they said "no" to a request by somebody who was in need, this is what accursed them! Denying help to a person that is in need, is just like killing him.

If a positive answer provides life, a negative one provides death. If you don't feed those who are hungry, they starve, you are a party to their death, you are responsible for it.

In our experience we sometimes succeed in feeding those who are hungry, but as for giving something to drink to those who are thirsty, it seems a bit more difficult; for all other positive gestures indicated by the Gospel, well, it's something disastrous.

I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest. These are words which are always topical ... The one who doesn't receive a foreigner, is accursed just like Cain, because he didn't stretch out his hand to someone who was needing life.

I was in prison and you did not visit me. This concept needs to be explained, prisoners were not maintained by jailers, but by relatives and friends. So they had to provide for prisoners, to keep them alive.

This was the most gloomy part of the lecture. Then we will see the positive side from now on. We will see that God provides such a quality of life that no one will experience death.

Jesus doesn't free from the fear of dying, but from death itself.

We can summarize the entire concept with Matthew's Gospel chapt. 10, where Jesus says: "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Mt 10,28).

What does this mean? If opposing to false and unfair values, power, richness sometimes leads to physical death, don't worry, your eternal life won't be injured. Jesus warns that by adhering to profit, to power, life is completely destroyed.

In the Talmud, which is the Sacred Book of Jews we find: the Saint, blessed Him, condemns the wicked to the Gehenna for 12 months. Jewish people didn't think that condemnation was eternal. After that period of time a person was destroyed, didn't exist anymore. Even today, when someone dies, Jews pray for 11 months because the dead might be with the Lord or completely vanished, so it's useless to go on praying.

The message of Jesus is really a good one and after 2000 years it is still greatly unknown. We talked about the living who are already dead, now we talk about the dead who are alive.

The experience of Christian communities is that **Jesus didn't resurrect the dead, but provided the living ones with a kind of life, able to go beyond death.**

This is useful to understand some expressions, which might seem absurd, that we find in Letters of St. Paul. In the Letter to Ephesians, Paul writes: "*and he rised us up with him*". How comes? We are already rised up? Paul says that, by adhering to Jesus we are already rised up. In early Christianity resurrection didn't come after death, but during life. Paul also writes: "*and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus*", so our condition is already that of divine fullness.

In his Letter to Colossians, Paul writes: "*Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been rised with him through your faith in the power of God who rised him from the dead.*". This was Christians belief and in the apocryphal Gospel of Philip we read this very important expression, attributed to Jesus: "*if one is not rised during his life, will not be rised after death.*"

Christian communities didn't believe in dead resurrection, but in a life that was able to go beyond death, the eternal one. And this life is eternal not because of its length but of its quality.

Quality is what turns this life into eternal, not a never ending length. This is a quality perfectly reachable during this existence; it is an indestructible one, it is able to go beyond death.

That's why when women went to look at the tomb of Jesus they were stopped by angels, figures that say: "*why do you look for the living among the dead?*". Jesus is not in a tomb because he's alive.

Jesus is in any place but the tomb, and is reachable only keeping away from the tomb, going toward life.

For this reason, in Gospels, Jesus' end is never described by using the verb "die". The evangelists use the verb (πνέω), "expire" or "breath one's last" that did never mean the death of a person.

From Gospels on, it started to mean the death of a person. Before it just meant something like "blow".

So, when the evangelists describe the scene of Jesus hanging on the cross (which is not a scene of death, but a scene of life), that Spirit (God's life, divine life) that he had received during his baptism, is blown by him on all those who are ready to welcome it. By owning this kind of spirit every individual, just like Jesus, can pass safely through death. In the scene of crucifixion the evangelists don't speak of Jesus who loses his life, but of Jesus who gives it to others.

According to Jesus, the eternal life is not a reward reserved to the good in their future, but a condition of life in the present. This is extremely important.

Religion is a creation of humans, faith is from God. Not being able to assure happiness here on earth, inventing a sense of sin, instilling a sense of guilt, creating the nightmare of God's judgment and condemnation, religions of all over the world create an hypothetical happiness in the next life.

Jesus doesn't agree. When he speaks of "next life" he uses verbs at the present tense, not the future.

The next life is not a reward to get after death, but a possible condition here on earth. In fact, he says: the one who believes has the eternal life, not will have the eternal life. This quality of life is the condition of all the rised from death, that is the condition of plain unity with God.

So it is useless yearning back to an hypothetic heavenly world where we are all with God, according to Jesus it is possible to live this experience already here on earth.

Eternal life is a quality of life that is available right now for all those who welcome Jesus.

And Jesus talks about it several times in Gospels: "*This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat from it and not die*". It seems amazing, how comes that a person who eats the bread may not die? We experience death almost every day. What does that mean?

The one who, like Jesus, the son of God, turns himself into bread for others, that is source of life, immediatly, not tomorrow, owns a quality of life which is able to go beyond death.

So Jesus, doesn't free from the fear of death, but **from death itself.**

This is not easy to welcome due to religious traditions of the past. To better understand this new concept, we will consider what the evangelists wrote by representing some arguments that will let us easily comprehend.

The death of Lazarus, in John chapt. 11 represents a profound teaching in order to change our idea of life, of death and raising. I'm aware that sometimes the attachment to ancient traditions and images, prevents from seeing the reality and observing what is easily understandable. Let's analyze though the episode of the death of Lazarus. Please remember that this is a proposal of interpretation.

Those who prefer to remain in the old traditional image of this raising of Lazarus can do it, but please just only try to think it in this other perspective.

In Gospels Jesus, the only one who has this power, reanimates that body. It's not a real resurrection, **because resurrection is the definitive passage from mortal life to immortal life, the only who made this passage is Jesus.** Actions made by Jesus on dead are not resurrections, because those people will die once again. I hope nobody of you is thinking that Lazarus is still alive!

So we may ask ourselves: did Jesus make a favour to Lazarus? If we believe that, by dying we enter a condition of happiness, of joy, did Jesus make him a favour raising him? And how was his life after that episode by thinking that he would die once more in the future?

Raisings in Gospels are only 3; quite a few. If Jesus could rise dead, why didn't he rise much more people? He wasted his energies by changing water into wine, maybe it would be better to rise some children ...

Lazarus had died four days before and he smelled, as his corpse was already decomposing (John 11, 1-44)

In order to interpret this passage we are going to use the guidelines that the evangelist provides. Gospels aren't stories or chronicles, but it's a matter of faith.

