

II SUNDAY OF EASTER- 19th April 2020

A WEEK LATER....JESUS CAME - Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah,^{le} the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

The first day of the week - is the day of the resurrection of Jesus - the disciples have the habit, the initiative to meet for the Eucharistic celebration. And it concerns precisely the profound meaning of the Eucharistic celebration in the Gospel of John chapter 20, 19-31, which the liturgy presents to us today. The Eucharist is the important moment, indispensable and precious for the individual and the growth of the community; in this passage the evangelist gives us its deep meaning, let's see.

The community gathered on the first day of the week and - John writes - that "Jesus came". Whenever the community comes together, Jesus manifests himself. In this passage the evangelist avoids using the verb "to appear"; they are not apparitions, they are meetings, they are normal manifestations of Jesus when his community comes together.

, "...Jesus came and stood among them.." the indication given by the evangelist on the position of Jesus is important: when Jesus manifests himself he puts himself at the center. What is the meaning of this? Jesus does not put himself in front of others, - which would assume that some people, might be closer to him - no, Jesus puts himself in the center. This means that in the Eucharist there are no hierarchies of importance, but all are equal around Jesus. But Jesus from the center does not absorb his people, he does not draw them towards him, but from there he communicates his love, strengthens his love to his people, who give it with him and like him, to others.

Well, once Jesus gets in the center he speaks the words that are repeated three times in this passage - three means what is complete, what is definitive - "Peace be with you." What Jesus says is not an invitation, nor a greeting, it is a gift. In the Eucharist, the presence of Jesus involves a

gift. *"Peace.."* we know - in the Jewish world it has a very rich meaning and indicates everything that contributes to the welfare of mankind. Well, Jesus has the well-being of his disciples at heart and he gives it to them.

But those of Jesus are not words, they are facts. In fact, the evangelist writes that "*After he said this,..*" after having given them peace "*..he showed them his hands and his side*" The warrant of arrest - we know - had been for Jesus' whole group ; it was Jesus -who had said that the true shepherd is he who lays down his life for his sheep - who at the moment of the arrest, in a position of strength, he told the guards "*If you are looking for me, then let these men go.*" (John 18,8) He did not allow himself to be defended by his disciples who were ready to give their lives for their own teacher, no, it was he who gave his life for his disciples. Well, showing your hands and side with the signs of the passion, means that the love that pushed Jesus to give life, his own life, for his disciples, remains forever.

So (for) the community here is this gift of peace: the security of the presence of a love of the Lord that is forever, a love that protects, a love that envelops, a love that follows and accompanies his disciples. And in fact, the evangelist writes, "*Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*" The experience of feeling so loved - there is an expression that we use colloquially when it is said "in God's hands" "only in the final stage of a moment of difficulty, but it is the constant experience of the believer of the Christian community: you are in the loving hands of the Lord.

Then Jesus returns again to repeat this gift of peace, but this time he adds "*As the Father has sent me, ..*" "; how did the Father send the Son? To manifest his love, his unconditional tenderness: a love that does not depend on the merits of people, but on their needs. The Father did not send the Son to transmit a doctrine about him, but to manifest his love, his tenderness

So Jesus says "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*"

Here, the task of the believers is to continue in the world with their love the very love of the Father and the Son that has been given to them and, as Jesus did not come to bring a doctrine about God, so the Christian community must not transmit a doctrine, but an expression of his love. And how do they express his love? Through a caress. The caress is a gesture of tenderness that everyone can understand.

And this time the evangelist writes "*When he had said this,..*" - therefore for the mandate, to be able to manifest this love of tenderness "*.. he breathed on them..*" The expression is found in the book of Genesis in chapter 2, 7. at the creation of man, "*..and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.* Jesus had said that he gave the spirit without measure. Communication from God of life is without measure, the measure is put by the person. Those parts that are still occupied by resentments, grudges and selfishness are all parts where the Spirit cannot go, but where this Spirit is accepted in fullness, a dynamism of received love and communicated love is triggered. The greater the capacity of the disciple to communicate love, the greater the capacity will be to receive this Spirit from God.

After this there is Jesus' indication on the forgiveness of sins, which is not important charge that Jesus gives to some, it is not a power that Jesus gives, but it is a responsibility for all. Jesus' community, with him at the center, where this love radiates, gives off light. Those that live in sin - the term sin indicates the wrong direction of life and therefore concerns the past - those who, living in sin, feel attracted by the light of this love and enter to be part of it, their past is completely erased. Who instead - Jesus had said it - does evil hates the light and remains in the darkness, even seeing the light of this love withdraws from it remaining in the presence of their guilt and their sin . So, as we said, it is not a power for some, but an enormous responsibility of the community to be the light of the love of the Father.

