

PENTECOST – 4th June 2017

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 man and God, needed a new alliance. For this, Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, presents the episode of Pentecost. Pentecost was the day in which the Jewish community celebrated the gift of the laws. Well, whilst the Jews celebrated the gift of the laws, on the community of Jesus' disciples the Holy Spirit descended. With Jesus there is no more a law external to man to observe, but to absorb, an inner force, that releases an energy of love. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The other evangelists also have their Pentecost, even if told in a different ways. Let's read what John writes in the verses, chapter 20, 19-21.

"On the evening of that day," it is 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 for the arrest was not only for Jesus, he was not only dangerous, his doctrine was dangerous. For this, when Jesus found himself in front of the high priest, he was not asked anything about himself, but they asked him two things: of his disciples and of his doctrine. Therefore, for fear of coming to the same end as Jesus, the disciples had locked the door.

"Jesus came and stood among them..." this indication that the evangelist gives is important. When Jesus has risen he manifests himself to his disciples, and puts himself in the middle. He does not go in front, so that the people next to him are nearer to him, or above. Jesus puts himself in the middle. This means that all those around him have the same identical relationship with him, no one has more and another has less, someone comes first and someone comes after.

"..and said to them, "Peace be with you."" This is not a greeting, but it is a gift. Peace – we know that the Jewish word is 'shalom' – that indicates all that contributes to the happiness of man. But then Jesus shows the reason of this gift: *"When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side."* The hands and the side show the signs of the passion. It was Jesus that had said at the moment of the capture: *"So, if you seek me, let these men go."* (John 18,8) he is the shepherd that gives his life for his sheep, and it is not an isolated episode, but for always. Jesus in the community, is the one that defends his people.

At this point the disciples, that the evangelist had described as being fearful of the Jews – remember that, for Jews, in this gospel it is not the population, but always the authority, the religious leaders – turn from fear to joy at seeing the Lord. *"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you."* This will be repeated three times in this chapter, but this time the gift of peace is to be shared. In fact Jesus adds: *"As the Father has sent me, ..."* the Father had send Jesus to visibly manifest his love and what is this love of God? A generous love that puts itself to the service of others, that has been manifested by Jesus in the washing of the feet.

"As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." The task of the believers and the task of the Christian community is not to go and propose a doctrine, but to communicate love: as the Father has sent his Son to manifest his love, the community must be the visible testimony of this generous love that puts itself to the service of others.

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them.. " why "breathed" ? The evangelist refers to the Genesis,

in the episode of the creation, when God, the Creator breathed into the first man created 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 is up to the person whether he accepts it or not. It is however a gift in fullness, the gift of the Spirit, the divine force, that is called Holy, not only for the quality, but for its activity which is able to separate the men who welcome it from the sphere of evil.

“If you forgive, “ literally condone and cancel *“..the sins of any,”* the word sins used by the evangelist does not indicate the sins of the people, but in the gospels, this term always indicates the unjust past of the individual. *“ they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”* What does Jesus mean by this? Jesus is not giving power to someone, but a responsibility for all Christian communities. The communities must be like as light the shines rays of his love. When they live in a place of sin and injustice and see this light, if they feel attracted, they have their past, whatever it was, completely cancelled. When in fact seeing the shining light, they still remain in darkness – Jesus had said that he who is evil hates the light – remain under the shadow of sin. So Jesus has not come to judge the people, but to offer every individual a proposal of a fullness of life.