

I'M THE LIVING BREAD THAT COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN - Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Jn 6.41-51

At that time, the Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

By using the term 'Jews', the evangelist is not referring to the people, but to religious authorities, who murmur about Jesus. The fact that they murmur about Jesus is easily understandable, but in this gospel also the crowd and the disciples are murmuring.

Jesus displeased everybody and in this passage we will see how.

Chiefs were displeased because they cannot acknowledge that Jesus claims his divine condition. Jesus said "I am" – which is God's name – "the bread that comes down from heaven". According to religious authorities it's not acceptable that Jesus claims a divine condition. That a man claims to have the divine condition sounds as an intolerable crime to religious authorities. God is completely absorbed in approaching man and melting with him; religious authorities are interested in separating man from God, because the more God and man are far from each other, the more they can represent the one and only mediator.

They don't accept the fact that Jesus claims to be a man with a divine condition.

That's why they reply *"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?"* And Jesus provides here a key criterion to approach him and welcome him: *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him"*. What does this mean? Coming to Jesus means to acknowledge God as a Father, that is the one who takes care of man, for Jesus is the expression of God's love for the entire mankind.

Whoever perceives God as an ally, inevitably feels attracted by Jesus. That's why the chiefs will never approach Jesus and reach God, for they are not interested in man's sake, but only in their self-interest.

Love that Jesus is conveying is one that comes from God and is indestructible; that's why Jesus is able to assure *"Amen, amen, I say to you whoever believes"*, that is 'whoever adheres to him, to the loving project of God towards mankind', *"has eternal life"*. According to Jesus eternal life is not a promise of something to be achieved in the future, thanks to a good behavior in the present, but it is a reality to be lived during this existence. So Jesus doesn't say "whoever believes, will have" eternal life in the future, but "whoever believes already has", already lives one life of such a quality as to be indestructible.

Then Jesus says something he should say, that's why he displeases everybody, and opens up an old wound. Jesus, claiming his divine condition, *"I'm the bread of life"*, says *"Your ancestors"*. He would have said "our ancestors", he's a member of the people of Israel, too, but Jesus keeps his distance. He's moved by and follows the Father, not the ancestors or the fathers, nor people's tradition.

"Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died". Jesus opens up an old wound due to his recalling the great failure of exodus. All those who have been set free from slavery in Egypt died in the desert. Not even one entered the promised land; their sons entered it. Not even Moses did, they all died.+

Why did they die? According to the Book of Joshua and the second Book of Numbers they died because they didn't listen to God's voice. Jesus then warns "as that generation died in the desert for not having listened to God's voice, you run the risk of not entering the fullness of freedom if you don't listen to it."

Then Jesus claims and confirms *"whoever eats this bread"* – he and his life are the bread – *"will live forever"*. Life that Jesus is conveying is one that cannot be broken by death. And we find another precious indication *"the bread that I will give is my flesh"*, the evangelist uses the word 'flesh' to indicate man's weakness, *"for the life of the world"*. There are no divine gifts that might display out of weaknesses of human condition.