

IV SUNDAY OF LENT – 11th March 2018

GOD....GAVE HIS ONLY SON.....THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM. - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi

John 3,14-21

Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him..... And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

In John’s gospel chapter 3, we are presented with a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus the Pharisee. It is a dialogue between deaf people because Jesus speaks of new things and the Pharisee is a man of tradition and a man of the law does not understand and does nothing but object: how can he? Jesus to Nicodemus remembers the famous episode that is in the book of Numbers, of a punishment that God gave to the people who had turned against him and who had protested. He had sent poisonous snakes that biting them had killed them and then, through the intercession of Moses, he had raised a bronze copper snake that had saved them. It says in the book of Numbers “*And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.”* (chapter 21, v. 8) Well Jesus refers to this episode, but only the part of salvation, not the part of the punishment, because in Jesus God does not punish, but offers love and salvation to all.

So, “*Jesus answered him..... And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,...*” Jesus is the fullness of humanity that coincides with the divine condition, “*...that whoever believes in him...*” in whom? In the Son of man, that is, whoever aspires to the human fullness that shines in Jesus and shines forth at the moment of the cross, when Jesus shows the fullness of his and the Father’s love “*...may have eternal life.*” Jesus addresses the Pharisee, who believes in the eternal life, but as a prize in the future for good conduct done in the present. Well, Jesus for the first time in the gospel speaks of eternal life, but not as a prize in the future, but as a real possibility in the present moment. The eternal life will not be in the future but, it is, says “*Whoever believes in him...*” believing in him means giving adherence to Jesus, living like him for the good of mankind, “*.. have eternal life.*” Life that is called eternal not for the indefinite length,

but for the indestructible quality, and Jesus will speak always of the present. Eternal life is a possibility of fullness of life that is already at the disposition of everyone

Jesus affirming that this replaces the function that was attributed to the law. It was the observance of the laws that which guaranteed the prize of eternal life. Well, with Jesus there is no more observance of the law, but the adherence to a person. And Jesus continues in a crescendo of offering love. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Jesus is the gift of God’s love for all humanity, a love that wants to show and communicate itself.

And Jesus denies that image which is dear to all the religions of a God who judges, of a God who condemns, no. Jesus’ God, the Father is only love and offers love. It is for man to welcome and not this love. In fact Jesus says *“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* It is not as the Pharisee Nicodemus believed, a Messiah come to separate the clean from the unclean, the saints from the sinners, this violent ideology that all religions have to divide humanity, but an offering of love to all of them so that the world may be saved, this is God's plan of love for humanity.

And Jesus states, *“Whoever believes in him..”* in the son of man, does not encounter any judgment or condemnation. So one wonders where does this disastrous image of a God who judges comes from, a God who condemns when Jesus denies it? *“..but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”* It is clear: this judgment does not come from God, but from man who with the choice he makes, welcomes this life or refuses it and it is the fullness of death.

. Jesus clarifies his episode even better and he does so with an image that everyone can understand what this judgment is: it is a judgment based on light. Light is positive, the light does good, light is necessary for man to live. Light does no good only when man lives in darkness. When you spend a lot of time indoors, even a small glimmer of light annoys you, it hurts. So, Jesus says *“..this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil”*. Then who each day, welcomes Jesus, performs actions that communicate life, restore life, brightening the lives of others, becomes a splendid person, luminous, full of light and when he encounters light, he grasps at it. But he who egoistically thinks only of his own needs and his own necessities of life in his own little dark world, when the light arrives it is fastidious more than the darkness.

Jesus concludes *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light.....”* it is known that a delinquent hates light, *“...and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”* But as opposed to doing evil, Jesus does not speak of doing good as we would have expected. He says in fact *“.. whoever does what is true..”* the truth must be done, the truth is not a doctrine, but a benevolent attitude of love towards others. What separates men from God is not a doctrine, but conduct. *whoever does what is true.” But comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”* because it is God who does the good for mankind.