

ALL SAINTS – 1st November 2015

REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IS GREAT IN HEAVEN - Commentary on the Gospel by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 5,1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The new relationship of love between God and his people has need of a new alliance. It is what Matthew presents to us in his gospel chapter 5 with Jesus' Beatitudes.

The evangelist presents Jesus on “the” mountain. The definite article indicates that it is not just any mountain, but a mountain already known. He wants to represent Mount Sinai where Moses received from God the alliance with the people of Israel.

Well now, Jesus does not receive God, but he, himself, who is God and the evangelist has presented him as "God with us"- proposes a new alliance with the people. Moses, God's servant had imposed an alliance between servants and their lords based on obedience. Jesus, who is not God's servant, but the son of God, proposes an alliance between the sons and their fathers based on acceptance and the practice of love.

Then Jesus begins to speak and lists the beatitudes. The evangelist has taken great care with this test, as the numbers of the beatitudes are eight. Why eight? Jesus rose on the first day after the week, that is the eighth day and this number "8" in the primitive Christianity had always indicated that life is able to overcome death. Number eight was the number of the resurrection.

So, the evangelist, who has in mind Moses' Ten Commandments, presents the alternative of the beatitudes. While the acceptance of the Commandments guaranteed a long live on earth, the practice of the beatitudes guarantees a live so strong, so powerful that it will not be interrupted by death.

But not only this, the evangelist actually calculates how many words make up his writing, according to the literary style of time. There are exactly 72. Why 72? Because according to the book of Genesis it was the number of the known pagan nations. While the commandments were exclusively for the Israeli population, the beatitudes are for all humanity.

The commandments opened with an affirmation, the claim of God as the only Lord of his people. This is why the first of the beatitudes is not the same as the rest; the verb is in the present. It is the choice of the Father as only God.

The first three commandments were exclusively for the Israeli population, and they were absolute obligations to God. In the beatitudes, there are no obligations towards God, because Jesus is the God with us, God is made man and there is need to go with him and like him towards humanity. Here the first place on the list are situations of sufferance of humanity with the possible solution and help on the behalf of God and of his people.

The commandments continue with seven commandments concerning mankind, well in the beatitudes there are no obligations towards mankind, there have been already expressed, but the acts of God in the community that welcomes the beatitudes.

So, welcoming the beatitudes, will be a beginning for the growth of different attitudes that emerge, not as someone quality, but as attitudes recognized by those that, through the welcoming of the beatitudes, will be themselves be merciful *as the Father is merciful, they will be pure of heart, they will be peacemakers.*

Finally, the last beatitude, that has the verb in the present as the first, the acceptance and faith of the beatitudes does not bring praise to the person, but will bring them to the persecution. But like the choice of the first beatitude, that of poverty, being the decision to share joyously and freely with others, does not bring negative effects because God takes care of these people ,the last beatitude is the same, that of the persecution, it is diminished by the fact that God takes care of them.

The initial beatitude is linked to the last commandment. What is the last commandment? To not desire the things of others. The first beatitude is, “ desire that others have the same things as you.”

The kingdom of God is the novelty that Jesus came to propose.