

## BAPTISM OF JESUS – 10th January 2021

### YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

#### Mark 1,7-11

***And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”***

This Sunday's liturgy presents the baptism of Jesus. This baptism has always created many problems; John the Baptist had announced a baptism as a sign of conversion for the forgiveness of sins and people flocked to this invitation and Jesus goes there too. So, also for Jesus, baptism is a sign of conversion for the forgiveness of sins? Did Jesus have sins? And, if he didn't have them, why did he also participate and receive baptism? In reality the evangelist gives us the answer in the text he writes; let's read in the first chapter of Mark's gospel the verses concerning this baptism, remembering that the evangelists are not only great theologians but also great writers and write according to what were the literary rules of the time. Among these, a well known and much followed rule was the one established by the famous Rabbi Ishmael, who had drawn up the 13 rules of writing. In these rules of writing he said that, when you want to relate, similarity between one episode and another, use words only in these two episodes.

This is what the evangelist does. Indeed in the scene of the baptism of Jesus the evangelist uses the exact same words that he will use only at the time of death. So what is the meaning that we will now see? Baptism was a symbol of death to one's sinful past; well also for Jesus baptism is a sign of death, but not that of a past of a sinner, he has no sins, but of acceptance of death in the future.

Let's see what the evangelist writes for us, *“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.”* And immediately, writes the evangelist, coming out of the water ; baptism is a sign of death, but death cannot hold Jesus, so immediately he comes out of the water and *“saw the heavens being torn open”* the exact words used in chapter 15, 38 . *“And the curtain of the temple was torn in two ..”* the word used by the evangelist is *“torn”* Something open can be closed , but something torn can never be put together again It was believed at that time that God was so angry with his people who had sealed the heavens; since God sees in the Son Jesus the commitment to manifest what he really is, unconditional love, the heavens donot open, but they are torn, ripped apart . With Jesus, communication with God will be always uninterrupted.

Well, this same word *“torn”*, found in chapter 15, refers to the great curtain found in the sanctuary of the temple that hid God from the people and at the moment of Jesus' death, this curtain was torn apart. This is who God is: a man that was crucified for donating his love.

And Jesus therefore saw the heavens torn open and “...*the Spirit descending on him like a dove.*” Describing the love of a dove for its nest, it always returns to the same one. So, Jesus is the nest of the Spirit. “*The*” Spirit is the totality of the energy of the capacity of love on the part of the Father. And then later Jesus will baptize in the Spirit with his action of sanctifying, the Holy Spirit, to separate people from evil. Well, we find this term in the moment of Jesus' death when the evangelist writes “*And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.*” (Mark 15,37), “he returned the Spirit. That Spirit that he had received at the time of baptism in fullness Jesus hands it over to those who welcomed him as a model for their own lives.

“*And a voice came from heaven,..*” This word “*voice*” we again find in the death of Jesus, when the evangelist writes “*.. Jesus uttered a loud cry ..*” “*voice*” and “*cry*” are written the same in the Greek language, “*fonè*” It seems strange that a dying man gives a loud cry; it is not the cry of a dying man, it is a cry of a victorious one, of one who with his love has defeated death. So this term “*voice*” and “*cry*” we find here and at the moment of Jesus' death.

And here is the proclamation by God in the baptism “*You are my beloved Son; ...*” meaning the son that inherits, so in Jesus there is all of God; and “*...with you I am well pleased.*” Well, we find practically the same expression in the crucifixion, said by whom? Not a disciple, not even a family member, but a gentile. The person deemed furthest from God, seeing him expire in that way, the centurion says “*Truly this man was the Son of God*”( Mark 15,39). So the same words that the evangelist uses in the baptism, he then uses them for the death of Jesus, to signify that the baptism of Jesus is the acceptance of being a faithful witness of the love of the Father, even at the cost of facing death.