

PENTECOST – 31st. May 2020

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I AM SENDING YOU. – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 20,19-23

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."

The new relationship that Jesus established between men and God needed a new alliance. This is why Luke presents the Pentecost episode in the Acts of the Apostles. The Pentecost was the day when the Jewish community celebrated the gift of the law. Well, while the Jews celebrate the gift of the law, the Holy Spirit descends on the community of Jesus' disciples. With Jesus there is no longer a law that is external to man to be observed, but an acceptance of a dynamic internal force that releases energy of love. This is the gift of the Spirit.

The other evangelists also have their Pentecost, if narrated in a different way. For example John has the little Pentecost at the moment of death, when Jesus delivered his Spirit, and then in the passage we now examine, chapter 20, verses 19-23, let's read it.

"On the evening of that day..." - the day of Jesus' resurrection - *"...the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews..."* the warrant of arrest was not only for Jesus, not only was Jesus dangerous, his doctrine was dangerous. For this reason, when Jesus finds himself in front of the high priest, he asks nothing of him, but asks him two things: of the disciples and of the doctrine. So, for fear of making the same end as Jesus, they closed themselves behind locked doors.

"Jesus came and stood among them..." This indication that the evangelist gives us is important: when the resurrected Jesus manifests himself to his own, he places himself in the middle. Jesus does not place himself in front of us so that the people near to him are those who are the closest to him so he places himself in the middle. This means that everyone around him has the exact same relationship with him, there is no one nearer or more distant, all are the same.

He said to them *"Peace be with you."* This is not a wish, but it is a gift. Peace - we know that the Hebrew term is "shalom" – that indicates all that contributes to the happiness of man. But then Jesus shows the reason for this gift *"When he had said this..."* after he had said "peace" *"... he showed them his hands and his side..."* the hands and the side bear the signs of passion. It was Jesus who, at the time of the capture, said: *"... if you seek me, let these men go."* (John 18,8) He is the shepherd

who gives his life for his sheep and this is not in an isolated episode, but always. In the community, Jesus is the one who defends his own.

At this point the disciples, whom the evangelist had described as having fear of the Jews – remember that in this gospel Jews, are never meant as the population, but always as the authority, the religious leaders - pass from fear to joy to seeing the Lord: “*Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.”* again Jesus repeats this gift of peace - the term peace in this chapter will be repeated three times - but this time this gift of peace is to go and share it. In fact, Jesus adds “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” The Father sent Jesus to visibly manifest his love and what is the love of God? A generous love that puts itself at the service of others, which has been manifested by Jesus in the episode of the washing of the feet. “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” the task of believers, the task of the Christian community is not to go and propose or, worse, to impose doctrines, but to communicate love: as the Father sent the Son to manifest his love, so the community must be the visible witness of a generous love that is put to service for others.

“*And when he had said this,..*” the first time this referred to the gift of peace, justified with the signs of his passion, now, it refers to the second gift of peace “*..he breathed on them...*” why this verb to breathe? The evangelist takes it from the book of Genesis, in the episode of the creation, when God, the Creator, breathed into the first man's nostrils and made him a living being. “*...and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”* Jesus had said that he gives the Spirit without measure. The gift of the Spirit is total, it depends on the person how much he can accept or not, but in any case this is the gift in fullness, the gift of the Spirit, the divine strength, which is called Holy not only for its quality, but for its activity, which is capable of separating the men who welcome it from the sphere of evil.

“*If you forgive the sins of any,..*” they will literally erase and cancelled. The term sin used by the evangelist does not indicate the person's guilt, but, in the gospels, this term always indicates the individual's unfair past, “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*” What does Jesus mean to us with this expression? Jesus is not giving power to some, but a responsibility for the whole Christian community: the Christian community must be like a light that illuminates the action of his love. Those who live in the field of sin, of injustice and see this light, feel attracted to it, all have their past, whatever it is, completely erased. On the other hand, those who, although seeing the light shine, hide even more in the darkness - Jesus had said that those who do evil hate light - remain under the cloak of sin. Then that of Jesus is not a mandate to judge people, but to offer each individual a proposal of fullness of life.