

THEY 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.

On the feast of the Corpus Cristi the reading presents us with the evangelist Luke, chapter 9, 11-17. Jesus with his disciples withdraw to Bethsaida, outside the Jewish territory. But the crowd *learned it, they followed him*,. The crowd feel themselves attracted to Jesus because they hear in his message God's answer to the need of fullness that each person feels inside.

“..he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God.” Jesus does not speak of the Kingdom of Israel, he has not come to restore the Kingdom of Israel, but to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, a kingdom without boundaries because God's love does not tolerate barriers

“..and cured those who had need of healing.” Here faced with evil, in front of illness, Jesus does not have words of consolation, but actions that cure, that eliminate this evil. This is the effect of the kingdom of God. In the Kingdom of God the welfare and the needs of mankind takes first place.

“Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him... “ The evangelist underlines the difference. While the crowd follows Jesus – and Jesus had invited his disciples, the twelve, to follow

him - the twelve are at a distance, at a distance of security, they must come to him, but they come to him for a negative reason..... *"..and said to him,"* almost commanding 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."*

The twelve treat Jesus as someone naïve as if he did not know that they were in desolate place, that there was nothing to eat, therefore their preoccupation is to send the people away. They did not think that the people are tired after Jesus' teachings, they are thinking only of themselves.

But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." The evangelist writes literally: " You give them something to eat" The meaning is twofold. Apart from the obvious " you find something for them to eat" and "give yourselves to eat". The evangelist is anticipating that which will be the significance of the Eucharist, were Jesus, the son of God, becomes bread, food of life, because those that welcome him, eat him and assimilate him, they will then be able themselves to become bread, food of life for others.

Here is the objection of the twelve. *"We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food...."* There is a contrast between Jesus' invitation " to give ", meaning "to share", and the mentality of the disciples, " to buy". They still have not understood Jesus' message, of sharing *".. food for all these people"*, literally the population, and it is a negative term. The disciples see this crowd that follows Jesus almost with irritation.

"For there were about five thousand men." Why this number? Because the primitive Christian community, according to the Acts of the Apostles, was made up with five thousand people. So the evangelist wants to say that this is the action that establishes the community.

And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down..." While the disciples used the imperative *"send away"* Jesus replies with a contrary imperative: *"Have them sit down..."* literally to lie down. In the festive meals, the solemn meals, one ate lying on couches, but who could eat like this? The gentry that had servants that waited on them. So Jesus asks the community of disciples to ensure that those present feel as lords because they put themselves to their service.

"...in groups of about fifty each." In this reading of the gospel there are many numbers. Numbers in the Bible have always a figurative significance, symbolic, never mathematical or arithmetical. Fifty is the action of the Spirit. Pentecost is the fiftieth day, then fifty and its multiples indicates the action of the Spirit.

" And they did so, and had them all sit down." So all the participants in this are treated like gentry. And here the evangelist anticipates what will be Jesus' gestures at the Last Supper.

"And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven(in communion with God) and said a blessing over them." ... giving thanks, makes it understood that one does not possess this bread and fish anymore, but they are gifts from God and God's gifts must be shared to multiply the effects of his creative action.

"Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd." The disciples are not the owners of this bread, but they are servants who have the job to distribute the bread to the people.

It is not for them to decide who is worthy and who is not to take this bread, to participate or not at this meal, their job is only to distribute.

An omission of an important ritual in the Jewish meal is left out: the purification. Why does Jesus not ask the crowd to purify themselves to be worthy to eat this meal? The evangelist anticipates that which is Jesus' great novelty: while the religion teaches that mankind must purify itself to be worthy of welcoming the Lord, with Jesus it is the welcoming the Lord that which purifies and makes them worthy of him.

The evangelist concludes: "*And they all ate and were satisfied.*" When one shares there is in abundance for everyone.

"And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces." It is the last of the numbers in this gospel. Twelve is the number of the tribes that makeup Israel. The evangelist wants to say that through the sharing of the bread the problem of hunger is resolved. As long as people take for themselves, keep it for themselves, there is injustice and hunger, when what you have is not considered as exclusively your own but is shared, to multiply the creative action of the Father, creating satiety and abundance.