

XVIII ORDINARY TIME – 2nd August 2020

THEY ALL ATE AND WERE FILLED - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 14,13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

The division of the loaves and fishes is such an important episode that all four evangelists report it but they do not intend to convey a historical fact, a chronicle, but theology. In this episode they do nothing but anticipate and depict the Last Supper, the Eucharist of Jesus. And in fact the evangelist Matthew puts the same terms here in the sharing of the loaves which he will then put in the Last Supper. "*When it was evening,..*" the same term here as in the Last supper - and the verb "*to sit down*" is important. Jesus invites the disciples to ask the crowd, *to sit down* gives the profound meaning of the Eucharist: The community must put itself at the service of those who are considered servants. Jesus' supper is that meal where he frees from guilt and humiliation those considered sinners, because the Lord treats them with honour in the Eucharist - this is the meaning – those that society dishonours, that have been ignored and refused are welcomed. So in this verb "to sit down" we see a profound significance.

Jesus takes five loaves, the same as for the Last Supper "*.. he looked up to heaven, and blessed ..*" Jesus puts himself in communion with the action of the God at the creation, with the creator, to prolong his creative action, "*.. and broke the loaves,..*" here the evangelist in this narration eliminates the fish precisely to make it clear that the meaning he is giving is that of the Eucharist, "*...and gave them to the disciples,..*"

An important omission: Jesus does not ask the crowd to wash their hands; you could not take the food without first having performed the ritual - it was a ritual - to wash your hands because you had to be pure. It is the profound meaning of the Eucharist: it is not necessary to purify oneself to welcome the Eucharist, but it is to welcome the Eucharist, to welcome this bread that purifies. The Eucharist is not a prize given for those who deserve it, but a gift for those who need it.

And Jesus gives it to the disciples and it is important that the disciples must give it to the crowd. They are not the owners of the bread, but they are the servants; they don't have to administer it, but they have to distribute it. So the action of the disciples is to give people bread without asking for certificates of good conduct.

Then there is the ending that seems a bit strange. After listing the number of people they have eaten, 5,000, because 50 and its multiples are the action of the Spirit, the evangelist makes it clear that in this action of bread there was love, the Spirit, the evangelist concludes without counting women and children. Why? In the synagogal cult, the presence of 10 adult males was necessary without counting the women and children, who were not contacted. Then the evangelist wants us to understand that the new worship is no longer celebrated in the synagogue, but through the practice of the beatitudes. Only those who have accepted to share can make a gift of their own life and communicate life to others. The gift of one's life, that is, of what one is, is possible only if preceded by the gift of what one has.

Then this new cult is no longer in a synagogue, which among other things has been the place of disbelief for the Lord, and above all the new worship is no longer addressed to God, but from God through Jesus - Jesus in this gospel is called "*the God with us*" – going towards mankind.

So this passage is very important: the evangelist does nothing but anticipate and portray the Eucharist.