

EASTER SUNDAY – 1st APRIL 2018

Comment by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

If Christ had not risen, our preaching and faith would be empty. This is the unconditional statement of St. Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians. But, despite this statement, it is surprising that in the Gospels no evangelist describes the resurrection of Jesus. The traditional image we know of Christ coming out from the tomb victorious with the banner of victory is not in the Gospels, but it is in an apocryphal, in Peter's gospel, a text from the second century. But if no evangelist describes the resurrection of Jesus all give precious indications on how to experience him resurrected. As Paul always writes to the Corinthians that "...he (the risen Christ) *appeared to Cephas,*" that is Peter "*then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time,...*"

In the oldest gospel, that of Mark, there is only the announcement of the resurrection, but not the meeting which will be in Galilee. In fact, the young man in the tomb told the women "*Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here*" (Mark 16,6). This will be the constant message in all the gospels. It is useless to search for Jesus in the place of death. "*...he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him,...*"

But we must ask ourselves why should we postpone the important experience of the resurrected Christ for three or four days? Jesus died in Jerusalem, he was buried in Jerusalem, then he rose again in Jerusalem, the disciples are in Jerusalem, why does Jesus say that if they want to see him, they have to go to Galilee?

We will find out in Matthew's gospel where this appointment is in Galilee, it is repeated for a good three times, when the angel told the women "*He has risen; he is not here he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him.*" This message is confirmed by Jesus himself when he says to the women "*...go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.*" (Matthew 28,10)

The disciples leave, they go to Galilee, but the evangelist writes that "*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.*" (Matthew 28,16) if for a good three times there is the invitation to go to Galilee to experience the resurrected Christ, never had he indicated a particular mountain. Why do the eleven go up the mountain? In Matthew's gospel the mountain is the mount of the beatitudes. What does the evangelist want to say? That the experience of experiencing the risen Christ was not a privilege granted two thousand years ago to a small group of people, but to all those believers who will live the beatitudes. In living the beatitudes one experiences the living.

Likewise in the Luke's gospel there is the usual message, when the women go to the tomb, they find the road blocked by men "*Why do you seek the living among the dead?*" (Luke 24,5) and when is it that Jesus manifests himself? To the disciples in Emmaus repeating the gestures of the last supper. The evangelist writes "*When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them*" (v.30). the same gestures as the last supper. At the supper Jesus makes bread because all who eat it will be able to make bread with the others. In this dynamic of love received and given one experiences the presence of the risen Christ. The evangelist writes in fact "*And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.*" (v.31)

Likewise in the John's gospel we have the figure of Mary Magdalene crying, sobbing in front of a tomb, but as long as she looks towards the tomb she does not realize that the one she was crying as dead was actually alive. But to experience him alive she must stop looking at the grave and turn around and only when she turns back to see that Jesus was standing beside her. In John's gospel when the resurrected manifested himself to his disciples the first word that is pronounced is "*Peace to you.*" It is not a greeting, Jesus does not say peace be with you, it is a gift. Peace is all that is needed for happiness and the fullness of life of the person. The first thing that the risen Jesus does is to donate to his disciples the fullness of this life.

And then here is the mandate "*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*" What is the meaning of this? Jesus had been the testimony of the God's faithful love. How many with him and like he will be witnesses of this love and be able to experience the risen Christ living in their existence. Jesus does not send them to announce a doctrine, but sends them to be God's tenderness for humanity.

