

**IF A GRAIN OF WHEAT DIES IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Jn 12.20-33***

***Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.***

***“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.***

The evangelist, in chapter 12, 20-33, presents the first and only time that Jesus had contact with foreigners. They are Greeks that have come to Jerusalem to go to the temple for the Easter celebrations, but they meet Jesus. Jesus is the true sanctuary from which shine divine love.

The evangelist writes that “..among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks”, Greeks is a term generally used to indicate the pagans. And here there is something strange. “So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,” These Greeks, to meet Jesus, who is a Jew, go first to a disciple with a Greek name, Philip, who came from a place along the border where customs were less rigid than the Jewish religious institution, meaning a more open mentality, “.. and asked him, «Sir, we wish to see Jesus. »”.

This is the reply to what Jesus says, “ ..who see the son and believes in Him has eternal life”, it is not only in seeing, but it is seeing to know and then believing. Well, Philip does not go directly to Jesus, but

goes to Andrew, the other disciple with a Greek name. This shows the difficulties of the primitive communities to open themselves to Jesus' universal proposal.

Finally *“Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.”* Jesus' reply seems out of place, it seems not to have anything to do with the request. *“And Jesus answered them, «The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified»”*. Why does Jesus give this reply to the desire of a Greek to see Him? Because Jesus is speaking of His death, and on the cross will be manifested the divine condition of Jesus. And so Jesus says that when He will be dead His love will be universally understood.

Why? While a doctrine depends on the cultural contest, on its historical functions, love is the universal language that all humanity can understand. Therefore Jesus' answer, even if it seems out of place, is in fact right.

The moment will come in which everyone will understand the universal language, which is that of love. And here Jesus, speaking of His death, but also of the death of each person, manifests an important truth. *“« Truly, truly, »”*, a double affirmation “truly”, means that Jesus is saying something that is sure, something very true, *“..unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; »”*.

A grain of wheat has inside itself an energy that has need to find an ideal habitat to free itself and grow. If it remains alone all this has no effect. The evangelist here makes understood that everyone has the capacity and powers that are unknown and that are freed through Him, *“« but if it dies, it bears much fruit. »”*.

Jesus throws a positive light on death. In every person there is a vital energy that waits to manifest itself in a new form and death is the moment that allows all this. Therefore death does not trap mankind, but frees him. Death does not weaken the individual, but strengthens him. Death does not restrict the existence of the person, but widens it.

In every person there are potentials that only at the moment of death are able to be liberated and to flourish. So Jesus takes any negative elements from the fact of death, of destruction, to speak of it as a flowering of life, for the life of the people.

And Jesus says, like the grain of wheat, one must “give oneself” in order to grow *“«Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life...»”*, was typical of the Jewish mentality to speak of love and hate in the communal sense of “to prefer” that we usually use. So it is not to hate something, but to prefer or not. So Jesus is saying “who loves his own life”, that is who thinks of only of himself – this is the meaning – loses himself. The person realizes himself who is able to give himself for others. To give is not to lose, but to gain. The more the life is given for others, the more one obtains from life.

So, who thinks only of himself ends with losing himself; who in fact does not think only of himself, realizes himself forever. Here Jesus turns again to the theme which is dear to Him, eternal life, not thinking of it as a prize for the future, but a possibility in the present.

And Jesus continues “*«If anyone serves me, »*” the verb “to serve”, indicates a free choice of collaboration with Jesus, “*«... he must follow me; and where I am, ...»*” Jesus will end His life on the scaffold reserved for the evil of society, the rejected by society, “*«..there will my servant be also. »*” Jesus cannot be served from a safe distance. In following Jesus, one must be able to deal with inevitable sufferance and persecution which living like Him entails.

But, Jesus concludes, “*« If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him. »*”, so, at the cross, that is the maximum dishonor, corresponds to the maximum honour, that of the Father. And how does the Father honour the individual? Manifesting himself in him. The more man gives himself, the more God’s presence will manifest itself in him. And so every individual, like Jesus, becomes the one and only true sanctuary from which radiates and manifests the love of God for humanity.