

WHOEVER COMES TO ME SHALL NOT HUNGER, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME SHALL NEVER THIRST – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 6,24-35

So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst

With the episode of the dividing of the loaves and fishes which represents the Eucharist, Jesus had led the crowd to grow, to become men, adult men; unfortunately he failed: the participants did not understand the meaning of Jesus' gesture. The passage we now read is from John's gospel chapter 6, 24-35 And again those that Jesus had brought to the condition of mature adult men, they have not understood . This crowd that had not understood, sets out in search of Jesus. This verb "to seek" in John's gospel always has a negative connotation They seek, find him and turn to him calling him "Rabbi", teacher of the law; this is what they want, Jesus wanted to free them and they want to submit.

“Jesus answered them, ..” and it is a solemn statement “Truly, truly, I say to you,..” that is, what I say to you is sure and true “.. you are seeking me, not because you saw signs..” what are these signs? Making food for others, this is the meaning of the Eucharist and the sharing of the loaves, “..but because you ate..” only for the food itself “..your fill of the loaves.” So Jesus had invited them to make themselves bread for others, they only understood the bread for themselves.

, “Do not work for the food that perishes..” what is the food that does not last? That which serves the body, the physical and biological part “.. but for the food that endures to eternal life,..” ". Life that is called eternal not so much for the indefinite duration, but for the indestructible quality, “..,which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Jesus is the guaranty of the divine presence, Jesus manifests the presence of God
Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” And again

there is a misunderstanding: Jesus invites them to be free, they want to submit, they are not accustomed to a relationship with God of freedom, but of submission, they ask what they should do. And Jesus replies *“This is the work of God,...”* God's work, the only time it appears in the Old Testament in the Book of Exodus, chapter 32, 16, indicates the tables of the law. So *“This is the work of God,...”* that which substitutes the tables of the law *“..that you believe in him whom he has sent.”* There is no longer a law to obey, but to resemble one person who is Jesus, Jesus is the love of God for all humanity.

But again it is the dialogue with the deaf, they do not understand *So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you?”* It is typical of religion to ask for a sign to be able to believe, but Jesus never accepts, Jesus turns it around: not a sign to see in order to be able believe, but believe in order to become a sign to be seen. And they refer to our fathers, *“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness;..”* Jesus has just spoken of the Father and they are referring back to their fathers, Jesus speaks of the present and they refer to the past, Jesus speaks for humanity and they refer to Israel.

And here is Jesus' answer, again with the solemn declaration, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.”* The emphasis that that of Jesus is the real one indicates that there are other loaves that are false and, if the other bread is false, it cannot transmit life, but only communicate death; observance of the law does not realize the person.

And here is Jesus' conclusion *“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven...”* therefore of origin divine *“..gives life to the world.”* and again this theme returns to the indestructible life. Finally they begin to understand *“They said to him, “Sir,...”* finally they call him sir; they addressed him as a rabbi, they believed him a prophet, finally they understand something more in him *“ Sir, give us this bread always.”* It is a phrase that resembles the request of the Our Father, *“Jesus said to them, “I am...” “I am...”* is God's name, so Jesus claims the divine condition *“..the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* What is meant by this solemn declaration? That Jesus is the full response to man's needs, the desire for fullness that every man carries inside is found in Jesus, how? Jesus does not invite people to focus on themselves, on one's spiritual perfection as distant and unattainable as one's own is great ambition, but on the gift of self to others and it is attainable and immediate and gives the fullness of life to man.