

II ORDINARY TIME – January 19th, 2014

**BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD! –
Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

Jn 1.29-34

At that time, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, At that time, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'

I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

John follows, in his Gospel, the rhythm of the creation as the Book of Genesis. It is for this that the today's passage begins with the expression, "*The next day*" It is the second day and the evangelist will follow through this day until arriving at the seventh day, the day of the completion of the creation, with the Marriage at Cana, where the new covenant will be announced.

Well then, John the Baptist "*At that time, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "«Behold, the Lamb of God,.. »"* John the Baptist identifies in Jesus the Lamb of God, what does he mean with this lamb? It is the Easter lamb that Moses ordered his people to eat on Easter night, because the meat would have given strength to carry out the march towards the liberation and the blood of this lamb would have taken away the death from the Jews that the avenging angel that night would have brought to all Egypt.

Therefore meat to have strength to walk towards liberty, and blood that takes away death. Well, John the evangelist sees in Jesus the Lamb of God. There are numerous references in the Gospel to Jesus as the Easter lamb, for example His death will be the same hour in which the Easter lamb will be sacrificed in the temple, the fact that Jesus has no bones broken, as was established for this Easter lamb which must have no bones broken.

Therefore John sees in Jesus the Lamb of God, that is he whose flesh will give the capacity and the strength to begin the march towards liberty, the liberation and the exodus, and the blood, that will not save one from the physical death, but will save one from the final death. It will allow to who welcomes this blood a life of a such a quality able to overcome death.

Well, the function of the Lamb of God, according to John, is, “ *he...who takes away the sin of the world!*” It does not mean the sins of the world, significant of mankind’s sins, but the sin of the world. There is a sin that proceeds the coming of Jesus and represents an obstacle to the communication between God and humanity. This sin is refusing the fullness of life that God offers to humanity, caused by the adherence to an ideological system, religious that is contrary to the will of God.

And John the Baptist defines Jesus as “...*he of whom I said, «After me comes a man..»*”, therefore for now he is presented only as a man. He says that he does not know him, but he came “...*baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.*”

Israel has always been a small group that have remained faithful to the Lord, to the covenant, to its promises, and in the book of the prophet Zephaniah, one reads “ *But I will leave in you a people afflicted and poor. The survivors in Israel shall find refuge in the name of the Lord,*”, chapter 3,12, And to this remains the promise of the Lord. But this promise that now is for Israel after with Jesus is directed from Israel to all humanity.

“*And John bore witness: «I saw the Spirit»*”, the definite article indicates the totality of the Spirit, that is the divine energy, God’s full force, that is love, “...*descend from heaven like a dove»*”, remember that the dove was the Spirit that hovered over the creation in the story in Genesis, also the fondness of the dove for its nest “*«and it remained on him »*”.

It is important how the evangelist emphasizes not only the fact that the Spirit descends on Jesus, but that it remains. What does this mean? The experience of the Spirit is possible to many, but only the one to whom the Spirit remains, can communicate to another; this in fact will be the activity of Jesus that we will see now.

“*I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain..., »*” here again the evangelist emphasizes that, not only the Spirit, that is the strength, the power of God descended on Jesus, but it remained with Him. It continues literally “*«'... this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. »*”.

The evangelist proposes together the expressions used “...*who takes away the sin of the world!*” with “*«'... this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. »*”. This sin must not be expiated but must be eradicated. How? Not through a fight, not through violence. John had already written in his prologue that the light shines in the darkness, the light does not fight against the darkness; the light continues to shine and the darkness disappears.

Jesus’ work is to baptize in the Holy Spirit. While the baptism in water means to emerge oneself in a liquid that is outside of mankind, the baptism in the Holy Spirit means to let oneself be impregnated, soaked with the fullness of the divine power that comes from God through Jesus. Therefore the work of Jesus is to communicate to each person his own divine life.

While the strength of God descends on Jesus, the Spirit, the work of Jesus is that to baptize in the Holy Spirit; ‘Holy’ means not only the quality, the holiness of the Spirit, but it’s activity to make holy, that is to separate those that welcome this Spirit, from the sphere of evil, from the sphere of darkness. Therefore the work of Jesus is that of communicating His own Spirit.

Once this Spirit is welcomed in the person, he becomes a gushing source that communicates, in an ever growing way, continuing to overflow, the divine life. The passage concludes, “*«And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God. »*” With Him that was simply announced as a man, “*After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me,*” now is revealed as the Son of God.

Once that it is decided the fullness of the Holy Spirit, in Jesus there is the fullness of the divine condition and Jesus fully manifests the reality of God.