Jesus gave a mandate to all those who believed in him: rise the dead! In 2000 years of Christianity no one rised a dead, as far as I'm concerned.

So why Jesus said: go, and rise the dead? Maybe Jesus meant something different. I think that all of us have experienced the suffering of the death of a dear one and even if we asked God not to let this person die, she died. There are moments in our life in which we may experience a faith crisis because of all wrong ideas we have from religion. Let John guide us.

Lazarus is part of a community together with Maria and his sisters, where Jesus message has already been accepted. Lazarus is ill and his sisters go and inform Jesus that he is ill. Jesus doesn't move, he goes to Bethania only when Lazarus has already died and has been laying in the tomb since 4 days. This is very because, at that time, a person was considered definitively dead, starting from the third day. That is, when the decomposition process of a corpse made its features unrecognizable, the person was

definitively dead. They believed that as the corpse was put in the tomb, its spirit would have remained inside for three days. The third day, this spirit was thought to be going in the dead Kingdom. Therefore, this would happen 4 days after.

Now we read in chapter 11 of John, verse 21: *Martha said to Jesus "Lord, if you had been here, my broche would not have died"*. The sentence from Martha shows her pain and her reproach to Jesus who was absent when he was supposed to be there. He knew that Lazarus, the one whom he loved, was sick, and he didn't move, arriving too late.

Martha thinks that Jesus would have been able and would have the duty of preventing her brother's death. She thinks that death has broken off Lazarus life, Martha hoped he could recover and doesn't realize that Jesus cured Lazarus of the most awful illness he could suffer from, the slavery of death. *But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask*. That's what she knows from tradition, that's what she'd been taught. Her knowledge is subject to religious tradition, and is not open to the novelty carried by Jesus, who said that the one who believes has the eternal life. Therefore she addresses to Jesus in a very strange way.

The verb "to ask" in Greek can be written in two different ways:

- 1) The first (αἰτέω), the one we have translated with "ask", which is a request made by a subordinate to a superior;
- 2) The other one (ἑρωτάω), that we translate in a sense of request between two peers.

Therefore, if I ask something to a superior I use the verb "to ask" and If I make a request to a person like me I use the verb "to request". Martha still hasn't understood who Jesus is. She believes that Jesus is someone sent by God, that is an intermediary between men and God. She didn't catch the great novelty which opens John's Gospel: Jesus IS God.

John and other evangelists use the same guideline. Nobody has seen God, nobody knows who He is or how He is. The one who revealed Him is His Only Begotten Son. That means that all ideas or beliefs of God, all images we have must be verified in the light of what Jesus said and how he acted. If this image of God doesn't match with that, it must be cancelled as it is incomplete, inadequate or sometimes false.

Evangelists state that God is like Jesus, not Jesus is like God.

This difference is very important. If we say that Jesus is like God, that means that we know who God is. And it is the God of religion, the one of philosophy, the one of men's awes. Evangelists do not agree. God is like Jesus, not Jesus is like God. We must focus on Jesus.

When Philip asks Jesus: *"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."* Jesus answers: *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* Therefore, many ideas of God

deriving from religion are wrong. The God of religion is the one who punishes, sentences, judges, all negative actions.

You won't be able to find any situation in which Jesus sentences, judges or punishes. Therefore this image of God is completely false and must be eliminated.

The God that reveals Himself through Jesus is full of love, is an incredibly human God, which means completely sympathetic with men's sufferings and needs. God is not the one who inflicts sufferings, but is the one who makes hard tasks lighter.

Martha still hadn't understood. She thinks that everything you ask God..., she doesn't understand that in Jesus we find the fullness of God's love, by which He serves us all. God, who is a Lord, turns himself into a servant in order to allow all servants to become lords.

This God is so in love with men that doesn't think that this earthly life is enough; he wants to communicate and transmit his own life - the divine one.

You know that the God of religion is always pessimist, is a God always looking at mankind and being disgusted by seeing men's misdeeds.

The Father of Jesus is in love with His creation.

But Martha didn't realize that Jesus and the Father are the same thing, she asks for an intervention to rise his brother. *"But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."*

Martha believes in a God who rises dead, while Jesus speaks of a God that doesn't let you die, by communicating a quality of indestructible life.

Nowadays unfortunately many Christians believe what Martha believed.

This is something very important, because the topic of death crosses by our lives: first when dear ones die and then when we reach our own death. If our vision of death is wrong, maybe our entire life will.

And Jesus said to her: Your brother will rise again.

Jesus doesn't answer to Martha as she expected: I will rise your brother. He says, instead: Your brother will rise again. Lazarus raising is not an action performed by Jesus, but the effect of an indestructible life provided by the Spirit. Disciples became so because Jesus gave them His Spirit. **Whoever owns the Spirit of Jesus, which is the divine life, will not experience death.**

Martha seems annoyed and answers: *"I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*

Poor Martha, she is right: when a dear one dies, pious persons come and try to console us by saying: don't worry, he will rise. But when? Tonight? Tomorrow? In a week? No, at the end of times, at the last day!!!

This is not of great comfort to us. We don't care if she will rise at the last day, we're missing her now.

If we think that rising is linked to the end of times, this doesn't cheer us up, but causes a deep depression.

The entire episode of Lazarus is well explained in these next verses. Jesus answers: *I am the resurrection and the life.*

Jesus asserts the fullness of his divine condition.

I am, was one of the common ways to indicate the divinity. When Moses asks the name of the divinity, this entity answers: *I am*. In Hebrew tradition "I am" indicates God.

Therefore Jesus answers: *I'm the resurrection*. Resurrection is not something to happen at the last day, but is immediate because refers to the own presence of Jesus. He is not a doctor, he doesn't come to lengthen the physical life by canceling or delaying death.

He comes to communicate his own life, the divine one, the indestructible one.

He guarantees that Lazarus is alive by adhering to his message. *He who believes in me will live, even though he dies*. Therefore even if we see our dear one dead, he goes on living. And then he addresses to those who are alive by saying: *and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

To those who own the definitive life, Jesus guarantees that will never experience death. The eternal life is not a future reward, but a present condition. Whoever owns the Spirit of Jesus, will not die, because Spirit is a divine life, therefore it is indestructible.

Before starting the analysis of the second part of the episode, let's try to summarize all elements that we have learned, in order to change our mentality about death.

Jesus is very clear: whoever believes in Him, even if already dead, is still living. Jesus doesn't free us from the fear of death, but from death itself.

