

## VI ORDINARY TIME– 12th February 2017

**.. IT WAS SAID TO THOSE OF OLD,... BUT I SAY TO YOU.. - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

### **Matthew 5,17-37**

**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.**

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.**

**“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

**“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.**

The gospel this Sunday is very long and it is unthinkable, in the limited time we have available, that everything, can be read and commented on, so we will concentrate our attention on only the first verses, also because they are the most controversial and perhaps the most important. It is Matthew, chapter 5, verses 17 to 37.

Jesus states: *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;"* What is the context of this statement of Jesus? It is the proclamation of the beatitudes. The new relationship with God, that Jesus came to propose, that could no longer be contained in the old alliance of Moses. Moses was the servant of the Lord, and had proposed an alliance between servants and their lords, based on the observance of his laws, so the believer, with Moses, were the ones who obeyed God, and kept his laws.

But Jesus is not God's servant, he is the son of God. So, he came to propose a new relationship. Based on the acceptance and the practice of the love of the Father, so the believer, for Jesus, is the one who resembles the Father, practicing a love similar his. This is the new relationship that Jesus expressed, it was formulated on the mountain. As Moses, on Mount Sinai announced the Decalogue so, Jesus on a mountain proposed the beatitudes, that are the new alliance of God with his people.

But the Beatitudes, undoubtedly caused confusion and disappointment in the audience, why? With the first beatitude, Jesus invites us to enter into a condition of poverty, to eliminate the roots of poverty. Well they expected just the opposite. The kingdom of God was a kingdom of splendour and success and above all an accumulation of wealth; just reading the last part of the prophet Isaiah, where they imagine caravans of camels, which brought worldwide wealth to Jerusalem. So there was delusion.

Jesus says: no, *"Do not think that I have come, to abolish..."* the original verb used by the evangelist was not "to abolish" that is used for a law, but to overthrow, to destroy. It is the same verb that in chapter 26, 61, at Jesus' trial, will be used to accuse Jesus of coming to destroy the temple. Jesus does not speak of abolishing the laws but to destroying, what? *"..the Law or the Prophets;"* This is not about observing the law or not: with Jesus it is no longer the law that relates man to God, but the welcoming of his love.

The law and prophets are those that we call the Old Testament, that is, the whole of the Bible, consisting of the books of the law and the prophets So Jesus says: no I have not come to abolish that promise, God's project, that was contained in the law and in the prophets, but to give them fulfilment; and this is significant.

An example: in the book of the Deuteronomy, therefore in the law, the Lord says that in his population on one is in need, and as in the books of the prophet there is the continued condemnation against riches and greed, that make the people needy.

So, Jesus has not come to destroy all this, but to take it to fulfilment. As in the first beatitude, which is an invitation to sharing, it is like the last of the commandments: not covet another's property. In fact the first beatitude is: wanting others to have the same as you have.

The sign, the guarantee, that in the Christian community there is God's presence, so no one will be in need. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that the first Christian community gave testimony to the resurrection of Jesus with great force, and because of this no one was in need.. Even in the "Our Father", Jesus inserted the clause to cancel debts, the economic debts, meaning that Jesus did not come to abolish this project, this ideal of the Kingdom, but to bring it to fulfilment.

And then Jesus assures: *"For truly,"* a Hebrew term that translates into "amen," *"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth,.. "* an image to say it all, *"..pass away not an iota, "* the iota is the yod, the smallest sign in the Hebrew alphabet. *".. not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."* It is the assurance of Jesus. This project of God for humanity, of an alternative society, will find great difficulty, but sooner or later it will begin to flourish.

And for this, Jesus asks that *"..whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, "*Least and great do not mean a hierarchy, most important, the smallest, it's a Jewish way of saying exclusion or belonging. So Jesus asks his disciples, those that listen, to practice the beatitudes and when he says *"...and teaches others.. "* it does not mean to go and teach the doctrine – Jesus' last words

in the gospel are *“Go therefore ....teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28,19) not to teach a doctrine, but a practice, and what is this practice? That of love and sharing.

If there is this, we realize the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, an alternative society. We have said that these words bring delusion, and Jesus says: no, I have not come to abolish this project of a kingdom. I have come to realise it, but not as you think. You think that it will be realised through an accumulation of riches, I say to you that through the sharing of riches; you think that it will be realised through power, domination, I say to you that it will be realised through service; you think that this is for Israel alone, but my programme is for all humanity