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

Jn 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 anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld."

The warrant for arrest was not only for Jesus, but for all the group. It was Jesus that said to the guards: "If you are searching for me, let the others go". Jesus had been the shepherd that had given His life for His sheep. But now the shepherd goes to search of His sheep, those that are lost because of His arrest and above all for His infamous death.

And Jesus goes in search, to recuperate them. Even if the announcement of the resurrection of Jesus has already been given, the disciples are hidden for fear of the authorities. It is not enough to know that Jesus is risen, but there is a need to experienced it.

It is that which the evangelist John tells us. Therefore, "*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,....*". The Jews are not the people, but in this Gospel they represent the officials, the religious authority. "*Jesus came and stood among them..*", here is Jesus' place, in the centre of the community.

He is the reference point. He is the uniting factor of the whole group. These that follow are the first words that Jesus pronounced. Once risen, the fullness of the divine condition, and it is a wish for happiness in full. The word 'peace', from the Hebrew Shalom, indicates much more than our peace, it indicates all that is needed for the full happiness of mankind.

But Jesus does not limit Himself to a verbal announcement, a simple greeting, He demonstrates why they must be fully happy. *“When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.”* They are the signs of His everlasting love. The love that had caused Him to give His life for mankind and it was not a reply in a dramatic occasion, but the normal attitude of Jesus inside of the community.

Jesus does not intervene in moments of emergency, but responds with His love to the needs of the community. Jesus in the middle of the community protects, defends, helps and increases the capacity of love of His disciples, for those who welcome His love.

And in fact the disciples rejoice. Even if before they were frightened, now they are joyful *“...the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, «Peace be with you»”*. While the first ‘peace’ was motivated by the fact that Jesus had given His life for them, the second ‘peace’ is motivated by the fact to be called to continue the same action of Jesus.

Peace and happiness of mankind come from this love received from God. And Jesus had shown His hands and side, but it comes also from the love that is communicated, and for this Jesus, at the second ‘peace’ invites happiness, saying, *“«As the Father has sent me...»”*, and the Father has sent Jesus to be the visible manifestation of his love, an unconditional love of which on one, whatever his behavior or conduct, feels himself excluded.

Well then, *“« As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you. »”* here is the source of happiness. The disciples, each believer, is called to extend the mission of Jesus to manifest visibly the love of the Father. This source of joy, of a full happiness. Therefore there is a love that is communicated, a love that is received from God, a love that must be communicated to others.

“And when he had said this, he breathed on them..”. the evangelist repeats the same action of God on the first man, when we read in Genesis chapter 2,7 *“...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”*

Jesus did the same. Jesus completes the creation, communicates the Spirit to mankind, that is the same capacity of love that the Father had communicated to Jesus and that now Jesus communicates. But not to all, only to those that welcome His invitation to grow with their love, a love that they have received, those that go to others like the Father sent Jesus.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;” Here it was better to use the verb ‘to free oneself’ from sins. For ‘sins’ the evangelist does not use that which means ‘fault, mistake, lack’, but a mistaken direction of life. What does the evangelist want to say? Here Jesus is not giving power to anyone, but a responsibility to all the community. The community must be this light from which the love of God flows. How many, living in injustice, feel attracted to this light from which flows the love of God. How many, living in injustice, feel the attraction of this light and enter to be part of it, they have the past (that of injustice) completely cancelled.

On the other hand, *“«...if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld. »”*

What does the evangelist want to say? Those that do evil do not like the light, but they see the light shine, they withdraw themselves even more into the shadow of darkness. Therefore it is not a power of the community, but it is a responsibility: to make the love of God shine. How many feel attracted, they have the past completely forgiven, how many unfortunately see in this love a threat to their interests, to their way of life, they withdraw, under the shadow of darkness, under the shadow of death.