

**ALL ATE AND WERE SATISFIED - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

***Luke 9,11-17***

***When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.***

***Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.”***

***But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” And they did so, and had them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.***

The Eucharist is an important and precious moment, indispensable for the growth of the individual and of the community. And all the Gospels are written in a Eucharistic key. The Last Supper is not the only reference to the Eucharist, but all the Gospels, from the beginning to the end, have the explanation and the understanding of this important moment.

In particular in the episode known as the “multiplication of the bread.” We see in Luke, chapter 9,11-17. “*When the crowds learned it, they followed him..*” The crowds followed Jesus and what was His reply? “*..he welcomed them...*”

Jesus is the God that welcomes, that does not exclude; and the God to which all can approach unconditionally, without rules and limits. Jesus welcomes them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? It is the alternative society that Jesus came to propose, a society in which, instead of the three evil verbs, to possess, to climb and to command, that provoke in

mankind hate, rivalry and hostility, Jesus proposes the kingdom of God, a society in which instead of possessing there is the joy of sharing , instead of social climbing , there is an acceptance that no one is unfit for your love – and above all, instead of commanding there is serving.

This is the kingdom of God, where God is king.

The result of the announcement, the effect and the finality of this kingdom is that Jesus begins to heal and cure all those that have need. The kingdom of God is aimed at the good and welfare of mankind. Therefore it is not a religion that absorbs mans energy to honour and to worship a God, but a faith where God communicates his energy of life to mankind, to the people, so that they are well.

The evangelist notes that “...*the day began to wear away.*..” and ,while no sign of tiredness was seen on the part of the crowds, it is the twelve, the followers of Jesus that come to Him and say: “*Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.*”

So, while the crowds listen to this announcement of the Kingdom of God, the apostles, that are nearest to Jesus, show signs of impatience, and begin to tire, asking Jesus to break off His activity.

But Jesus says to them: “*You give them something to eat.*” Luke writes literally that “they must provide them with food,” as well as “providing the food”, meaning “ they must give food”, therefore the evangelist is referring to - as we will see further on – to the celebration of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist Jesus , Son of God, makes Himself bread, food of life, because those that receive it are able to make bread, food of life for others.

The twelve have no intention to give this to the crowds, and object saying: “*We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless..*” and here the tone seems a little resentful - “ *.. we are to go and buy food for all these people.*” The term used by the apostles is quite derogatory.

They had understood nothing. Whilst Jesus had spoken of “giving” and then “sharing ”, they still reason with the criterion of the society, “to possess ” and “to buy”. Then the evangelist notes that, “...*there were about five thousand men.*” It is the number of the members of the early Christian community. But Jesus says to the disciples – and gives the first command – “*Have them sit down....*”

*Why “have them sit down”?* Because in the festive meals the elite used to eat reclining. So, one of the effects of the Eucharist is that who participates must feel himself as a “lord”. But who is a “lord” ? One that has someone to serve him; only those who had servants could eat in this way. So Jesus asks the apostles to do service to the people allowing them to feel as “lords”.

“*..groups of about fifty each.*” Here there is a series of the symbolic number five ( as we see also five thousand) that represents the Holy Spirit, the works of the Holy Spirit. “ *And they did so, and had them all sit down.*” So the first thing about the Eucharist is that the people feel like “lords.”

The same gestures follow that are done in the Eucharistic supper, “ *And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.*”

The indication given by the evangelist is important. “*..he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.*” The disciples are the servants of this bread, non the owners. The disciples cannot decide to whom to give or not, this food to eat. It is not for them to make rules, limits or restrictions.

They are the servers of this bread, they are not the owners of it. The owner is God; they are the servers that must take this bread and distribute it to the people. So, this is very important in the Gospels. Note that the cleansing of the hands is absent. The evangelist wants us to understand that there is no need to cleanse the hands to participate at the Lord's supper, but it is the participation of the Lord's supper that cleanses the people. For this, Jesus, whilst giving instructions to be seated, etc; does not ask the disciples to make the people cleanse themselves.

*“And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”* Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel. The evangelist wants to make understood that the Kingdom of God with the practice of sharing, therefore not the accumulation, with the practice of service rather than command, is enough to feed the entire population.