

CHRISTMAS– 25th December 2016

AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US...Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 1,1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'" For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

The reading this Sunday presents us with the Prologue of John's gospel.

The prologue are the first 18 verse of his gospel, in which the evangelist summarizes and anticipates all of his gospel, every single word of the prologue will then be developed. Well, the evangelist begins by correcting the writing, and ends denying it. He actually begins his gospel writing: "*In the beginning was the Word,..*" it is the word creator, that realizes God's project in the creation, "*..and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" The evangelist corrects the biblical interpretation in the Book of Genesis, the first book with which the Bible opens, where it is written: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" For the evangelist God, before creating the heavens and the earth, had this project that he wanted to realize. But not only this: using "word" the evangelist opposes the biblical tradition, that said that the world was created in view of the ten words, the Decalogue, no, there is only one word that will be manifested in the gospel in Jesus' only commandment, "*....love one another: just as I have loved you.*"

(John 13, 34)

If the evangelist begins with correcting the scripture, he concludes his prologue denying it. In fact in verse 18, in a resolute way: "*No one has ever seen God;*" How can the evangelist say such a thing? Yet in the Bible we read that Moses, Aaron, and 70 other elders have seen God. The evangelist does not agree: they had only partial experiences of God, therefore they cannot manifest the fullness of the will of God. So the evangelist is unequivocal: "*No one has ever seen God;*"

"*..the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*" This statement is important: for the evangelist Jesus is not like God, but God is like Jesus. All that we believed we knew, that has been taught about God, now it is verified with what we see in Jesus in this gospel. All that which corresponds, coincides

should be maintained, but all that distances itself and is contradictory, must be eliminated.

When, in chapter 14, 7-8 in this gospel, one of the disciples, Philip, will ask Jesus; *"Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."* Jesus will reply: *"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* Therefore Jesus is not like God, but God is like Jesus. Therefore the evangelist concludes his prologue with an invitation to centre all the attention on the figure of Jesus.

Well, going back, in this prologue, the evangelist says: *"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth..."* this indicates a generous love, faithful love that becomes a gift, *"... came through Jesus Christ."*

Jesus, who is the only true manifestation of God, begins a new relation with God: whilst Moses, the servant of God, had imposed law between servants and their owners, based on the obedience of the laws. Jesus, who is not a servant of God, He is the son of God, proposes an alliance between sons and their fathers, not based on the obedience of the law, but on the welcoming and the practice of God's love.

And, always going back in this prologue to understand it, *"... from his fullness .."* the realization of this word in Jesus *"..we have all received, grace upon grace."* Here is the dynamic of a believers life, of the Christian community: it is a love that feeds love, love communicated, that then transforms itself into gifted love. And the most important verse, placed right in the middle of this prologue, is verse 12, where the evangelist had first written: *"He came to his own,"* this project, this reality, *".. and his own people did not receive him."* It is not a polemic with a world from which the Christian community has now moved away, but it is a warning to be careful not to make the same mistakes, that when God appears, and he always comes in new forms, in the name of the God of the past you do not recognize the God who comes.

But here is another important verse placed in the centre: *"But to all who did receive him,.. "* God's project that manifested itself in Jesus, *"...he gave the right to become children of God,."* You are not born children of God, but you can become one, by welcoming Jesus into your own existence, and imitating his love. With Jesus, there is no more need to search for God, only to welcome him. With Jesus mankind does not live any more for God, but lives of God, and with Him and like Him goes toward the others.

And in verse 14 the evangelist says, and this project *"..the Word became flesh.."* the weakness of humanity was realized, *".. and dwelt among us,"* it does not only mean that he came to live among us, but in us. With Jesus God asks to each person to be welcomed into his life, to expand his capacity to love and make it the only true sanctuary from which radiates his love and mercy. While in the ancient sanctuary it was the people that had to go, and not all has access, in the new sanctuary it is this sanctuary that is taken towards the others, and goes towards those excluded. The fact that God's project manifests itself in flesh, in the weakness of the flesh, indicates that there is no gift of God that does not pass through humanity: the more you are human, and more the divine manifests in us.

So, let's return to the beginning of the prologue, we have zigzagged through it because it is very long, but to understand its meaning, here we understand what the evangelist wanted to say: right from the beginning there was this project, God's project, the word becomes flesh, it manifests the divine condition, and, in this project, the evangelist writes. *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."*

Here is the great encouragement that the evangelist gives us: we must accept this love of God and manifest it. There is no need to fight the darkness and waste energy, but the light needs to expand. While the light expands the darkness diminishes. This idea will then pass through the gospels, then it will be formulated by Jesus a few moments before he is arrested, when Jesus will say: *"..take heart; I have overcome the world."*(John 16,33) Those who place themselves on the side of truth, light and love, will always be the winners over the darkness, hatred and death.