

XXI ORDINARY TIME- 26th August 2018

**TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE
biblica Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

John 6, 60-69

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, “Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Jesus has concluded a very long speech held in the synagogue of Capernaum, a speech in which he managed to displease everyone: the crowd that hoped to make the king, the religious leaders, the Jews, who see the danger of this Jesus who revolutionizes the relationship with God. But what is more dramatic on this reading, John chapter 6, 60 to 69, will cost Jesus the abandonment of many of his disciples.

The evangelist writes *“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying;”* The evangelist used, the only time in this gospel the Greek word “scleros” which in relation to a speech means that which is insolent, that which is offensive. What was offensive and insolent in Jesus’ speech? Jesus distanced himself from the myth of the exodus, of the liberation. He had said clearly: they all died in the desert and this for them was unacceptable. But they also understood Jesus’ invitation to make themselves bread, food of life for others, but they want to command, to reign, they do not want to serve others. *“... who can listen to it?”*

Jesus, knowing within himself *“... that his disciples were grumbling about this,”* grumbled exactly like the Jews, the religious leaders for this, *“... said to them, “Do you take offense at this?”* The verb to offend or scandalize appears again in chapter 16 when Jesus announces his persecution and death. So the reference to his death, Jesus’ death is offensive and is a scandal because they think that death will be the end of all. In fact he says *“Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?”* Death was considered a descent and the resurrection an ascent. And Jesus continues *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.”* Jesus had said his bread is like food, what does it mean *“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.”?* Eating the bread, refers to the Eucharist, so without making bread for others it is absolutely useless.

“The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” they are words that emanate in man and release ever-increasing vital energies; it is the Eucharist which is a dynamism of received and communicated love. *“But there are some of you who do not believe.”* they followed Jesus who is not radical, it is in view of their interest and not of the interest of others, they follow Jesus for their own convenience. *“Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.”* while the other evangelists give the announcement of betrayal in the context of the Easter dinner, the evangelist puts it here to make it clear that this long speech is the reference to the Eucharist.

And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” the work of the Father is to stimulate the desire for fullness of life, but whoever will be without the Spirit of God will yield it. And here is, the dramatic final, *“ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.”* But Jesus is ready to remain alone rather than change his project to manifest to the world the love of the Father. *“So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”* Simone Peter’s reply is in part positive, recognising that Jesus has the words to emit in man an indisputable life, but negative in part because he refers to Jesus as the Holy One of God with the definite article. The Holy One of God was the messiah of the tradition, he who came to restore the monarchy, to dominate the pagans, to impose the law, that is, the popular expected messiah. And it is the exact expression used by man possessed by the impure spirit, always in Capernaum, always in the synagogue, as we read in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, and this throws a sinister light on what will follow and also on Pieter's betrayal.