

V SUNDAY AFTER EASTER– 19th May 2019

A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER– Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 13,31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In chapter 13 of John’s gospel, the evangelist presents Jesus’ last supper with his disciples and his last try to offer his love also to the disciple that will betray him, Judas. He offers them bread, which represents his life, but Judas does not eat this bread, he does not assimilate Jesus. He takes it and leaves.

The evangelist says that “*And it was night.*” (John 13,30)

“*When he had gone out,*” (from the supper), he had taken the morsel of bread, but had not eaten it, but he went to betray Jesus. “*Jesus said, “Now..*” In all the gospel this hour has been announced and the evangelist says that now it is being realized. “*Now is the Son of Man glorified..*” Why does Jesus say this after Judas has betrayed him to be condemned to death?

Because in the unconditioned love that is offered even there the enemy manifests the glory of God, that is the visible manifestation of what God is. What is God? God is love that is offered even to the enemy, the betrayer. Jesus talks of himself as the “Son of Man”, why does he use this expression that is very dear to him?

“Son of Man” means the man with the divine condition. Therefore Jesus is the son of God, God in the human condition, and the son of man, meaning man with the divine condition.

“*..and God is glorified in him.*” The evangelist presents a continuous dynamic in the life of Jesus, that must be also that of the believer, of love received and love communicated. Then there is a verse that is omitted in many manuscripts, where the evangelist repeats the same concept. “*If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.*” How will he be glorified at once? Giving the capacity to face death, where it will not be the end, but a beginning, because in Jesus’ death the Spirit will spread through the community.

Then Jesus, for the first time, the only time, has an expression of great profound tenderness towards his disciples. He calls them "*Little children,*"

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews,.." - now here Jesus is comparing the disciples to their opponents, the authority – "*so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'*"

Why can they not go? Because the disciples are ready to die for Jesus, but not to die like him, to give life with him and like him. This is why Jesus says that for now they cannot go where he is going. Then the conclusion of this chapter 13 is extraordinary, Jesus' novelty.

"A new commandment I give to you,.." "New" In Greek means the best, that will substitute all the rest. The evangelist had said in his prologue "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1,17)

The new relationship that Jesus had established with the Father and the disciples could not meet the terms of the Old Covenant and need a new covenant that expresses itself in a unique, and new commandment. So "new", because the quality of this commandment outshines all others.

"..that you love one another: just as I have loved you,.." It is important that Jesus does not speak with a verb of the future he does not say "as I will love you". Jesus is not announcing death, the final sacrifice that he will do on the cross, but says, "*.. just as I have loved you,..*" And how has Jesus loved? We are in the context of the last supper according to John, when Jesus washes the disciples feet. Love is not real if it is not transformed into a service that purifies the lives of others.

This is the love that Jesus asks of us. "*..as I have loved you,..*" "*..you also are to love one another.*" Service is the only distinctive of the believer in the community and Jesus actually confirms this: "*By this..*" that is love that makes service, "*... all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Jesus with this declaration is very clear, excluding any other distinctive. Therefore NO to badges, uniforms, signs and decorations that want to show the relationship that one has with the Lord, but only a love that places itself at the service of others. And when you use these substitutes it is a warning light that lights up, a spy that lights up, that maybe this love that transforms itself into service is not so habitual to be the only distinctive of the Christian community.

So, Jesus leaves the only commandment, he that the evangelist had presented as the word of God, the verb made flesh, and this word of God formulates and expresses with the only commandment that outshines all the rest.