

**WHOEVER COMES TO ME WILL NEVER HUNGER AND NEVER THIRST - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Jn 6.24-35***

***At that time, when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. And when they found him across the sea they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered them and said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal."***

***So they said to him, "What can we do to accomplish the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in the one he sent." So they said to him, "What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do? Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"***

***So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst."***

By the episode of sharing of loaves, Jesus meant to raise the crowd to a higher level; first the one of men, then the one of adults, mature persons, but the crowd didn't want. It just wanted to make him king, preferring submission to the freedom that Jesus had brought. So he rushed off.

Now the crowd is running after him, it is looking for him – the verb 'to look for' in John's Gospel always has a negative meaning, implying the sense of 'capture', 'stone' and 'kill' Jesus – and as it sees him, addresses to him by calling him 'Rabbi'. A Rabbi was a master of Law, people didn't understand the good news suggested by Jesus, a completely different relationship between men and God, a relationship which was no longer based on obedience to law, but on welcoming his love.

Now a sort of dialogue between deaf starts, one quite dictated by incomprehension because the crowd asks for bread to eat while Jesus was urging it to turn itself into bread for others. As a matter of fact Jesus says: *"you are looking for me not because you saw signs"*. What was a sign? Welcoming a generous gift in order to turn oneself, in turn, into a generous gift for others, getting bread and turning oneself into bread for others.

*"But because you ate the loaves"* – that is you held bread for yourselves - *"and were filled"*

And he warns *"do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life"*. Life has a biological part which needs to be fed, and an eternal one, which just needs to feed. Two different aspects:

- Biological life, which has to be fed
- Eternal life, which has to feed, instead.

Well then, Jesus says *"work for this"*. *"this is the food given by the Son of Man and on him the Father, God, has set his seal"*, that is Jesus is the guarantee of a divine presence in mankind.

And people ask Jesus what they can do and Jesus replies: *"This is the work of God"*. The one and only time that we find the expression 'the work of God' in the Old Testament, is the Book of Exodus, chapter 32, verse 16, referring to Tables of Law. But there's a change in covenant, the relationship with God is not based on obeying Laws any longer, but on welcoming Jesus love. That is what he means by saying *"that you believe in the one he sent"*. **Obeying Laws is no longer required, resembling to a love which displays itself through Jesus, who is the guarantee of the divine presence.**

The crowd doesn't understand and asks *"what sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you?"* This is typical of a religious experience: the need of a sign to see in order to believe. And Jesus always refuses, never shows a sign but says: *"believe and you will become the sign that others will be able to see"*.

Facing this reaction of the crowd which recalls the fathers and not the Father, always recalling the past by saying *"our ancestors ate manna in the desert"*, always recalling the past of Israel while Jesus was urging them to live the present, that is the Father, Jesus states that it was not Moses who gave the true life, but the Fathers *"gives you the true bread from heaven"*.

The next request made by the crowd recalls the prayer of Our Father which is absent in John's Gospel, *"Lord, give us this bread always"*. Well the crowd has grown up. It used to call 'Rabbi', who was the teacher of the law – now it says 'Lord', understanding that in Jesus the divine reality is present.

And now there's the statement made by Jesus *"I'm the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst"*. He introduces himself as the full response to the needs that each individual feels inside.