

II Sunday of Christmas— 3rd January 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 for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power 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, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John bore witness to him, and cried, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.'") And from his fullness have we 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 Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

The reading for this Sunday presents us with prologue to John's gospel. The prologue is the first eighteen verses of his gospel in which the evangelist summarizes and anticipates his entire gospel. Later every word of this prologue will be explained.

Well the evangelist begins by correcting the Scripture and ends by denying it. At the beginning of his gospel he writes; "*In the beginning was the Word,*" It is the creative word that realizes God's project on 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 on opening the Bible, where we read, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" For the evangelist God, before creating the heavens

and earth, had a project that he wanted to realize. Not only using the term “word”, the evangelist is opposed to the biblical tradition that says that the world was created in view of the ten words, that is the Decalogue.

In fact there is only one “word” that manifests itself in this gospel, in a single commandment, that of Jesus, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* (John 15, 12)

If the evangelist begins by correcting the scriptures, he concludes his prologue denying it. In verse 18 it is written: *“No one has ever seen God;..”* How can an evangelist say such a thing? Yet in the bible, it says that Moses, Aaron and another seventy elders had seen God. The evangelist does not agree.

“No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father..” meaning most intimately, *“.., he has made him known.”* This affirmation of most important. For the evangelist Jesus is not like God, but God is like Jesus. Everything we thought we knew, that had been taught about God, is now has to be verified with what we see in Jesus in this gospel. All that which corresponds and coincides remains, but all that is distance from him or even contradictory must be eliminated.

When in this gospel, in chapter 14, 8 one of the disciples, Philip, will say to Jesus *“Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.”* Jesus replies, *“He who 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 invitation to centre all attention on the figure of Jesus. Well, looking back at this prologue, the evangelist says: *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth..”* - meaning a generous and faithful love, that becomes a gift *“..came through Jesus Christ.”* (John 1, 17) Jesus the only true manifestation of God begins a new relationship with God.

Whilst Moses, God’s servant, had imposed a law between the servants and their masters, based on the obedience of the laws. Jesus is not the servant of God, but the son of God and proposes an alliance between sons and their fathers; not based on the obedience of the laws, but on the acceptance and the application of his love.

And always going back in this prologue, to understand, *“And from his fullness have we all received,.”* from the realization of this word in Jesus, *“.. grace upon grace.”* (John1, 16) Here the dynamic of the life the believer, it is a love that feeds love, love communicated transforms itself into a gift of love. And the most important verse, placed right in the centre of this prologue, is verse 12. Before the evangelist had written, *“He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.”* It is not a problem with the world in which the Christian communities have now moved away, but a warning to be alert, not to commit the same mistakes.

When God presents himself, and he presents himself always in a new form, in the name of the God of the past is unrecognisable in the God that is coming. However, here the most important verse right in the middle, *“But to all who received him, who believed in his name,..”* this project of God that is manifested in Jesus, *“..he gave power to become children of God;”* One is not born a son of God, but becomes one accepting Jesus into his own life and imitating his love.

Jesus with God is no longer to look for but to be welcomed, accepted. With Jesus, mankind lives on more for God, but of God and with him and like him goes towards others. And in verse 14 the evangelist says, "*And the Word became flesh..*" this project has become flesh, it has been realized in the weakness of humanity "*..and dwelt among us,..*" Not only did it come to dwell among us but in us. With Jesus God asks every person to be welcomed in his life to form a single entity with him, to widen his capacity of love and to make the only true sanctuary from which radiates his love and his mercy.

While in the old sanctuary it was the people that had to go, and not all had access; in the new sanctuary it is the sanctuary that goes towards the outcasts, towards the excluded. The fact that God's project manifests itself in flesh, in the weakness of the flesh, means that there is no gift of God that does not pass through humanity.

The more one is human and the more one manifests the divine that is in us. Now, we return to the beginning of the prologue - we have gone back and forward, because it is very long, to understand the significance, here we understand what the evangelist wants to say. From the beginning, there was God's project, a word was made flesh and manifested the divine condition, and in this project - writes the evangelist - was life.

"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 the evangelist gives us great encouragement. God's love must be welcomed and manifested. There is no need to fight the darkness, no need to waste energy for fighting, but the light must expand. As the light expands the darkness diminishes.

This idea that will persist throughout the gospel, then will be formulated by Jesus seconds before being arrested when he will say: "*...I have overcome the world.*" (John 16, 33) Those that place themselves beside the truth, the light and love, will always conquer over the darkness, hate and death.