In order to use a correct language, we have to start avoiding the contrasting of "life" and "death", as we always do. We have to learn the contrasting of "birth" and "death", which are both life expressions, two very important aspects of life.

The entrance and the exit in earthly existence are both part of the only vital cycle of an individual. Both phases have a birth and a death.

The new-born has passed through a death, because he was in his mother's womb and everything was calm. Should he have been able to choose he would have stayed there, but if he wants to go on with life, his pre-birth life has to end, he has to leave his calm and secure world to go towards an unknown world.

Only by birth he will experiment kisses and caresses by his mum and dad. Death is just the same, the individual leaves a known world to enter into an unknown one. But, also in this case, if he doesn't die in the old life, he cannot be filled with the Fatherly love he had already perceived on earth.

The child could receive the whole love of his mother while being in her womb, we cannot fully receive our Fatherly love during our earthly existence.

That's why the early Christians used to consider death like a natal day. There are two births in the life of an individual: the first when he leaves his mother's womb, and the second when he abandons his biological existence to go towards the fullness of God's love.

Now we have to understand one very important concept: if dead persons are alive, where are they now?

We must explode the myths in the Bible and analyze what Jesus teaches us about this.

The Bible says that death means the end of everything, both the good and the wicked went to the dead kingdom. About two centuries before Jesus, the Greek philosophy started spreading some doctrines about souls' immortality. There was a preacher that wrote a book titled "preacher" (Ecclesiaste), like his activity, in Hebrew Qoelet (preacher). In order to deny this doctrine of immortality he writes: the fate of beasts and the one of men are the same.

Men are not greater than beasts, because all is vanity. All of them are destined to the same abode, everything came from dust and everything returns to the dust.

He recalls to the Book of Genesis where God says to man: *for dust you are and to dust you will return.*

I degress - it's really pitiful that, even after 40 years since the liturgical renewal during the Ash-Wednesday rite we still hear *for dust you are and to dust you will return.* There's now a new formula *Convert and believe the Gospel.* We are not dust and will not return to dust, because we are sons of God and own an endless life of divine quality.

Ecclesiaste (chap.9): *Alla share a common destiny - the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad. Do whatever you have to, for it is now that God favors what you do, for there is nothing in the grave where you are going.*

In Hebrews' mentality world was like this: imagine the earth. Above the earth there was the heavenly vault which was formed by 7 stratums, 7 skies. Rabbis taught that there was 500 years walking distance between one sky and the other, so there was 3500 years walking distance between God and manhood. A good way of saying that God was unreachable. Under this heavenly valut there was the earth and under the earth there was a great chasm, which was the dead kingdom.

We find this same idea in the Letter to Philipians (chap. 2) where Paul writes: *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*

This chasm was called in Hebrew "sheol", meaning "the one who demands, the one who swallows", because death swallows everybody. And once you enter this kingdom of

dead you live like shadows, like semblances eating dust. Isaiah writes: *They are now dead, they live no more; those departed spirits do not rise.*

Why are we talking about Hebraic beliefs? Because this is very important in order to understand the new proposal of Jesus, also regarding what happens after death.

Bible was written in Hebrew and this Kingdom of dead was called "Sheol", where the righteous and the wicked went, it's not a reward, it's not a punishment: both went there all together, living like shadows.

At the same time of Qoelet, the Jewish expanded not only in Israel, but in the entire Mediterranean basin and they didn't understand or know the Hebrew language anymore, which was used only for worship; they spoke Greek. So they needed to translate the Sacred text from Hebrew into Greek.

When translators found the word "Sheol", they had many difficulties. They related to the Greek mythology where Kronos, the great divinity, had three children and divided the world for them. Zeus (Jove) had the heavenly part, Poseidone (Neptune) had the aquatic part and Ade (which literally means "the one who was not seen") had the Kingdom of dead.

That's why when the Bible was translated into Greek, "Sheol" became Ade. Gospels are written in Greek, so Ade means "kingdom of dead", nothing more than this, and it only appears 4 times:

- During Jesus lament for not having being accepted in some villages: *and you Capernaum, will you be lifted up in the skies? No, you will go down to the depths;*
- When Jesus promises his disciples that they will be stronger than death and that the doors of the "kingdom of death" (Ade) will not prevail on them;
- In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: *in hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away.*

Why were Gospels written in Greek? Because it was the commercial language of that time. After some centuries, in western world it was replaced by Latin. So they were translated into Latin. And when translators found the word "Ade", they translated it by using Latin mythology. There were divinities for the "kingdom of the living", called "superi", and those for the "kingdom of the dead", called "inferi" (the dead). From the name of the divinities derived the name of the place.

The Hebrew "sheol", the Greek "Ade", became "Inferi", which is not Hell!!! Pay attention, by wrongly translating some words, we made a terrible mess. **The word Hell (in Italian inferno), is not like inferi, and doesn't appear in Gospels.** When we recite the Creed we say that Jesus descended to the dead, not to hell!!!! He went to the dead to

communicate to those who had died before Him, his own life, the one who is able to overcome death.

In the same way the word "Paradise or Heaven" is a term that derives from Iran and means "garden". In Gospels we find this word only one time: when Jesus speaks of the next life, but he never speaks of Paradise; only during his crucifixion he addresses to the bandit crucified next to him by saying: *today you will be with me in paradise*. That was the best way to make him understand as he was moribund and Jesus could not start and teach him catechism. So He spoke with a language that this other man could be able to understand.

In the whole New Testament we find "paradise" twice in the Second Letter to Corinthians where Paul says: *was caught up to paradise*. This was an Hebraic mentality, by which all were going to this big underground cave. With the influence of Pharisees this mentality changed into the resurrection doctrine, for all those who were righteous. According to Jesus **dead are where the Father is and, together with the Father cooperate to his creative action.**

Let's go on with the raising of Lazarus.

Jesus said to Martha: *whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" We then tried to understand the culture of that time and we will see the great new that Jesus proposes.

She answered: *Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.*

Martha's faith is growing.

After Martha, it's her sister's turn, Mary.

But we will jump some verses as we have not enough time to analyze them all.

