

III ADVENT SUNDAY– 13th December 2020

...AMONG YOU STANDS ONE YOU DO NOT KNOW – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 1,6-8.19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” So they said to him, ““No.” Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

“*There was a man sent from God,..*” With this beautiful expression taken from the prologue of John's Gospel begins the passage from today's reading; “*..whose name was John.*” Being God's plan towards man, he chooses a man to manifest it. God carefully avoids people and religious systems that he knows are refractory and even hostile to his project. Therefore this man came, his name was John, John means “*the lord of mercy*” to be a witness to the light because of the works of darkness, which are identified in the John's gospel with the religious institution, was so powerful that it drugged every man. Then what is John's task? To awaken the desire for life in all men, his message is universal.

Then we go to verse 19 which continues “*And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews...*” the alarm goes off immediately: as soon as God's work is manifested, the alarm goes off with the authorities. With the word “*Jews*” appearing here for the first time, it does not mean the people, the Jewish population, but always the religious leaders. “*..sent priests and Levites ...*” the evangelist first spoke of a man sent by God, well when God sends someone to awaken the light, the darkness sends someone to extinguish it. They come from Jerusalem, it is the holy see, it is the holy city where the religious institution resides, the “*Levites*”; also performed the function of police. They send the priests to question this strange character, John, because they were alarmed, and the Levites came to eventually arrest him; he is dangerous. They turn on him in a brutal manner, without any form of courtesy, “*Who are you?*” and John replies “*I am not the Christ.*” That is he is not the Messiah that they feared But why did they fear him? If they announced and prayed that he would come, in reality they hoped that this would never happen because among the things that the Messiah would do, would be to put right the rot in the priestly caste of Jerusalem and expel the corrupt priests. So they feared him.

“What then? Are you Elijah?” Elijah was the prophet he was supposed to come before the Messiah. John's answers *“I am not.”* *“Are you the Prophet?”* the prophet announced by Moses that he would come to interpret the law and the last answer a firm *“No.”* So they asked *“Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”* And the evangelist cites the prophet Isaiah, but modifying him *“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”* The religious authorities have no need of preparing, they only have to straighten everything out, that is, to remove the obstacles that they themselves have made. And how did they make these obstacles that prevented people from welcoming God's love? Through an obsessive observance of the law that covered every detail of the life of men.

And then the alarm goes off and the Pharisees appear. The Pharisees appear here for the first time once, to question and possibly arrest John, and they will appear the last time to the arrest of Jesus. The Pharisees, the term means *"separated"*, they are pious lay people, they keep all the 613 precepts of the law of Moses. From this interpretation that John adapted in his answer, *"straighten"* rather than *"prepare"*, they understood that the obstacle is really what? Observance of the law that they advocate.,

So then they too intervene to question him and here is John's answer, that will accompany his whole Gospel, *“I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ...”* The Pharisees, the authorities, the priests will never know Jesus because who has a relationship with God based on the observance of the law will never get to know Jesus who proposes a relationship with the Father based not on obedience to his laws, but on the acceptance and likeness in his love.