

LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SINS OF THE WORLD! – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 1,29-34

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

In the book of Exodus, the night of the liberation of the Egyptian slavery at the beginning of the long journey towards the land of freedom, Moses asks, each family to eat a lamb. The meat of the lamb would give them the strength to begin this journey of liberation, and the blood, sprinkled on the doorposts of the tents, of the door, would save them from the angel of death. John the evangelist presents Jesus with this lamb, the Easter lamb, for which the meat will give mankind the capacity to free themselves from the darkness, to soar towards liberation, and the blood absorbed will deliver them not so much from physical death, but from an everlasting death. Let’s read how the evangelist John presents us with all this, in the first chapter, verses 29-34.

“The next day.. “, the evangelist continues his timing, this is the second day, because he wants to get, to the episode of the marriage of Cana, on the seventh day, the fullness of the creation, with the change of the alliance. “The next day John saw Jesus...” it is the first time that Jesus appears with only his name, before in the Prologue he was “ Jesus Messiah.” “.. coming toward him and said, “Look,... “ literally calling for the attention of those present “Look, the Lamb of God” and here the evangelist presents Jesus as the Lamb of God, he who must carry out this liberation.

For John the Baptist the Lamb of God is *“..he who takes away the sin of the world! “*

Above all, the evangelist does not say that this lamb atones the sins of the world, and it is not the sins of the world in the plural form, which could give the impression the sins of men, but it is a sin of the world, a sin that precedes the coming of Jesus.

What is this sin? This sin is the refusal of the life that God communicates, a refusal caused by the false ideology, also religion, that prevents the light of God’s love to arrive to mankind; and it is this the task of 'the "Lamb": to remove this sin.

Later on the evangelist will also tell us how he will do it, to up root and eliminate this sin that oppresses the world like a cloud of darkness.

“This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me.. “ This lamb that must free the world of this sin, now is presented as a man, in fact the evangelist does not present the Messiah with the image of power, such as the Lion of Judah, no, he presents him as a lamb, the image of meekness. And neither does he present him as a person of religion or other, but as a “man”, because in the humanity of Jesus the fullness of the divinity is manifested.

"..he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Which Israel? Among the prophets there was one, Zephaniah, who had reported these words of the Lord, this promise: " *But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord.*" (Zephaniah 3,12) There had been a part of Israel that had been always faithful to the alliance, and it is to this part the Lord refers.

Then John gave this testimony: *"I saw the Spirit come down from heaven..."* the definite article "the" refers to the totality, to the fullness.

What is the Spirit? The Spirit is the vital energy.

In the moment of the baptism the Father communicates to Jesus all that he is, all his fullness of love: the Spirit, and this as a response to the commitment of Jesus to visibly manifest the Father's love for humanity

This image *" ..the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove.. "*, has a double meaning; the first refers to the book of Genesis, where at the moment of the creation the Spirit hovered over the waters, over the chaos, therefore Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of this creation. But above all the second refers the proverbial love of the dove for its nest; Jesus is presented as the nest of the Spirit, the permanent dwelling place of the Spirit.

In fact he says: *" ..the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."* This aspect is important; it is not enough that the Spirit descends on a person, but, to be communicated and transmitted to others, this Spirit must remain of this person and on Jesus it remained.

Therefore Jesus is the permanent dwelling place of the Spirit, that is the visible manifestation of God, the presence of God on earth.

"I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." *The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain...* " the evangelist repeats this descending, above all this Spirit that remains, and uses it again the with the definite article "the" that indicates all the fullness of God.

"..(he) is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." The evangelist puts a parallel between who takes away the sin of the world *"it is he who baptizes"* and how the sin of the world is taken away *"with the Holy Spirit"*.

Already in the prologue, the evangelist had said that the light does not fight against the darkness, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness fades away. And what of this sin, that weighs upon humanity, it should not be fought, but should be eliminated, so it fades away. How? The evangelist says *"..the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."* Jesus' task will be to immerse, fill up and baptize in the Holy Spirit, which means to fill up with the strength of God. Love in the depths of the Spirit, while baptizing with water means being immersed in an external liquid. In this verse the Spirit is defined Holy, not only in its quality sublime, divine, but for its activity to sanctify, to separate from evil. Who accepts Jesus and his message, receives from him his Spirit, his own capacity to love, that progressively will distance him from the sphere of evil and start the penetration of the Spirit of God in mankind.

"I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One." He who was first presented as the Lamb of God, and then as man, now is presented as the Son of God.

From the moment that the Spirit of God descends in Jesus, there is the fullness of the divine condition in him, that will not be a privilege, but will be a possibility that will communicate to all who want to follow him.