Mary cries, v. 33: *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled*. The evangelist doesn't say "he was touched", but literally "he fumed" (ἐνεβριμήσατο). When Jesus sees Martha and Mary both weeping, and *all the Jews who came along also weeping* (the word "Jews" means the authorities, namely Jesus enemies), he doesn't stand this cry and fumes. The verb ἐμβριμάομαι indicates a violent gesture by which he esprime the sentiment he feels. Jesus doesn't stand the fact that everybody were weeping for Lazarus death and says: (from now on Jesus gives some precious indications that become effective for Lazarus community and for all believers): *Where have you laid him?* People had laid him somewhere, with no hope. And they say: *Come and see, Lord*. Jesus starts taking the distance.

The expression: *Come and see*, is used by John at the beginning of his Gospel, in the invitation that Nathanael receives by Philip to join Jesus (John 1,46). While in chap.

1 it indicated the direction towards Jesus, the fullness of life, here it indicates the direction towards death (v. 35).

Actually the evangelist writes that Jesus started weeping. Why does he weep? He knows he will raise Lazarus, why does he weep?

Let's recap, there were Martha, Mary and the authorities, who are weeping. Jesus is also weeping, but in the passage here we find the great theological stand of the evangelist, because he uses two different verbs.

There's a verb "to weep" that indicates desperation, the pain for someone who is not alive anymore. Martha, Mary and the Jews were weeping. They know that Lazarus will raise, but at the last day. So, for the time being, he is irremediably dead (κλαίω). Jesus will cry in the same way when he will look at Jerusalem, because it will be destroyed.

The other verb is "to water", which indicates pain, but no desperation (δακρύω). Jesus waters.

The tears of Jesus show his pain, as he loved his friend and all people think: *how he loved him!*

In the meantime Jesus was fuming and approaching the tomb. There was a cave - every particular is important. In the Old Testament caves indicate the tombs of patriarchs. They were put in a cave in order to join their fathers.

People still didn't understand the novelty of Jesus and, as in ancient times, put Lazarus in a cave to allow him joining his fathers. They didn't understand that Lazarus had to join the Father. So they put the big stone on it. The stone has a very important meaning and is named for three times. It's a sort of final separation between the world of living and the world of dead.

So Jesus says: *Take away the stone.*

Here Martha is in crisis. She used to say: *I believe!* But now her faith is shaky. She says: *But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.*

Remember, as I already told, death was definitive after the third day.

Jesus answers: *Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?* Please note the word "If". Lazarus raising depend upon Martha's faith. If she believes, she will see, otherwise she will see nothing.

The evangelists means: **in the indestructible life, the one that is able to overcome death, the glory of God will be displayed, His action will be visible.** But Martha will not be able to see, until she believes.

This is the message of Jesus to all believers, to all communities. It's not a historical fact, it's a theological one. It doesn't pertain to a physical eyesight, but an inner sight.

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said "Father I thank you that you have heard me".

Remember that Martha said: whatever you ask... Jesus doesn't ask something to the Father, he just thank Him. From this verb "to thank" ("εὐχαριστέω") derives our word "Eucharist" = thanksgiving. And, following a particular literary technique, the evangelist uses this verb only three times in his entire Gospel: twice in the episode of the sharing of bread and fish, and once here.

His aim is clear. **The generous gift of what we have and of what we are, well expressed in the sharing of bread, provides a quality of life which overcomes death.**

What's Eucharist? We receive Jesus who turns himself into bread for us all, providing the strength to turn ourselves into bread for the others.

So, by using this verb, the evangelist states: **the one who generously shares his life with others, doesn't lose his life, but enriches it, as it becomes a life able to overcome death.**

I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

And here is the surprise. Jesus is calling Lazarus, but who comes out of the tomb?
The dead man came out.

The dead man? How comes? If he is dead, how can he come out?

Lazarus is already in God's fullness. The dead man has to come out, not Lazarus. The community has to change its mentality, stopping weeping and starting to experiment a living man.

The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

In many Psalms we find an image of death that refers to death's stings. For example in Psalm 116,3 we read: *The cords of death entangled me.*

In Psalm 18,6: *The cords of the grave coiled around me*

Death was pictured like a cord, a string on hands and feet. That was the dead who had to come out from the cave.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

By taking off the grave clothes, also the fear of death goes away; Lazarus is already with the Father, but the dead man needs to be untied.

And here comes the final surprise. Let's try to imagine the scene. A dear one comes out of the grave. Jesus raised him, and then says: *let him go.* We would expect him to say: *let him come here* or *let's go towards him, let's celebrate him, let's welcome him, let's wash him as he smells.*

We don't have to consider this episode literally. It expresses a theology.

Let him go! But where?

This verb "to go" that the evangelist is using for Lazarus (ὑπάγω) is the same used by him to indicate Jesus going towards his Father through death.

So I believe that the concept is clear: it's an invitation for the community to make a real choice, stop weeping the dead and think of them as living persons. The two ideas cannot be superimposed.

Our dear ones who died can be weeped as dead or feeled as still alive.

The one who comes out from the tomb is not Lazarus, is the dead one. We have to eliminate the idea of a dead Lazarus, for he is with the Father.

In the past there were several theories who didn't pertain to Gospels, and that created therefore many superstitions. Guided by Gospels, we are learning which is the right attitude for a Christian towards life, death and resurrection.

We already learned not to oppose life to death, but birth to death, which are two different moments, completely part of the same vital cycle.

The early Church didn't believe in dead raising. Dead don't raise; the living ones own a quality of life that is able to overcome death.

There are some mistakes also in the liturgy. On November 2nd, what do we celebrate? The dead. Dead haven't nothing to celebrate. It's the celebration of defuncts. This distinction is very important. **Dead means completely finished, no hope.** Deceased/Defunct originates from Latin (defunus) which means: one that carried out a function, something effective also for the living ones. A person had a mission, carried it out, and we used to say that he had deceased that activity.

People who pass through death are called: the deceased, not the dead.

I realize it's not easy when we are used to certain images, extremely deeply-rooted in our traditions, but this new proposal leads us ask ourselves: did Jesus raise a corpse that then died again, or does the evangelist teach us something concerning life and death that is still valid as of today?

We really don't care that Jesus raised a dead 2000 years ago. Why doesn't he raise our dear ones? Or, much better, why doesn't he prevent them from dying?

The evangelist helps us changing the meaning of death and resurrection. Jesus said it very clearly: *He who believes in me will live, even though he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*

So when we think about a dear one as if he is dead, we are tying him up. Jesus says: *Take off the grave clothes.* We have tied him by thinking of him as a dead. And the final invitation of Jesus: *let him go!*

Where do our dear ones go after death? We look for answers in Gospels.

