

II ADVENT SUNDAY – 6th December 2020

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 1,1-8

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'"

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

For the second Sunday of Advent the reading presents us with the oldest gospel, Mark's gospel that begins with these words "*The beginning of the ...*" the Greek term is 'euangelio' meaning good news ; this is how this gospel begins. And what is this good news? The good news is the announcement of a new relationship with God, no longer based on the observance of the law, but through the acceptance and likeness of his love.

The evangelist presents us with the first character of this gospel, who is a certain John, the name means "the Lord is merciful", who baptizes in the desert. What does it mean to baptize? It does not have the liturgical meaning it will later take; to baptize means to immerse in water. It was a known rite with which a new reality of the person was indicated. For example, a slave was given freedom, he immersed himself in water, the slave metaphorically died naturally, and what emerged was a new person, a free person. So baptism was a sign of death of the past and re-birth to start a new life.

And this John preaches, this baptism and immersion, for conversion. In the Greek language there are two ways to indicate conversion: one that indicates the return to religion, to God, to rites, and to prayers. Well, the evangelist does not use this version because it does not exist for Jesus does not need to return to God, but to welcome him and with him and like him to go towards others. For this they use a term that indicates a profound inner change that involves a change in behaviour. We could sum it up like this: if before today you have lived for yourself, there is this change or conversion to live for others.

Well, what is the effect of this conversion? The forgiveness of sins. But this is a sensational challenge: the forgiveness of sins took place in Jerusalem, in the temple, bringing sacrifices,

undergoing a liturgy; so John challenges the religious institution, puts himself in the desert and what is the response of the people? The response of the people is incredible “.. *all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan.*”, Why does the evangelist emphasize the Jordan River? The Jordan River was the last passage that the Jews, as they came out of the slavery of Egypt, had to cross to enter the promised land. Now the promised land had become a land of slavery from which it is necessary to leave and the evangelist emphasizes that the response to John the Baptist’s activity is not that they only come from Judea, but also all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, who are a stone's throw from the temple to obtain the forgiveness of sins, they understood that the forgiveness of sins cannot come through a rite, through a liturgy, but through a profound change of life and they rush to John the Baptist. Of course the authorities will then make him pay for this because the forgiveness of sins was obtained through offerings, sacrifices, therefore economic income. John the Baptist’s activity touches one of the exposed nerves of the institution.

And John the Baptist announces “ *I have baptized you with water,..* ” that is, I help you to change your life, but I can't give the strength to live this new reality and there is the announcement of the coming of Jesus, who is the one who “.. *will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” If baptizing with water means immersing something that is external to man, baptizing in the Spirit, the Spirit is this divine energy which is called holy not only for the quality, but for the activity of separating from sin, this is an inner immersion, we could say an absorption of the divine life into your person. And this will be Jesus' task and work.