

EIGHT DAYS LATER JESUS CAME – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Jn 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 anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, 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.

The first words that Jesus pronounced to His disciple, that were hidden for fear of the coming to the same end as their teacher – the warrant of arrest was for Jesus' whole group – are: *"Peace be with you."* Not a greeting, or invitation, but as a gift, Jesus give them peace.

The word "peace" holds all that is needed for the fullness of the life of mankind, in one word to "happiness", therefore Jesus presents Himself with a gift of the fullness of happiness. And then shows them immediately why they must be happy, he shows His hands and side, showing the permanent signs of love, with which Jesus has given His life for His disciples.

In fact at the moment of His arrest Jesus had said to the guards “..if you seek me, let these men go.”(John 18 ,8) it is the shepherd that has given His life for his sheep. Then Jesus again repeats this gift of peace, but this time because they communicate it to all humanity. After He had repeated “ Peace be with you”, Jesus adds: “*As the Father has sent me,..*” the father had sent his son to demonstrate a everlasting love, “*..even so I am sending you.*”

Jesus invites His disciples to prolong the offer of Jesus’ life. And for this communicates to them His own capacity of love, that is the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ activity, that in this Gospel is described as one of a lamb that take away the sins of the world, and takes away the sins of the world filling the people with the Holy Spirit, which is extended by His community .

One must propose and offer to everyone the fullness of life, the fullness of love. And so Jesus continues saying: “ *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*” These are the word used by the evangelist. What does Jesus mean? Not to give power to some, but capacity, a responsibility for all.

The community must be like a light that shines in the darkness. How many living in darkness feel attracted and enter to be part of this radius of love, their past is completely cancelled. However many, seeing this shining light, remain in darkness – Jesus has said “*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light,..*” (John 3, 20) – they remain with their sins, under the cloak of darkness and death.

In this meeting of Jesus with His disciples Thomas is not there. How come Thomas is missing? The disciples were hidden for the fear of coming to the same end as Jesus. Thomas was not afraid; Thomas was the one that said at the resurrection of Lazarus: “ *Let us also go and die with him*” This is why he is called “the twin”, the one most like Jesus. Thomas is not present and when they tell him of Jesus’ has appeared, he does not express his disbelief but the desperate need to believe.

And he does it with this expression: “*Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails,..*” it is the same as receiving some surprising news we would say “*I can’t believe it! It’s not possible.*”

We are not denying the fact, it means it is wonderful, extraordinary. *Eight days later*, the rhythm is that of the celebration of the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that Jesus presents Himself and communicates His love. This second time when Jesus shows Himself to Thomas, he does not put his finger into Jesus’ wounds, but proclaims the highest profession of faith of all the gospels.

Jesus was described at the beginning of the Gospel, as the God that no one had ever seen and that in Him was manifested. Thomas understood it, he turns to Jesus calling Him, “*My Lord and my God!*” The passage ends with a beatitude. The believes of all time are not disadvantaged in respect of those that have had this experience , but are actually advantaged, because they have the beatitudes that were not told for the disciples, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” Jesus calls them “*blessed*” How many ask for a sign in order to believe, Jesus invites them to believe to be themselves

signs so others seeing them are able to believe. This is Jesus' good news that the community of the disciples is called to spread.