John, chapt. 12 begins with: *six days before the Passover* (this means it's on Sunday, the one that, from that time on will be called the day of the Lord).

And goes on: *Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.*

Jesus goes back to Bethany, where was this individual, named Lazarus.

But we don't know in which sense Lazarus was present.

There's the first gesture of this week, at the end of which Jesus will be killed, and it will be a life scene, the triumph of life, as we will see through the images used by John: the dinner and the perfume.

Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor.

When we read Gospels we could think that details are something superfluous, but this is an important feature of evangelists. Why weren't we told about all those things? Because nobody was aware of them. Today we have much many theological and literary tools in order to better analyze and comprehend Gospels. It's been from a very long time that 13 scripture rules have been discovered, the one used in the ancient Hebraic world by evangelists.

There has been a time when Gospels were thought to be a devilish work and were sent to the stake. You know that the Jews believe that God gave two laws to Moses on the mountain. One was written, and are the first five books of the Law, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, and the other was oral, which contained the explanation of behaviors to put on according to laws. This oral teaching was called Talmud. After Jesus, all this was put in writing.

There's no present scholar of Sacred Scriptures who doesn't refer to Talmud, because only by referring to it, which is a rich mine of information about customs and habits of the ancient times, we are able to better comprehend the meaning of certain words or certain actions.

Those of my age had a vague idea of Bible and its contents. When I was young I asked: what's the Bible? I was answered: it's the book of Protestants because it seemed not to be part of the Catholic tradition. And as far as Gospel is concerned, it was read in Latin during Masses.

After the Second Vatican Council, blessed it, we restarted focusing on Gospels. All this description is needed to explain why we find this word "dinner" (δεῖπνον), the one used by John only with reference to the last supper of Jesus.

One of the particular techniques used by evangelists is that of using a term only in two or more episodes in order to show that these episodes are strictly linked to each other.

By using this word "dinner" John wants to say that this is not a common dinner, it's an Eucharistic dinner. Both of them are a thanksgiving for the gift of life.

What did the Christian community do? In Hebraic world, when a person died, after one week they organized a funeral feast. It was a dinner where they laid a spare place with flowers and decorations which indicated the presence of the dead one. The

Christian community took this custom, turning it into an Eucharistic dinner. In the Eucharistic dinner, in fact, the dead is present in some way. Here started the custom to pray for dead during the Liturgy. But pay attention!

During the Mass we don't pray for the dead! Many people pay for a suffrage Mass. This is an offensive concept. It seems almost that the dead needs a little string-pulling in order to go up in the hit parade of God's liking.

In the Eucharist we don't pray for the dead, we pray with the dead. The person is present in the Eucharist (as we will see in the dinner of Lazarus). **With the dead we thank the Lord for the gift of a life able to overcome death, and with him we thank for the good he's done during his existence.**

So, in the episode that we are analyzing there was a dinner, an Eucharistic dinner. Pay attention to the characters. Each of them had his own function. Martha was serving. Then we will see that Mary will anoint Jesus. There will be also Judas who will protest. The one who does nothing is Lazarus.

As far as Martha was serving Lazarus was one of those who were reclining at the table with Jesus (it's difficult to translate the Greek verb ἀνάκειμαι, which literally means to lay down next to somebody). During solemn meals they used to lay on a cot, one big trayful was in the middle and people ate this way. It was the custom of nobles, those who had servants. In the Eucharist we are all lords, as Jesus comes and serves us all.

Therefore the Eucharist is not a worship towards God. As we already saw, there's a difference between religion and faith. Religion is what man does for God. Jesus ends this concept of a man needing to offer something to God; God comes and serves him. Faith is just welcoming God's love. Almost all passages of Gospels have an Eucharistic flavor because they were probably born during Eucharistic celebrations.

There's a very touching image in Luke's Gospel, when Jesus says: *It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.* That's Eucharist!

We were talking about this dinner. Lazarus is present, strictly joined with Jesus, laying by his side. It's a particular presence, he doesn't act, he just lays down.

What would the evangelist like to say? **In the Eucharistic dinner the presence of Jesus involves that of Lazarus. So in the Eucharistic dinner the presence of the Lord involves that of all the deceased, who live in this love's circle.** And the community acknowledges it.

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. (a pint seems an exaggeration, it's some three hundreds and half grams). Why does the evangelist speak

of nard? In the Song of Solomon the love of the bride towards his husbands is expressed through nard and perfumes.

Mary, Lazarus sister, wants to express all her love and thankfulness to Jesus, so *she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

The bad smell of death (remember the answer of Martha - *But, Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days*) is replaced by the perfume of life.

This enormous quantity of nard means that the perfume of life has been able to supplant the bad odor of death.

Through this scene the evangelist wants to demonstrate that, starting from the very beginning, the Christian community thought that when a person died, the community gathered and in the Eucharistic celebration the dead one was present with Jesus and a great perfume of life filled the whole house or church.

Unfortunately the most part of our catechism, the teachings that we received are mere doctrine. No life experience is provided.

Sometimes this happens also because those who are entitled to teach catechism do not own this kind of life to express. Once we understand that the dead are in God's sphere, in love's sphere, next to the Father of life, the main question remains: but where are they? This question pertains to the same presence of God, which sometimes is the great absent in Christians lives.

The usual answer was: *God is in heaven, on earth, everywhere.* This is correct, but is not enough. Being everywhere could mean at the same time being nowhere. In heaven, on earth, everywhere... but when you ask people if they experienced this presence they are not able to answer.

If God, and hence the dead, are everywhere why don't we perceive them? Why don't they give signs of their presence?

In order to understand where our dead are, we have to understand first where God is. Since ancient times, the greatest ambition for men was seeing God, but religion made this impossible. Why? Because religion made God unreachable, more similar to earthly monarchs, just like Pharaohs.

For example in the Exodus God was far away and fearful. God says to Moses: *"you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*

How can this be possible? The author closely followed the words of the pharaoh. God addressed to Moses as the Pharaoh already did. *Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die."*

Seeing God's face or the pharaoh's one was forbidden. The author translated the reality of the pharaoh on the one of God.

Jesus, on the contrary, says that God has human features and where in the Old Testament seeing God caused death, with Jesus it takes towards life. In the first letter to John (1,1) there's a great expression: *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.*

Through the Son, the Father becomes approachable, it's something concrete also in this earthly existence, otherwise a believer's life will be incomplete.

