

II SUNDAY OF EASTER– 8th APRIL 2018

EIGHT DAYS LATER.....JESUS CAME : Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi

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.

The first day of the week is the day of Jesus' resurrection. The disciples have got in to habit, the initiative to come together for the Eucharistic celebration and it concerns precisely the profound meaning of the Eucharistic celebration in the Gospel of John, chapter 20 verses, 19 to 31, which the liturgy presents to us today. The Eucharist is the important moment, indispensable and precious for the growth of the individual and for the growth of the community. The evangelist in this passage gives us its profound meaning, let's see.

The community is united the first day of the week and John writes that "*Jesus came...*" Every time that the community meets here it is that Jesus manifests himself. In this passage the evangelist does not use the verb to appear; they are not apparitions, they are encounters, they are habitual manifestations of Jesus when his community meets. "*...and stood among them..*" it is an important indication that the evangelist gives us on the position of Jesus. When Jesus manifests himself he puts himself in the midst. What is the meaning of this? Jesus does not put himself forward, he does not even put himself on high, which presupposes that people, some may be closer to him than others, no Jesus puts himself at the centre. This means that in the Eucharist there are no hierarchies and those more important, all are equal around Jesus. But Jesus from the centre does not draw his own to himself, but from the centre he communicates his love, which strengthens this love to his own, to send them with and like him to others.

Well once Jesus places himself at the centre he pronounces the words that are repeated three times in this passage, three means that which is complete, that which is definitive, "*Peace be with you.*" Those words of Jesus' are not an invitation but a gift. In the Eucharist, Jesus' presence brings a gift. Peace we know in the Jewish world has a very rich meaning, it indicates everything that contributes to the well-being of man. Well, Jesus cares about the welfare of his disciples and he gives it to them.

But that of Jesus are not words, but facts. In fact the evangelist writes that "*When he had said this,*" therefore after he had given them peace, "*...he showed them his hands and his side.*" that are the signs of the passion. The order of capture, we know was for all his group. It was Jesus that had said that the true shepherd is he that gives his life for his sheep, that at the moment of capture, in a strong position, he told the guards "*I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.*" (John 18, 8) He was not defended by his disciples who were ready to give their life for their teacher, no. It was he who gave his life for his disciples. Well showing the hands and the side with the signs of the passion means that the love that had made Jesus to give his life for his disciples remains forever. So in the community, here is the gift of peace, the security of the presence of the love of the Lord that is for always, a love that protects, envelopes, follows and accompanies his disciples.

The evangelist writes that "*..the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.*" The experience of feeling so loved, there is an expression that we use colloquially when we say "in the hands of the Lord." To be in the hands of the Lord is not only the final stage of a moment of difficulty, but it is the constant experience of the believer of the Christian community, one is in the hands of the Lord's love. Then Jesus turns again to repeat this gift of peace, but this time adds "*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*" how did the Father send his son? To manifest his love, his unconditioned tenderness, a love that does not depend of the merits of a person, but on his needs. The Father has not sent his son to transmit a doctrine about himself, but to manifest his love and his tenderness.

Then Jesus says "*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*" Here is the task of the believers and to prolong in the world with their love, the love of the Father and of the son which has been given to them. And as Jesus has not come to bring a doctrine about God, so the Christian community must not transmit a doctrine, but must be an expression of his love. How does one express his love ? Through an embrace. An embrace is a gesture of tenderness that all can understand.

This time the evangelist writes "*And when he had said this,...*" so in order to do this, to be able to manifest this love of tenderness, "*..he breathed on them..*" This expression is found in the book of Genesis chapter 2, 7 at the moment of the creation of man. He then says to them "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" Jesus had said that he gave the Spirit without measure. On God's part the communication of life is without measure, the measure is put by the person. Those parts that are still occupied with resentment, rancour and selfishness are all parts where the Spirit cannot arrive. But where this Spirit is welcomed in fullness it triggers a dynamism of love received and communicated. The greater the capacity of the disciple to communicate love, the greater will be the ability to receive this Spirit from God.

After this there is the indication of Jesus on the pardon of sins that is not an important job that Jesus gives to his disciples, it is not a power that Jesus gives to them, but it is the responsibility for all. Jesus' community with him in the middle must radiate this love that emanates light. Those that live in sin, the word sin indicates a mistaken direction of life and therefore regards the past, those that live in sin feel attracted to the light of this love and enter to be part and their past is completely cancelled. In fact, Jesus had said "*For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*"(John 3 ,20) even if he sees the light of this love, he drawn to it, but the presence of their guilt and their sin remains Therefore, as we said, it is not a power, but an enormous responsibility of the community to be the light of the Father's love.