

EASTER – April 20th, 2014

## HE MUST RISE FROM THE DEAD – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

*Jn 20,1-9*

*Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

*So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself.*

*Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*

If Mary Magdalena had gone to the tomb a day earlier, we would have celebrated Easter a day earlier. John writes in chapter 20 “...on the first day of the week”, literally “ the first day after Saturday”, “*Mary Magdalena came to the tomb...*”. Why did Mary Magdalena not go to the tomb immediately after Jesus’ burial, but waited for the first day after Saturday? Because she was still conditioned of observing the law for Saturday as a day of rest.

And therefore observing of the law had immediately obstructed the experimentation of the power of life that was in Jesus, a life able to suppurate death. The evangelist, through this indication, wants the readers to note that the observation of the law delayed the experience of the new creation that Jesus had begun. The expression “the first day of the week” recalls, in fact, the first day of the creation. In Jesus there is a new creation, that truly created by God does not know death, does not know the end. But the community, represented by Mary Magdalena, is still conditioned with observing the law. For this reason the experience of the resurrection was delayed.

*“Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark,”* . Darkness is the image of the misunderstanding of the community that still has not understood Jesus, that defines Himself as the “light of the world”, His message, His truth. “ *..and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb*”. Well the first reaction of Mary Magdalena is to run to Simone Peter and “*..the other disciple*”. Jesus had said: “*«Behold the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home»*”.

Well, the evangelist gives to this woman, Mary Magdalena, the role of the shepherd that gathers the sheep that were scattered. “*..and said to them, « They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!»*” She does not speak of a corpse, but of the Lord. And therefore already there is the allusion that Jesus is alive. So, what do Peter and the other disciple do? They go to the tomb, the only place where they should not go.

In the Gospel of Luke it will be expressed very clearly that the men stop the women that go to the tomb. “*«Why search amongst the dead he that is alive? »*” Well, Peter and the other disciple go in search of the Lord in the only place where he is not, that is in the place of the dead. Like Mary, observing Saturday has delayed the experience of a life stronger than death, because Jesus cannot be kept in the tomb, a place of death.

He is living. So the disciples go to the tomb, the only place where they will not find Jesus. If one cries for a person as dead, that is if one goes to the tomb, you cannot experiment life and the living in one’s own existence. Both disciples run, the most loved disciple arrives first, he who has experienced the love of Jesus.

Peter- who had refused to have his feet washed and therefore had not wanted to accept the love of Jesus expressed in service, arrives later. But the other disciple stops and allows Peter to be the first to enter. Why? It is important that the disciple that had betrayed Jesus and for whom death is the end of everything – and this was the reason for the betrayal – makes the first experience of life.

Then the other disciple enters, “*.. he saw and believed;*”. But the very important wise word of the evangelist is that “ *for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*” John’s preoccupation is that one can believe in the resurrection of Jesus only by seeing the signs of His victory over death.

The resurrection of Jesus is not a privilege given to some person two thousand years ago, but a possibility for all believers. How? The evangelist tells it. “*...as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.*” The welcoming of the scriptures, the word of the Lord, in the disciple, the radicalization of this message in his life, and his transformation, allowed the disciple to have a life of such a quality that he experiments the rising in his own existence.

One does not believe that Jesus is risen because the tomb is empty, but only if one meets Him alive and giving life in one’s own.