We have been taught that God is Father, but we have not been taught how to experience Him as a Father.

Try with someone, try and ask him: do you believe that God is our Father? He will answer: Yes. Then ask him: have you ever experimented Him as a Father? Tell me about the last time you did: total blank.

We all know the Beatitudes. **Beatitudes are an invitation to the fullness of happiness. The maximum ambition of men, happiness is also the will of God. God wants all men to be happy.** Religion introduces a God who punishes and chastises. But this is a false God; this is not the Father of Jesus.

Unfortunately it seems that some theologians feel bad if deprived of suffering, pain and penances. They've nothing to write about, as their image of God was linked to those expressions. Make a test, turn on your radio on Radio Maria and you will hear so much of this repertoire...

A Father who aims to put his sons to the test in order to verify if they love him... it's foolish.

Some spiritualistic ravings that we ear on certain radio stations: "God doesn't want the suffering, but allows it to happen", he is a criminal, though! Or "Pain exists because His sons don't deserve His love, as they are all sinners".

Let's at least appeal to our intelligence and let's think to the experience of parents. They hope that their son will be healthy. But if their child doesn't meet their expectations, what do they do? Do they deny him? If their son has health problems they will be much more loving as he requires more attention and care.

So the Lord pays attention to all people, especially those who are most needy.

The Father of Jesus is not attracted by human virtues, by human merits, but by human needs. The more a person is needy, the more Fatherly love he deserves.

It is possible to experiment the presence of the Father when Jesus proclaims in the Beatitudes: *blessed are the pure in heart.* The heart in Hebrew culture is not the place of feelings, but represents the mind, the conscience of a person. So Jesus refers to those who are crystal clear, for they gave up their ambitions of domain and power, by welcoming His message, especially the first Beatitude and accepted to share what they are and what they own for others' happiness.

We can summarize the Beatitudes in this way. **Jesus suggests a new experience: feel responsible for the happiness of others and you will allow the Father to take care of your happiness.**

It's not a kind of doctrine, it's not theory, it's a practice.

Such a sadness to see many Christians that rush here and there on the places of supposed apparitions. When you know the word of the Lord, which is authentic, there's not need to go to other places. The prophet Jeremiah uses a beautiful expression: *They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Also in Christian world there are many people going towards polluted water, with devastating effects. The doctrine of the catholic church teaches that you are a **true believer also if you don't trust apparitions.**

Seeing God doesn't mean experience apparitions. Let's see which verb is used. The verb "to see" in Greek has two different meanings. The first which is the physical sight (βλέπω), the other which represent an inner perception (ὁράω).

Jesus doesn't want you to have apparitions, but to feel a deep inner experience of a Fatherly God. This kind of Father is the one who takes care of His sons, a loving one, who doesn't miss His sons' needs but - and this is His characteristic - goes and meet them. In this way life changes, you don't **worry anymore, you just take care.**

The one who made this choice: "from now on I'll take care of others. My only aim will be let people be happy. Every person I meet shall be more happy to be alive. This is the only thing that Jesus requests from us). And we are able to.

This means seeing the Father. And this vision is not a sort of reward for the future, but an earthly reality: the daily personal presence of God in our existence.

Why we don't feel it, though? Because we have a wrong image of God. The one who believes in a powerful God will not be able to experiment a loving God. The one who seeks extraordinary signs, will not be aware of the ordinary sign of God's presence.

In the Bible we find many examples. Let's take only one. In the First Book of Kings Elijah makes an experience that is described in this way: *The Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind.*

So there's something very powerful, but God is not in power.

After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.

Through those elements the author wants to express the maximum of the force. But God is not there.

And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

This is a very meaningful teaching that Elijah gives us. The one who seeks God in powerful expressions, doesn't realize His presence in all what is feeble and ordinary.

As you remember, Pharisees and religious persons always ask Jesus extraordinary signs to believe. Jesus doesn't agree with this vision and says: **believe in me and you will become the sign that others will be able to recognize.**

Master Eckart, one of great mystics of Christian spirituality, gives a very beautiful image of this kind of experience of God. *"If you are lost in contemplation over the Trinity, and you realize that your brother would like a cup of tea, leave the Trinity and prepare the tea for him: the God you find is much sure than the one you're leaving.*

In other words, by giving to your brother what he's asking, you don't just give him a cup of tea, you express your love. That is the moment in which God is fully present.

God expresses Himself through love, not through power, because God IS love. When an individual enters this new dimension in which he increases his loving ability, he perfectly harmonizes with the love of God.

A daily experience that we all make is the one of forgiveness. Forgiving is not easy. We are able to bear a grudge for long time, but we think we made our best.

I remember a person who came and told me: Father I got it, I've forgiven that person, but from now on she will be as a dead one.

But Jesus, where are you living? You ask us to wish the well of our enemies. This seems to be far beyond our capabilities. Nevertheless all Jesus words are true. It would be enough to practice them in order to savour their truth.

Let's try this only once. Let's try to do our enemy's sake. You know what happens? It happens something extraordinary: **we raised our loving capability, we syntonized it with God's love; our life and God are perfectly linked and we experiment such a new dimension that we will not want to go back anymore.**

It's not a matter of going around to look for our enemies, but it's really an amazing experience. **We feel in our inner self such a great loving energy, that we realize that Jesus words were true, that God is really our Father and is present in our existence.**

This is the experience of the risen Christ.

Matthew's Gospel has a strange ending; Jesus dies in Jerusalem, is buried in Jerusalem, his disciples are in Jerusalem shut into a room because they're afraid of dying like their Master did.

In John's Gospel, instead, we find something more obvious. Jesus joins his disciples the same day of the resurrection.

In the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus doesn't appear to his disciples but says *"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

Why shall they go to Galilee? Why delaying something so important like a resurrection, waiting for their arrival at Galilee? The disciples welcome this invitation

and go to Galilee and reach the mountain indicated by Jesus. But Jesus didn't indicate any mountain, he simply said: go to Galilee. Why do they go to *the mountain*?

The definite article indicates that this mountain is not a common one, is the most important of Galilee, the one where Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes, his message. What does the evangelist mean by that? Do you want to experience the risen Christ? We cannot believe only because somebody told us to or because it is written in Gospels! **We can believe in the risen Christ only if we experiment Him like a bright presence in our existence. There's a great difference between "believing" and "experimenting"**. Therefore, the disciples go "on the mountain" and there they can see Jesus.

