

II SUNDAY AFTER EASTER– 3rd April 2016

**EIGHT DAYS LATER JESUS CAME—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.***

It cannot be believed that Jesus is risen because there is an empty tomb, but because you encounter him alive, living and invigorating in your own existence and your own experience.

This is what the evangelist writes in chapter 20, 19-31. "*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,*" it refers to the first day in the book of Genesis, the day of the creation. With Jesus risen there is a new creation that will not see the end and death, but will continue all his existence.

*"..the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,"* remember that the order of arrest was for all Jesus' group, not only Jesus. The teacher was not the only dangerous one, his doctrine, so the order of arrest was for all the group. It was Jesus that, in a position of strength, had bartered for

the salvation of all the group. He had said: *“So, if you seek me, let these men go.”* (John 18,8) But the fear remained

*“Jesus came and stood among them..”* It is an important characteristic that the evangelist gives us of the encounter with Jesus. Jesus put himself in the middle, he does not put himself neither in front nor above. There is no hierarchy of people that are nearer him than others. Jesus puts himself in the middle so all have the same relationship with him.

*“..and said to them, “Peace be with you.””* It is not a wish, but a gift. When Jesus manifests himself in the centre of his community he gives peace, being all that is necessary for the happiness of mankind.

*“When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side..”* According to the Jewish culture peace must always be accompanied with something concrete. So Jesus when he give this peace shows also the motive because he shows his hands and side, the symbols of his torture and of his passion. He wants to say *“ Here is the love that led me to give life for you and to die on the cross, this continues to remain.”* So *“ do not worry about anything”* The is the gift of peace that Jesus gives.

*“..the disciples...”* they were locked in fear of the Jews *“..were glad when they saw the Lord.”*

*“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”* Again the gift of peace. *“As the Father has sent me,...”* The Father had sent the son to demonstrate a total love, unconditioned for all mankind. *“...even so I am sending you.”* Therefore Jesus sends his disciples to demonstrate the Father’s unconditional love for humanity. *“And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* -that is the same force, power and capacity of God’s love. *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”*

Jesus invites them to prolong his offer of life, That which Jesus is saying at this moment, the actions he is taking, are not the consequence of the power of someone, but a capability and a responsibility for all the group of disciples: to take the offer of live that, if welcomed, immediately cancels the past sinner.

*“Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin,”* Why is he called “twin”? Because he is the only one to have understood the resurrection of Lazarus, saying *“Let us also go, that we may die with him.”* (John 11,16) ....he has the same sentiments as Jesus. *“...was not with them when Jesus came.”* Why is he not closed with them? Because he does not fear to come to the same end as Jesus. He is not frightened like the others that are locked away.

*“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.”* That of Thomas is not a denial , it is a desire and the impossibility to believe in something so marvellous. Thomas’ expression should be understood a little like when we are given a wonderful and unexpected piece of news. What is our reaction? We say *“No it can’t be true!”* We do not deny the news, it is so good that it seems impossible. Or when we say: *“No, I can’t believe it!”* It is not that we do not want to believe, but it is so very good..... This is Thomas’ attitude.

*“Eight days later,”... once again the Eucharist Rite returns, with the meeting with Jesus.... “...his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them.... “ here again is Jesus’ characteristic of being in the middle and says for the third time in this reading: “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!”*

Here the evangelist presents the greatest manifestation, attestation of faith of all the gospels. The other disciples through Peter had arrived to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, son of the living God, but Thomas is the only one, turning to Jesus, he says: *“My Lord and my God!”*

The evangelist in his prologue had said that no one had ever seen God and the son was the revelation, and here now Thomas manifests total faith. So, Thomas, strangely, pasted in history as the incredulous disciple, in reality he is the one that proclaims and explodes in the most highest manifestation of faith of the gospels.

*“Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* It is the last beatitude, there are two in John’s gospel. The first is the beatitude of service, and now the beatitude of faith. Service, freely and voluntarily carried out for love towards others, makes it possible in one’s own live the experience of the risen Christ.

Jesus here proclaims blessed those that believe without the need to see, to those who want to see the signs, to believe, Jesus proposes: No, believe and you become a sign that the others are able see.”

Then to conclude the evangelist: *“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;”* It is an invitation that the evangelist makes: write your own book, write your own gospel, we have transmitted our experience, make yours and then write your gospel. It was what happened at least to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century in the first Christian communities

*“..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.”* Faith in Jesus gives a life of such quality to overcome death. The evangelist uses the word “life”, indicating eternal life, a life that is called eternal not because it lasts forever, but for the indestructible quality. Welcoming Jesus into one’s own existence means fully realising this.