

XVII ORDINARY TIME– 25th July 2021

DISTRIBUÌ A QUELLI CHE ERANO SEDUTI QUANTO NE VOLEVANO
Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 6,1-15

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

The episode of the dividing of the fishes and loaves is told by all four evangelists; what is its importance? This narration anticipates and depicts the meaning of the Eucharist. In particular John makes it the theme of the sixth and longest chapter of his Gospel, of 71 verses. The context in which he sets it is that of the book of Exodus; in fact we find the theme of the sea, of the mountain, of Easter and of temptation is the theme of bread and, while in the desert it was the crowd that had to ask God to be fed, here it is Jesus, who is God, who foretells people's wants and needs. But the results are disappointing.

The evangelist writes that Andrew, Simone Peter's brother says "*There is a boy here who has five barley loaves,...*", the five barley loaves recalls the miracle of Elisha who fed 100 people with 20 barley loaves, "*..and two fish but what are they for so many?*" And here the evangelist gives an important indication *Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down..*" This is important because in important meals, such as Easter the nobility and rich ate in the Greek- Roman manner, lying down. Who could do this ? Only those that had a servant who served them; so here is the first meaning of the Eucharist, To make the people feel like lords, that is to be fully free. The evangelist had said "*... there was much grass in the place.*" Which is a reference to Psalm 72, the times of the Messiah, of abundance, "*in that place*". John has always used the term "*place*" for the temple, here it indicates where Jesus resides, but, while in the temple it is man who must offer to God, here it is God who offers himself to man. "*So the men sat down, about five thousand in number .*" Why five thousand ? Because it indicates the

number of the primitive Christian community according to the Acts, but above all it is a multiple of 50, which indicates the action of the Spirit; 50 in Greek is Pentecost.

Here the evangelist for "men" does not use the term he used previously, "anthropous", but "andres", which means mature men; the Eucharist makes people mature, complete and free "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated." The word "seated" appears for the third time. Jesus omits a very important action: he does not ask for the ritual of the washing of the hands; there is no need to purify oneself to eat the Lord's meal, it is the Lord's meal that purifies people. "... as much as they wanted." while the manna was limited and measured, here there is abundance. When one no longer keeps selfishly for himself, but generously shares with others, there is abundance. Actually the evangelist says "... they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets ..." like the twelve tribes of Israel, so a whole nation can be fed.

Unfortunately, the participants did not understand. In fact, the evangelist writes "When the people saw the sign that he had done,..." here the translation is "the people", but it should be "the men"; as in the beginning, they participated at the Eucharist and it had made them mature men, adult men, now they return to being only men because they don't they understand, they do not accept the condition of mature men, they want to submit themselves. Seeing Jesus' gesture they say "This is indeed the Prophet.." what was, according to the line of Moses, he had to observe the law, "... who is to come into the world!"

"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king,..." they want obedience and submission, they don't want maturity and they don't want freedom "...Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." As Moses withdrew to the mountain after the betrayal of the people that worshiped a golden calf, so Jesus, alone again, goes to the mountain. Submission, obedience for Jesus is equal to idolatry because he is the God who sets people free.