The experience of the risen Christ is not a privilege of 2000 thousand years ago, given to a small group, but an opportunity for all people at all times.

In Galilee, on the mountain, Jesus proclaimed the Beatitudes, which are an invitation for all of us to be like the Father. Jesus never states that God must be obeyed, because obedience implies that a person orders and the other obeys. There's a distance between the two. **Jesus never requires obedience to God, but always says: be like your Father.**

Jesus in this speech states: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Not as "God" is, but as "your Father" is. Nobody can think to be perfect like God. And what is this fatherly perfection?

Be as your heavenly Father, who is benevolent with ungrateful and the wicked. The God of Jesus doesn't reward the good, and doesn't punish the wicked either. The God of Jesus is love and only gets in touch with people by incessantly communicating his love.

Jesus says: look at the sun, today it is shining. The sun shines for everybody, the praiseworthy and the undeserving. So does the rain, it waters all. The Father does the same.

We are all wrapped up in the love of God and Jesus came to remind this to us.

I want to remind you that what I'm explaining is just a proposal of interpretation, made on the basis of studies on Scriptures. This message can be proposed but never imposed. If this message is something that meets your inner feelings, you can welcome it. After 30 years of spreading the Word of God, I always find someone who come and say: "I always thought it was in this way, but I never succeeded in expressing my reflections, as I thought it was a sin, even an heresy!" This proves that Jesus is the answer to our intimate desires.

There's still a question to be answered: how will we be after death? Will we recognize our husband/wife or friends?

Sometimes, in the past, through wrong interpretation of Gospels, there were fading answers.

In Gospels we find phrases that state that after death we will be like angels. Therefore the traditional interpretation is that we will not remain persons, we will be something spiritualized. The husband will not recognize his wife because he doesn't need a wife anymore.

In this case we have to remind the contents of Talmud, as we told before, in order to better comprehend the mentality and the customs of those times.

Conoscete tutti nel vangelo di Matteo, Marco e Luca, lo riportano tutti e tre, quando i Sadducei che non credono alla risurrezione, perché nella Bibbia non si parla di risurrezione.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke there is the story of the Sadducee who didn't believe in resurrection. So they ask Jesus about the destiny of a widow. There's a widow that loses her husband the first night after wedding. She remarries and also the second husband dies, and then the same happened several times. Which one will be her husband after her resurrection?

We shall not interpret Gospels through our modern categories, but we have to try to enter the culture of ancient times. We think about marriage as a matter of love relationship. At that time it was not like this.

Woman was an instrument for giving birth to baby boys. That's all. Marriages were planned by parents and women were accurately examined in order to establish the appropriate dowry.

Why just baby boys? Because it was the only way for eternity. He maintained the name of his father, of his grandfather through all future generations. Jesus says NO! With resurrection we don't die, we're just like angels, not in the sense of spiritualized beings, but in the sense of eternity.

Jesus wants to explain that there's no need of procreating in order to be eternal, because a person is already eternal herself.

Not being able to communicate our experience after death, evangelists found very difficult to explain the reality of death and tried to use all images available in the cycle of nature: sleeping, sowing and the shining of the sun. Three concrete examples will follow.

In Matthew's Gospel when Jesus dies, something strange happens. Here all theologians gave a symbolic interpretation.

"Tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

These people wait for Jesus to resurrect before coming out the tombs. This sounds very strange. But as it was not Easter time, they have to wait.

But first of all, please note that this is not a correct translation. According to the original Greek text these "holy people" were "not dead" but "sleeping".

The word "saint" refers to the one who welcomed the message of Jesus and for the same reason he is not dead, but he sleeps, simply because Jesus guaranteed: *"Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life"* (John 6,54) or *"Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die."*⁵¹ *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."* (John 6,50-51) or *"Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3,15).

1. These were the holy people asleep. The same word is used by Jesus for Lazarus. What does this mean? For those who welcome the message of Jesus, death is not the end, but is a moment in which a person rests in order to gain new vigor. Sleep is a necessary break: if we sleep badly we live badly. Therefore the evangelists choose an aspect which is part of the life cycle in order to indicate the moment of death. From the word "sleep" (κοιμάω) derives the word cemetery, in Greek (κοιμητήριον), dormitory. Christianity changed completely the relationship with the world of dead. In the pagan civilization and in Hebraic world, dead were unclean, so they were buried out of the city in order to prevent any contact with the world of living. Starting from Christians death was not something horrible, it was part of life of an individual.
2. Another image that Jesus chooses is the one of the seed. In John's Gospel he states: *"Unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives"* (John 12,24). Jesus shows that death is a condition for setting the vital energy free. In the kernel of wheat, or any other seed, is hold a great energy, that we don't see: a small acorn becomes a big oak. And what about sunflowers? In a small grey seed there's the explosion of a real beauty of the nature. For corn is the same. The ear is hold in the kernel, but in order to grow and free, the kernel has to be put under the soil and decay. Jesus is saying that man owns much many potentialities than expected, in terms of love, of generosity, and it's impossible to express them all during earthly existence. Sometimes, in painful situations we discover a great strength; in case of illness or death of a dear one we discover to be able to serve with love, devotion and unsuspected energy. Therefore, Jesus takes away the drama of the moment of death. **Death doesn't destroy a person, but helps her to develop and free all what she really is; that's why we should imagine our dear ones different from how we knew them. What we knew was the kernel of wheat, but now they are ears.** The image of this transformation is cited also by Paul in the first Letter to Corinthians. Many of us are still stuck to the idea of the resurrection of bodies. We will be younger, thin, beautiful... Paul

says: "What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed". (1Cor 15,36-38) Resurrection is a new action by our Creator. And Paul continues: *It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies [σῶμα ψυχικόν], there are also spiritual bodies [σῶμα πνευματικόν]*". (1Cor 15,42-44). This new situation that we will experiment after death is not conceivable, we can only use some appropriate comparisons. Jesus said that death doesn't destroy, but strengthens, and proved it.

3. We all know the important episode of the Transfiguration. Jesus thought that disciples had understood his plan, go to Jerusalem and die, when Peter says he should not. Jesus then answers: "Go behind me, Satan!" For disciples it is not possible that Jesus, the Messiah could die. As of today, the Jews still say that Jesus was not the Messiah, because he would not have died. The disciples didn't accept the fact Jesus goes to Jerusalem not to gain the power, but to be killed by the power. This is unacceptable.

