

MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST – 14th June 2020

FOR MY FLESH IS THE TRUE FOOD AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 6,51-58

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

This is the conclusion of the very long speech given by Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, a speech that will cost him the disappointment from the crowd that followed him hoping that he could become their king. It will raise the concern of the religious leaders, the authorities, because they understand that Jesus comes to propose and to inaugurate, a new relationship with God, very different, even destabilizing, from what they imposed on the people. It will also cost Jesus the abandonment of many of his disciples who, at the end of this speech, will abandon him. Let's see what happened, it is John's gospel chapter 6, 51- 58.

Jesus once again claims the divine condition through the name of God "*I am..*"

"*I am the living bread.*" The term used by the evangelist indicates living bread and uses a term that indicates an indestructible life, therefore it is a bread that, if eaten, produces in man a life of such a quality capable of overcoming death. "*..that came down from heaven.*" of course the sense is theological and not spatial - it indicates divine origin; and then Jesus puts a condition: "*.. if one eats of this bread he will live forever .*" - because it is a bread that communicates an indestructible life – "*..and the bread that I will give,*" here with this image, the evangelist is anticipating the meaning of the Eucharist, "*..is my flesh.*" the gift of God passes through the flesh of Jesus, for the life of the world. There can be no communication of the Spirit where there is not also the gift of the flesh. Jesus reverses the spirituality of the time: man at that time had to spiritualize to rise to God and instead Jesus presents a God who becomes humanized more and more to get closer to man. Then the communication of God is through humanity of people: the more human we are, the more God can manifest himself through us.

This raises alarm and concern, and in fact the Jews - that is, the religious leaders, the authorities began to argue bitterly among themselves: "*How can this man..*" they never mention Jesus by name. So much is the bitterness and contempt towards Jesus that they always avoid

naming him and they use quite derogatory terms, “*..this man..*” “*.. give us his flesh to eat?*” A God who, instead of demanding gifts, it is he who gives himself to man, this is unacceptable for the religious mentality.

Then Jesus renews the condition: he says to them: “*Truly, truly,..*” so it is an expression that means what I am going to tell you is sure and certain “*..I say to you,..*” and here is the condition “*..unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,..*” through the flesh and blood the evangelist refers to the image with which from the beginning of the gospel he presented Jesus with: “*Jesus is the lamb of God.*” What is the lamb of God? Moses on the night of the Exodus commanded each family to take a lamb and eat it: the flesh would have give strength to begin this road to the land of freedom and blood would protect them from death. Behold Jesus is the true lamb whose flesh helps in this path, in this exodus, and the blood frees not from physical death, but from death eternal.

And Jesus says “*...you have no life in you.*” there is no realization of man except through assimilation and identification with Jesus. Then here the evangelist uses a strange term, which is not used for people, saying those who eat, in Greek is “trogon” (phonetic), we can already hear the sound, it is eating unrefinedly and vulgarly, like that of animals, why does he do this? To avoid any spiritual sense of the term, it indicates a true assimilation. “*..my flesh* - and then Jesus says what he should never have to say in a Jewish assembly – “*...and drink my blood..*”, blood is the life of people, the Jews didn't even drink the blood of animals, how can you drink blood ? This is a shocking thing; has - he does not say eternal life – “*..has eternal life.*” Eternal life is not something which is added to this life, but it is a life of such a quality that it is indestructible, and “*...I will rise up on the last day*”. And then Jesus confirms “*..my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*” that is, authentic nourishment.

And Jesus still insists who eats my flesh and drinks my blood - and for the first time ‘abide’ a verb that is very dear to the evangelist, he uses it forty times in his gospel the verb to abide- “*...abides in me, and I in him.*” Jesus’ God is not a God that absorbs man, but a God who asks to be welcomed in man to merge with him and expand his capacity for love. This causes man to abide in God and God in man.

And then Jesus continues “*As the living Father sent me, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. and I live because of the Father,*” This living for Jesus means because of Jesus and thanks to Jesus: the life received corresponds to a life given. It is the image of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist there is a dynamic love received and love communicated: the greater the ability to give oneself, the greater the ability to receive this God who abides in us.

And Jesus concludes, and concludes with a statement that will then cost him the abandonment of his disciples, this, and he underlines it, “*This is the bread that came down from heaven..*”, what was the bread that came down from the sky? The bread that came down from sky was the manna in the desert. Jesus says no, this is not manna, “*This is the bread that came down from heaven not like the bread the fathers ate, and died.*” Jesus again takes a dig at the Exodus. The exodus was a failure everyone who followed Moses died in the desert, only the children entered the promised

land. And Jesus continues again with the verb to eat , “*Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.*” The exodus of Jesus is destined to be fully realized.