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WHOEVER COMES TO ME SHALL NOT HUNGER AND WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME SHALL NEVER THIRST. – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 6, 24-35

So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.” Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” So they said to him, “Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.

⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

With the episode of the dividing of the bread and fishes that depicts the Eucharist Jesus had brought about the growth of the crowd to become men, adult men. Unfortunately it failed. The participants had not understood the meaning of Jesus’ gestures. The passage that we read now in John’s gospel ch.6, 24 - 35 it's the sequel.

And again, those that Jesus had brought to the condition of mature adult men (crowd) had not understood. This crowd is “...*seeking Jesus.*” This verb “to seek” in John’s gospel has always a negative connotation, it means to capture, stone, kill. They seek him, they find him and they turn to him calling him “*Rabbi,*” master of the law, this is what they want: Jesus wanted them to be free, but they want to submit themselves.

“*Jesus answered them,..*” and it is an affirmation that is preceded by a solemn declaration “*Truly, truly, I say to you...*” that is, what I am telling you is real and true “*..you are seeking me, not because you saw signs,..*” what were these signs? to make oneself food for others, this is the meaning of the Eucharist and of the division of the bread “*.. but because you ate..*” food only for themselves “*..your fill of the loaves.*” Therefore Jesus had invited them to make themselves food for others, they had understood only food for themselves. “*Do not work for the food that perishes,..*” what is food that perishes? That which concerns the body, the physical and biological part “*..but for the food that endures to eternal life..*” life that is called eternal not for the indefinite duration, but for the indestructible quality “*..which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.*” Jesus is the guarantee of the divine presence, and manifests the presence of God.

Then they said to him, “*What must we do, to be doing the works of God?*” And here again there is misunderstanding. Jesus invites them to be free, they want to submit, they are not used to a relationship with God of freedom, but of submission and ask what they should do. And here is

Jesus' reply "*This is the work of God..*" "Work of God" the only time it appears in the Old Testament is in the Exodus ch.32, 16 and indicates the tablets of the law. "*This is the work of God..*", meaning that which replaces the tablets of the law, "*..that you believe in him whom he has sent.*" There is no need to obey a law, but to be similar to a person who is Jesus and Jesus is the love of God for all humanity.

But still the dialogue is between the deaf, they do not understand. *So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you?"* It is typical of religion to ask for signs to see to be able to believe, but Jesus never accepts, he answers back: not a sign to see to be able to believe, but to believe to become a sign to see. And they refer to their fathers "*Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness;*" Jesus had just spoken of the Father and they refer to their fathers. Jesus speaks of the present and they refer to the past, Jesus speaks for humanity and they refer to Israel.

And here is Jesus' answer, again with the solemn declaration "*Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.*" Jesus underlines the true bread indicating that there are other loaves that are false and if the other bread is false it cannot transmit life, but only communicate death. The person is not realized by the observation of the law.

And here is the conclusion "*For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven...*" that has divine origin "*..and gives life to the world.*" once again the theme of the indestructible life returns. Finally they begin to understand "*They said to him, "Sir,...."*" Finally they call him sir, they have turned to him calling him Rabbi, they have believed a prophet, finally they find something more in him "*Sir, give us this bread always.*" A phrase similar to that of Our Father. "*Jesus said to them, "I am..."*" I am is the name of God, therefore Jesus claims the divine condition "*...the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* What does this solemn declaration mean? That Jesus is the complete answer to the needs of man. The desire for fullness that every man carries within is found in Jesus, how? Jesus does not invite people to focus on themselves, on their spiritual perfection, so far and unreachable as their ambition is great, but on the giving of self to others and is attainable, immediate and gives the fullness of life to man.