Evangelists start: "*After six days*". This is not a particular. Maybe we don't care if this happens after 6, 3 or 8 days, but the evangelists uses this figure to represent the day of the creation of man, according to Genesis. All Gospels introduce Jesus as the highest realization of the creation. Not the first man, but the true one.

Well, Jesus wants to display to Peter, John and James the condition of men after death.

And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. (Mt 17,2)

The creative work of God through Jesus comes out as a bright transformation, where his face shines like the sun. Shining means reaching the divine condition. Evangelists want to explain through this image of Jesus the situation of a man after death. The person is completely transformed and is able to display her highest splendor. **Jesus guarantees that we will not experience death; the others will see a corpse, but we will go on existing.**

So Jesus doesn't free us from fear of death, but from death itself.

Some time ago, one brother and I were strolling around our garden and I told him: "Ricardo, maybe we are dead and we don't realize we are!" This is because we live in a very beautiful place, with a marvelous community, always surrounded by lovely and joyful people: this is death.

In an ancient preface of the Mass of the dead this reality is described as follows: *life is not taken away, it is just transformed (vita mutatur, non tollitur).*

We have to change our language, according to Gospels and liturgy. We often hear: the Lord has taken away something or somebody! The Lord doesn't take away our life, the Lord welcomes us transforming our existence.

According to Gospels, then, death is a transformation process that doesn't start with passing away, but already during earthly life; man's life is not transformed after death, but has already started his process of transformation during his existence.

Man get to a point of life in which the harmonious growth of the biological and spiritual parts of the person, changes significantly. What does this mean?

There's the biological life, which has a beginning and a maximum development (20-40 years) and then slowly crumples, because cells don't regenerate.

Aging is a natural process. At a certain point of the existence, we come to a separation: our spiritual life grows and develops while the biological one declines. There's a sort of divorce: externally we age, internally we renew.

Let's make an experiment. After forties when we look at our photo, we say: it didn't come out well. Simply we don't recognize what we see, but we are just like the picture shows. There's a different perception between what we see and what we think we are from inside.

Paul uses a beautiful expression to describe this process, in the Second Letter to Corinthians: *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away (he's rude!), yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (2Cor 4,16).*

Now, let's deal with the last part of this analysis of the subject of death.

Christian civilization caused great damage by crossing with Greek philosophy on the matter of soul's immortality. The word "soul" is unknown in Hebraic culture; it derives from Greek philosophy. For Jews there was the person, the one who outlives death. Not the soul, but the entire person.

Through death life continues; but it's not a sort of spiritual existence, it's a real life, transformed and enriched by the inner good we carry with us entering the fullness of divine condition.

Here comes the explanation of the Last Beatitude, which I chose as the title of this conference. We find it in the New Testament, in the Book of Revelation: *"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." (Rev. 14,13)

The word "blessed" (μακάριοι) indicates a kind of happiness impossible to reach, because it is the one of a divinity.

Please note the contrast, *blessed are the dead... from now on*. Happiness is full only through death. How can these two concepts get along?

Those who die in the Lord, are the ones who oriented their lives as the Lord did. And the Lord oriented his life towards the sake of others.

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.

What does this mean?

Death is not a defeat, an annihilation or a wait condition; it is the passage towards a definitive fullness dimension. The dead are not staying in the cemetery, which is the world of dead, but go on existing in God.

Eternal rest: you remember the prayer. It is beautiful, but provides a wrong interpretation, because we think about a sort of eternal idleness. This is quite frightening!

When I was young I was told in the catechism that the eternal life was just like being at the theatre. God was on the stage, angels played instruments, and we just had to contemplate God. Maybe God is a very funny guy, but this eternal life should be something really boring!

The Eternal rest is not a sort of eternal idleness. The author talks about rest because the Creator worked for six days and in the seventh he rested. This kind of rest represents the divine condition because men never rest. Only on Saturdays they rested to imitate their Creator.

Therefore entering in the rest of the Lord means entering in His divine condition, a creative condition.

You see, in Hebraic world they thought that God created the world in 6 days time, and on the seventh he rested. Then men spoiled the whole creation. Jesus doesn't agree. The creative work of God is not finished. In John's Gospel, chapt. 5 Jesus says: *"My Father is always working, and so am I" (John 5,17).*

God still needs the cooperation of men in order to achieve fullness. In the Letter to Romans (8,22 and foll) Paul shouts: *For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children".*

God of religion is displeased with men and is ready to punish. The Father of Jesus looks at His creation and loves it, holding it in high regard, so much he takes it into His creative work.

When Paul speaks about God's will and about us as God's adoptive children, is a kind of adoption made by a powerful.

What happened with kings and emperors in matter of adoptions?

When an emperor realized he was approaching death, he didn't leave his empire to his son, but he adopted a general as his son, the one who would have been able to carry on what he had started.

That's why Paul calls us "adoptive children". It's something terrific which gives us a great responsibility.

The Father is so in love with us, as of asking us to continue his work with him, right by his side. Passing through death this relationship will be full, as we will be out of our bodily limits or defects.

So our dear ones are not "sleeping", but cooperate with God in His creative work: communicate love and life to mankind.

Death doesn't cancel the love between us and our dear ones, makes it more intense, more "divine", because their love is now strengthened by God's own love.

You see, we always remember the good situations we lived with our dear ones, and we seem to forget all the negative ones. This is not true. Our dear ones are so much absorbed in this divine creative work that all bad aspects of their characters left them. They are completely different now; they are so beautiful, in a way we did never see them.

The Author of Revelation goes on: "*for their deeds will follow them*".

The only luggage we carry with us are our deeds. And we have to think it over very carefully. We often spend so much time and energies in order to acquire that kind of things we don't really need, or that are almost harmful, neglecting the most important ones: the deeds.

What are they?

In Matthew's Gospel, at the end of Beatitudes, Jesus says: *In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see*". (Mt 5,16).

Therefore, by practicing the message of Beatitudes, deeds become our richness, and will allow us to continue our existence also in what we call "the eternal life".

Deeds are all ways of communicating love and life to others. Every positive choice we make, such as forgiveness or sharing, gives us an indelible structure for the definitive life dimension.

To come to a conclusion: every person we meet is a gift of God, by which he shows us His love and enriches our life. I repeat, **each person we meet is like God telling us: look at this special gift, without this person your life wouldn't be the same.**

And let's pay attention to the opposite, too: each person we reject or we don't welcome is just like a black hole that will remain forever.