

XX ORDINARY TIME – August 16th, 2015

MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Jn 6.51-58

At that time, Jesus said 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.' The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us (his) flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The evangelist is introducing the conclusion of the long speech delivered by Jesus in the synagogue of Capernaum, focused on Eucharist.

John is the one and only evangelist who doesn't provide an account of the Eucharistic Supper, but he's the one who, more than others, explores its rich meanings. Let's have a look at them.

By claiming his divine condition with the expression "*I am*", Jesus states he is the "*living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever*", it's a kind of bread that allows living a life of such a quality as not being scratched by death; and states "*the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world*".

Which is the meaning of this expression? 'Flesh' represents man with all his weakness. God's life cannot be given without human reality. There cannot be a Spirit transmission without the gift of flesh. Spirit's gifts pass through humanity; the more an individual is human, the more he discovers the Divine in himself.

Well then, *“the Jews”* – I remind you that this word represents religious authorities, the chiefs – don’t accept this, quarreling among themselves and ask *“How can this man”* – please note that the Jews always address to Jesus with disregard, avoiding to name him – *“give us his flesh to eat?”*

One God, who, rather than demanding gifts for himself, turns himself into a gift for the life of the world, this is really unacceptable for a religious institution that created a kind of God made in their image and after their likeness, therefore exploiting man’s needs.

Then Jesus makes a statement *“Amen, amen, I say to you”* – a very important expression that means ‘I assure, with certainty’ – *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you”*. Flesh and blood are a key issue for the evangelist who refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God, that is the Lamb of Passover, the Lamb whose flesh must be eaten in order to get the energy of beginning this exodus, whose blood must be drunk in order to be free from death during the night of Egyptian first-born extermination.

Well then, Jesus is introduced by this evangelist as the true Lamb, flesh will allow individuals to complete the exodus until its full success and blood won’t free people from earthly death, a physical one, but from the ‘eternal death’, that is it will allow individuals to live the ‘eternal life’.

To this quite difficult expression for Jews to understand, eating the flesh, Jesus is adding something that goes against Judaic culture and outlook, that is drinking blood. In order to avoid them to interpret all this in a symbolic way, metaphorically, Jesus literally says ‘whoever chews’. The evangelist doesn’t use the verb ‘to eat’, but the Greek verb ‘trogo’ (trogo), which gives an idea of something very tough, such as ‘to grind’; so Jesus wants to avoid that people only gives an ideal adherence; no, it has to be a complete one.

“Whoever chews my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”. Again Jesus recalls a topic which is a key one: **eternal life is not something future, like a reward for a good present behavior, but an experience of the present. Whoever adheres to Jesus and, just like him, turns himself into flesh for others’ lives, turns himself into bread for men’s sake, is already living a life of such a quality as to not to be broken by death.**

And Jesus goes on *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him”*. God’s plan is to merge with man. As religious institution separates God from man to place itself as the one and only mediator, God wishes to merge with man until becoming one. Jesus states *“whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him”*, there’s a fusion between God and man.

From now on, the only true sanctuary where God’s love spreads is a man who welcome him.

And Jesus goes on *“Just as the living Father”* – this is the first time in Gospels we find that God is defined as the living Father, the one who conveys life – *“sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me”*. This is not only the cause, but also the effect. Whoever feeds on Jesus will have life because of him, but will live for him, too. As the Father sent his

Son in the world in order to witness a God who is ESCLUSIVELY GOOD, a faithful loving one, so this will be the destiny and the mission of all those who welcome Jesus.

The only true sanctuary where God's love is displayed is a place where this love doesn't exclude anybody. Then Jesus attacks again *"This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died"*. He recalls once again the failure of exodus occurred because the voice of God remained unheard. *"Whoever eats this bread will live forever"*; the exodus of Jesus is intended to be completely carried out.