**September** 13th 2020 Num 21:4b-9; Jn 3:13-17

Welcome with me our studio guest today: John, the Evangelist.

John, famous author of the best-selling biography of Jesus with the title “The Gospel of John” found the time to be with us today.

Thank you for today’s reading, St. John. Thanks to you, we have one of the most popular Bible verses. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him does not perish but has eternal life* (Jn 3:16).

We find it on wall calendars, birthday cards, mugs… Just a quick poll here: Who likes this Bible verse and uses it sometimes?

It is lovely, isn’t it? Personally, I think the little word ‘so’ makes all the difference. “God so loved the world”. And it continues in such a romantic way: “that he gave his only son”. I don’t know what you see but in my mind the old image of God Father with a beard pops up immediately and I see him sacrificing his only son. Nice, thank you St. John.

What theological traditions have made of it was the teaching that God was angry with God’s own creation because of their behaviour (who can blame God for that?). And the tradition teaches that God needed satisfaction for the suffered attack on God’s honour and the only way to reconcile God with humanity was a human sacrifice of the highest purity. God in God’s great love provided this sacrifice by sending his son to the Cross.

So, St. John, what are your thoughts on this traditional teaching?

I see, yes, let’s first understand why God became human.

So what you are saying is that humans had developed the belief that God was a far and distant God to whom we cannot pray and who doesn’t care for us and they turned from God. And in God’s love, God became human to bridge that gap and to proclaim God’s infinite love for creation. Humanity had turned from God but God did everything to win them back. And what do we do with angry God? Aha, God was angry but the wish for reconciliation was stronger. Is that what you are saying?

But how can we support the sacrifice of God’s son? I am also thinking of psalm 50 where God is asking us not sacrifice animals but to make sacrifices by giving God thanks and praise and by keeping our vows and duties. Or psalm 51 where it says:

*For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

How does that go with your beautiful verse about God sacrificing his son?

Stop taking verses out of context and read from the beginning. What do you mean by that? Ok, ok, I read from the beginning. At the beginning of your Gospel it says:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). And if we continue reading later Jesus says, *The Father and I are one* (Jn 10:30).

Well, do you want to say that it wasn’t God Father sacrificing his son, but if the father and the son are one and always have been, then, it would be a self-sacrifice of God. So it wasn’t God sending the son to the cross, it was God Herself going to the cross?

Thank you St. John. That was very helpful, I think we now have to think about this a bit more in detail. You may stay in the room, there is space right next to the Holy Spirit, please, just keep your 6 feet distance.

A self-sacrifice by God. There is an ancient teaching of the Church, one we usually don’t like when a child asks us to explain it but which is still a wonderful truth: the Trinity. Humanity had always known the awe in face of creation and life. There has been a sense for the Creator in many cultures of the world. The people walking with Jesus experienced the presence of this Creator (God Father) in such a real, such a strong way, that they believed God Creator was fully present in the human Jesus of Nazareth and by this presence bridging the gap between the Creator and creation.

After Jesus had died on the cross and was raised, there came the time when the risen Christ did no longer appear to his disciples. We believe he ascended into heaven. But even after this Ascension, the disciples still felt the presence of God in their midst, so real, so strong. They experience this as the Holy Spirit. One God in three persons, three revelations. When Jesus died on the cross, it was in fact God dying on the cross.

A self-sacrifice by God. That sounds different, better than God Father sending God Son into death, but still, I wonder, how can we celebrate the cross as a sign of hope and salvation?

God became human out of pure love and God as human preached love. Humanity, however, couldn’t bear the message of love, they could not hear it. And they turned against the message and God, the messenger and killed their own God, killed Love itself.

So, against the traditional teaching that the cross was a necessity and had been planned by God from the beginning of creation, I believe that the cross was the greatest disaster in human history. It was the moment, humanity killed their creator because they did not want to hear God’s message of Love.

Now, how can we celebrate the sign of this disaster, the sign of hatred and shame?

God had all reason to say good-bye to humanity after that. That was it, break all bridges, Hasta la Vista.

But God didn’t. Jesus raised from the dead which proofed humanity wrong in their judgment that Jesus was a blasphemer. And this risen Jesus, God’s presence in human form did not preach the condemnation of humanity, nor God’s wrath about the cross, but this risen Jesus, who had been killed by humans, continued to preach the message of love. God overcame hatred and death to let us know that God’s bond with us is unbreakable and that in turning to Her, we will always find forgiveness and an outstretched hand.

The cross is the sign for this new covenant, sealed in the self-sacrifice of God, which is stronger than any covenant before. That is why we celebrate the Cross today as sign of hope, of endless love and the victory of life and love over death and hatred.