

CORPUS CHRISTI – 18th June 2017

..MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD, AND MY BLOOD 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.”

The words that we will now read and comment on, those of Jesus John’s Gospel of are so serious that at the end, many of his disciples will abandon him and will no longer return with him. Let’s see what is serious and important in what Jesus has to say.

In John’s gospel, chapter 6 we find a long and intense teaching on the Eucharist. John is the only evangelist that does not write of the supper, but it is that more than the others, that reflects on its profound significance.

So, chapter 6 is a teaching, a catechism to the Christian community, on the Eucharist. Let’s read chapter 6 , 51 *“I am “ and Jesus claims the divine condition “..the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”*

Jesus guarantees that following him permits mankind to have a quality of life that is indestructible. This is the eternal life. Jesus , son of God, becomes bread so that those that accept him are able to become bread for others, become also sons of God. *“And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”* Jesus uses the word ‘flesh’, indicating the weakness of mankind.

What Jesus is saying is very important: the life of God is not given outside the human reality. There cannot be communication of the Spirit where there is no gift of flesh. Therefore the gift of God passes through the flesh, says Jesus The earthly aspect, the weakness, of his life. Here the evangelist presents a contrast between the men of religion who rise up to meet God - a God that religion has made unapproachable and inaccessible - instead of a God who comes down to meet man.

“The Jews..” meaning the authority *“..then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”* A God who, instead of claiming gifts from man, gives himself to man until he becomes part of him and feeds on him. This is unacceptable for the religious authorities that base all their power on the separation between God and mankind.

A God who wants to be welcomed by mankind and become one with them, this for them is not only intolerable, but dangerous. So Jesus says to them: *"Truly, truly, I say to you,"* the double affirmation proceeds a solemn and important declaration by Jesus *"...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Jesus refers to the image of the lamb, the Easter lamb. The night of Moses' exodus he had commanded the Jews to eat the meat of the lamb, because it would have given them the strength to begin their journey towards freedom and to sprinkle the blood on the door posts because it would have separated them from the actions of the angel of death.

So Jesus presents himself as flesh. A food that gives the capacity to undertake a journey towards freedom, and the blood that does not free them from earthly death, but from a definitive death. Then Jesus, thinking maybe his words are not clear, says: *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,..."* So Jesus wants to avoid adherence to him as an ideal attachment, but it must be concrete. Eternal life for Jesus is not a future prize for good conduct in the present but a chance for a quality of life in the present. He does not say *"...will have eternal life"*. The eternal life there is already. Who, like him, during his life gives the gift of love for others, has a life of such quality that it is indestructible.

"...and I will raise him up on the last day." The last day is not the end of the world. The last day, in John's gospel is the day of the death of Jesus, dying, he communicates his Spirit, that is, element of life that he gives to those who receive it an indestructible life.

Jesus confirms that *"...my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."* With Jesus there are no external rules that man must observe, but the assimilation of a new life. His flesh is the true food, that which alimnts the life of man, and his blood a true drink, there are the elements that enter into man and unite with him. No longer an external code to observe, but a life to assimilate.

Jesus presents us a God that does not absorb man, but strengthens him. A God that does not take the energy from man, but communicates his to them. And Jesus insists *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."* Here is the full fusion of Jesus with mankind and mankind with him.

Jesus' God asks to be welcomed to unite with man and expand the capacity of love. *"As the living Father..."* it is the only time that God is called a living Father *"...sent me,"* The Father has sent his son to manifest his unlimited love. *"...and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me,"* Again Jesus insists on this verb which indicates not a theoretical but a real and concrete adherence *"...he also will live because of me."*

The life received by God corresponds to a life communicated to others. This is the meaning of the Eucharist. As the Father had sent his son to be a visible manifestation of unlimited love, so those who welcome Jesus are called to manifest unconditional love.

And Jesus concludes: *"This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread[the fathers ate, and died]"* Jesus refers to the failure of the Exodus. All those that came out of Egypt, died. Only their children entered. And Jesus opposes his exodus, which is intended to be fully realized.

Again Jesus insists: *"Whoever feeds..."* therefore a full and total welcoming, not symbolic, *"...on this bread will live forever."* Whoever orientates his life with Jesus and like Jesus, towards others, has already the life that death cannot interrupt.

