

## II SUNDAY OF EASTER– 23rd April 2017

### EIGHT DAYS LATER..... JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

#### John 20,19-31

***On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And 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 withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."***

***Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, 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 in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."***

***Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, 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; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, 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 believed."***

***Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.***

When we read the gospel, to understand what the evangelist wants to transmit to us, we always have to move away from the traditions and especially from pictorial images, in which the artists have sought to pass on this episode. It is the case of Thomas, who normally is presented, as an unbeliever, as he who puts his finger into the wounds of the Lord, in the hands and above all the side, as in the magnificent picture by Caravaggio; but the gospel gives nothing like this. Let's see.

The evangelist writes that "...Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin," for four times appears in this gospel and for three times is presented as a twin, a twin to whom? He is the twin brother of Jesus, because he resembles him in behaviour. In Apocryphal it says : "Thomas is named my ideal second", but why is he considered Jesus' twin? When Jesus announced to his disciples that he wanted to go to Judea, because Lazarus, his friend, had died, all the disciples were afraid, they said to Jesus; in Judea they will try to kill you. Thomas was the only one to have said; let us go and die with him. Whilst Peter wanted to die for Jesus but will end up betraying him. Thomas no, Thomas realized that he was not to give his life for Jesus, but, with him, we must give our lives for others. For this Thomas was presented as a twin, that is he who is the most like Jesus, and his importance comes out in this gospel. For a good seven times his name appears.

***" Now Thomas, ..... was not with them.. ". Why was he not with them? We have read in this passage, that "...the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews," Well, Thomas, Jesus' twin, was not afraid , he was not afraid to die like his Master.***

***So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails," it is only from John that we know that nails were used for the crucifixion of Jesus. "... and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." This statement of Thomas should not be interpreted as an absolute denial of Jesus' resurrection,***

but as a desire to believe. It is like when an extraordinary, unthought-of notice is given what do we say? "Oh, I can't believe it! It isn't that we do not want to believe, it seems so great, and unbelievable ; too good to be true. So here Thomas does not deny the possibility, but expresses his ardent desire to be able to experience it .

*"Eight days later,..."* This indication is important: the eighth day is the day of Jesus' resurrection, and the community of believers had learned to come together for the Eucharistic celebration *"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them..."* It is important to note that every time Jesus manifests himself to his disciples he is amongst them, not above , but in the middle of them. What is the meaning of this? That all the people are around him, they all have the same relationship with him, no one is nearer or distant, all have the same relationship. Jesus is in the middle and everyone around him.

*".. and said,..."* for the third time Jesus says *"Peace be with you."* When Jesus manifests himself he always gives peace, the fullness of happiness, and with this, the gift of the Spirit, and is capable of extending , through the apostles, the gift of the Father's love for humanity.

*"Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."* Well in the face of this invitation of Jesus, Thomas does not desire to put his finger in the wounds of the Lord, on the contrary, *"Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* It is the highest profession of faith in all the gospels, so other than unbelieving, Thomas is the perfect believer. John had presented Jesus as he who was the revelation of God, and Jesus had said to Philip *" .. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* (John 14,9) and Jesus had always said: *"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he,"* (John 8,28) well Thomas is the first of all the disciples to recognise in Jesus the fullness of the divinity, the fullness of the divine condition *"My Lord and my God!"*

*"Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me?"* There are two beatitudes in John's gospel, closely linked; one in the Last Supper, after the service of the washing of the feet, when Jesus says *"...that you also should do just as I have done to you."* (John 13,15) Meaning there is this attitude of service, and the other one that is closely linked is that this attitude of service allows the experience of the risen Christ in one's life, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Those who, in time, will succeed, are not disadvantaged, in fact they are blessed, they are more fortunate. The message that the evangelist gives us is that there is no need to see in order to believe, but believe, to adhere to Jesus, and become a sign that others can see.