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GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 3,16-18

(Jesus talking to Nicodemus)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

It is typical of every religion that the image of God is he that judges then condemns, a God that rewards the good and punishes the evil. This image of God is completely absent in Jesus, Jesus actually denies the image of a God that judges and condemns. Let's see what John writes in chapter 3, 16-18. The context is that of a talk with the Pharisee Nicodemus – the Pharisees were waiting for the Messiah that in fact was the expression of the justice divine – Jesus says no.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,...” Jesus declares the expression of God's love for humanity – God expresses his love by sending his son - *“... whoever believes in him....”* To believe does not mean to accept a doctrine, but to accept a person, to his message, in this case to Jesus, *“.. should not perish but have eternal life.”* For the second time in this chapter, there appears a theme very dear to the evangelist, that of the eternal life. The eternal life, the Pharisees think of as a reward, to gain in the future for good conduct in the present life; for Jesus, it is in fact a condition in the present. Life is called eternal not for the indefinite duration, but for the indestructible quality.

And Jesus continues: *“...God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* Jesus has come to offer an alternative life, a possibility to grow, of a full realization of his existence to man.

“Whoever believes in him...” continues Jesus, *“.. is not condemned,”* so the image of a judgment on God's behalf, is absent in Jesus' message: there is no judgment, so there is no punishment. *“..but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”* Here it is necessary to add two other verses, (v.19-20) that are not in the liturgical version, otherwise it seems a contradiction. Jesus continues saying that the judgment is this *“..the light has come into the world..”* then concludes *“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light,”* It is not a judgment on the part of God, there is an offer of life, depicted here as the light, it is for mankind to feel an attraction for the light and to enter to become part of the sphere of love of salvation. But who does evil, dislikes the light. Who does evil wants the darkness and therefore remains in the darkness, the image of death. So there is no judgment on God's behalf that rejects the person, but it is the person that, for his own interests and convenience, rejects God's offer for the fullness of life, this is the evil. God can do on other than shine more brilliantly his light, but the more his light shines, for those in darkness this is a threat, it is something that's blinds them and they hate it. So the evangelist's invitation is to carry out daily actions of light so that one can then enter into full harmony and communion with that God who is light and love.