

VII ORDINARY TIME– 23rd February 2020

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 5,38-48 “

***“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”**

Jesus proposes a new relationship with God, which can no longer be contained in the ancient covenant. For this reason, in the Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 5, after proclaiming the beatitudes, Jesus begins a series of distances, saying: *“You have heard that it was said,.. “* And this is the fourth time that Jesus repeats the expression, he says: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’* This law, which is known as the law of retaliation, which undoubtedly horrifies for revenge, was in use at the time because revenge was unlimited and ruthless, as recounted in the book of Genesis 4 v. 23, the episode of Lamec, who boasted: *“I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me ”*

The phrase that Jesus quoted is taken from the book of Deuteronomy, at the end of chapter 19, v.21 where it says: *“ Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”* So it's a law where there is no compassion, you have to make the culprit pay for the damage he has done. Well Jesus distances himself from all this: *“ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”* It should be borne in mind that the only time that Jesus received a slap, he was careful not to turn the other cheek. So what does this statement of Jesus’ mean? It is not an invitation to be foolish, but good to the end: ignore the anger and aggression of the other with your goodness, it is a matter of disarming the other.

“And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.” he is a domineering person, well leave him even what he does not need, the coat serves as a cover in the night, he will wrap himself in his clothes and with your cloak, and you will be freer.

So Jesus invites us to have this full freedom, all required in ignoring the aggressiveness of others.

“If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.” Jesus refers to the laws of the occupying forces, which imposed forced exercises and services to the people, as it will be for Cyreneus, *“You make two with him”*, then disarm the aggression of the other with your love,

because if you respond to aggression with other aggression, it grows and you do not know where it ends up.

Then Jesus gives a very, clear indication for the Christian community: *"Give to the one who asks you,.."* To give is not to lose, but to gain, because we know that when we give, then the Father gives with more abundance, *".. and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."* so Jesus asks us to have this attention for the needy, to those who ask you, without calculating.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' To the precept of loving one's neighbour is added that of the hatred of the enemy. We can find this expression in the Psalms; for example there is Psalm 139 v. 21 which says: *"Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."* therefore love was given to your neighbour, but hatred was for enemies.

With Jesus, in the new relationship that exists with the Father and with the brothers, all this comes to an end: *"But I tell you, love your enemies..."* it is a generous love, which is a gift and the love becomes prayer: *"..and pray for those who persecute you,.."* who are these enemies Why this? *"..that you may be children of your Father..."* A son, in the culture of that time, did not mean only the one who was born of someone, but the one who looks like him in behaviour, therefore you are like the Father *".. in heaven."* Here Jesus, in addition to giving instructions to his followers on how to behave, reveals to us who God is, he says: *"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."*

The prophet Amos did not really agree, the prophet Amos presented a God who refused rain to the unrighteous. No, the God of Jesus is not God who rewards the good and punishes the wicked, but he is a God of love, he is a God who shows his love to everyone, regardless of their conduct. As Jesus said, he makes the sun rise on the bad and the good, not only on those who deserve it, but on all those who need it. Jesus passes from the theory of the doctrine of merit to that of the gift: God does not love his own, he does not love creatures for their merits, but for their needs. Jesus comments; *"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"* the tax collectors were the people believed to be transgressors of all the commandments, the furthest from God. *"And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?"* so Jesus quotes gentiles and tax collectors, the categories that were furthest from God. *They too are able to greet those who greet them and to love those who love them, what is extraordinary about doing this?* Jesus concludes *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Jesus does not ask to be perfect like God, which could make the person lost, the immensity of God, no. Jesus speaks of being perfect, perfect means complete, he says, like the Father, and what is the perfection of the father? It is what we have seen: that of a love that appeals to everyone, a love that does not look at merits, who deserves it, but looks at needs, this is within the possibilities of every believer.

