

III SUNDAY AFTER EASTER– 18th April 2021

THUS IT IS WRITTEN, THAT THE CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER AND ON THE THIRD DAY RISE FROM THE DEAD – Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 24, 35-48

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

If no evangelist describes the resurrection of Jesus to us, all of them give us precious indications for how to experience it alive, vivifying in our life. The experience of the resurrection of Christ was not a privilege for a few, but a possibility for all. Luke chapter 24 we are at the final part of his gospel and he insists on the words “..he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.” What Luca is describing to us is not a vision, but an experience, an acknowledgment. They are the disciples of Emmaus who return, find the others and tell how they recognized Jesus in the breaking the bread. Why in breaking bread? It is Jesus who in the Last Supper, in the Gospel of Luke, after breaking the bread and offering it to them, said, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” (Luke 22,19) In the celebration of the Eucharist, because this is what it is, in this dynamic of love received and love communicated, the Lord Jesus makes himself present, manifests himself.

The evangelist writes “*As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them,...*” It is characteristic of the risen Jesus that when he manifests himself he places himself at the centre; he does not put himself in front or to each side, but the centre so that all have the same relationship, with him; there are no hierarchies of importance, of who comes first or last. And the first words that Jesus says, not “*Peace be with you*”, but “*Peace to you!*” as in John’s Gospel , not as a greeting but as a gift .We know that peace in the Jewish culture indicates everything that contributes to the fullness of life, happiness, well-being, work and health. Well then, the risen Jesus gives this peace but it is not only a gift, it is the proof of his love for them; this is why he then says that he will show his hands and feet that bear the signs of the crucifixion, the love that prompted him to give his life for his people.

But the disciples are startled, they think they see, and it is not a ghost, the evangelist speaks of "*spirit*" because they cannot believe that a person can continue to be alive while passing through death and also because there was immediately a rumour around that the one who had been crucified was not really Jesus, Jesus was saved. This is why the evangelist insists, and here there are three imperatives one after the other, "*look, touch*" and "*look*", look at the hands and feet that have the marks of the nails, the marks of the passion of Jesus. It is the same Jesus who passed through death. What does the evangelist mean with the scene that Jesus eats, or rather, asks him to eat? That he is not a spirit, but a person with a divine condition. This does not cancel the physicality, but expands, transforms and transfigures it. St Paul, taking this theology, develops it and in the First Letter to the Corinthians he will speak of "*an animal body*" which is buried and resurrects a "*spiritual body*"; it is always a body, it is not a soul, a spirit, but a body with another dimension.

And then Jesus, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus to whom he interpreted the scriptures, here He opens their minds for understanding; why? As for the disciples of Emmaus, the writing not only needs to be read, but it must be interpreted; it is necessary to open the mind and tune it to interpret rightly what is contained in the writing with the same Spirit that inspired it. And what is the Spirit who inspired the writing? The unconditional love of the creator for his creatures, this it is the interpretative criterion of all sacred writing.

So Jesus makes them understand and what does he make them understand? These disciples in the scriptures had selected only those aspects that spoke of the triumphant, glorious and victorious Messiah, they had neglected all those who spoke instead of the Messiah who was despised and persecuted.

And then here is the final mandate of Jesus, who asks that "*...that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations,*" therefore also the gentile nations. Conversion is not a conversion to the Lord, but a change of mentality which then coincides with a change of behaviour, a change of life "*for the forgiveness of sins*" and here it is not a question of faults, but of the unjust past. Then Jesus adds a very significant addition "*....beginning from Jerusalem*". It is Jerusalem, the seat of the religious institution which for convenience and interest killed Jesus, that is where there is the most need of conversion and forgiveness of sins.