

V SUNDAY OF EASTER– 28th April 2013

**A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER –
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

John 13,31-33a. 34-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In John’s Gospel the only time that Jesus commands something of His disciples , He asks that which is impossible to command: love. It is not possible to command love. A man can be commanded to obey, to serve, but not to love.

Why does Jesus command to love? Let’s see the context. The context is that of the Last Supper where John present us with Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. So, after having washed the disciples feet, and above all after having demonstrated love even towards the disciple that will betray Him. Judah, here Jesus leaves this important commandment that will be the characteristic of the believers of His community.

Let’s see it then. The evangelist writes that Jesus says: “*A new commandment I give to you,*” Jesus does not say “I give you a new commandment”, to one add to those of Moses’ law. In Jesus the evangelist sees the fulfillment of the new alliance. At the beginning of his Gospel, in the Prologue, the evangelist had written “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth..” - an expression that indicates faithful love- “...came through Jesus Christ.”

So, there is a new relationship with God; mankind does no more obey a God observing his laws – this was the old alliance – but like him welcomes and practices a love similar to his.

And it is in this context of the new alliance that we understand Jesus’ sayings. If Jesus uses the term “commandment” it is not that it is a true and real commandment. Love can only be offered, proposed, but never commanded. But it is precisely in opposition to Moses ‘commandments. The only commandment of the community of believers is this. So, Jesus says: “*A new commandment I give to you,*” the Greek word “new” indicates a better quality, that surpasses and takes away the rest, therefore we can translate it as, “*A better commandment I give you.*”

“..that you love one another: just as I have loved you,..” Jesus does not say “ *as I will love you*”, He is not talking of the total gift of love that will be manifested with the cross, but it is in the past “how I have loved you”

And how did Jesus love His disciples? Jesus love them by washing their feet, therefore a love that became a service for others, a sign that meant giving dignity and freedom to people, a love that does not discourage, respects the freedom of the other and replies to hate with love, as Jesus had done with Judah.

So, the “loved” has two meanings: service, that renders a person freedom, full of their dignity, and a love that is given in reply for hate, a love that does not discourage.

So Jesus says: “*...just as I have loved you,*” and this is the quality of love “*...you also are to love one another.*” At the base of the only commandment of Jesus’ community there is no doctrine, but a gesture of love that serves. While the doctrine divides, love unites. And then the words of Jesus: “*By this..*” that is a love that serves and is not discouraged in front of negative replies,”*.. all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

The only characteristic of the Christian community is a love that becomes invincible through service and through the offer of love also to those that do not merit it. So, Jesus does not speak of coats of arms, uniforms, badges and insignia. The only characteristic of His community is a love like His.