

Commentary on the Gospel: “I am the bread of life”

Gospel for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 6:41-51)

The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.”

They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

Jesus answered them, “Do not murmur among yourselves. No one

can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Commentary

In today's Gospel we hear wonderful words of our Lord that have a great depth. Saint John presents the discourse on the Bread of Life as coming right after two miracles, where we see Jesus' mastery over nature. The first is the multiplication of the loaves for a large crowd; the second is Jesus walking on the water, witnessed only by the Apostles.

In this context, some Jews begin a dialogue with our Lord about the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus takes advantage of this to explain that the important thing is not so much the food that nourishes our earthly life but the bread come down from heaven that provides eternal life. Moreover, Jesus mysteriously identifies himself with that bread of life, a declaration that amazes his listeners. "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven'" (v. 41).

The muttering of the people – our muttering – on seeing God's providence and way of acting is not something new. His ancestors had given in to that temptation many centuries ago in the desert. On that occasion they also had a prophet before them, Moses, who promised them bread come down from heaven, manna, to nourish them during their long trek to the promised land.

But the Chosen People failed to view things with God's eyes. After taking advantage of this gift for some days, their lack of faith led them to begin to complain, and to look back with longing at all the tasty food they had been given when they were slaves in Egypt: "And the people of Israel also wept again, and said, 'O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our

strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at” (*Num 11:4-6*).

Those people did not want to enter into the divine paths of faith, and wanted visible signs instead. Yet Jesus, whose father Joseph they knew, was telling them that his Father was God himself and therefore He could claim to be bread come down from Heaven.

It is moving to see how Jesus identifies Himself ever more clearly with bread. But since He Himself is this bread, it is Bread of Eternal Life: “this is the bread” (v. 50); “I am the living bread” (v. 51); this bread “is my flesh” (v. 51). So today is a good opportunity to ask for a great faith in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We don’t want to mutter against God’s way of acting, but rather to humbly and devoutly bow before the mystery

of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Saint Josemaria said: “Consider what is most beautiful and most noble on earth, what pleases the mind and the other faculties, and what delights the flesh and the senses. And the world, and the other worlds that shine in the night: the whole universe. Well this, along with all the follies of the heart satisfied, is worth nothing, is nothing and less than nothing compared... with this God of mine! – of yours! Infinite treasure, pearl of great price, humbled, become a slave, reduced to the form of a servant in the stable where he chose to be born, in Joseph’s workshop, in his passion and in his ignominious death... and in the madness of Love which is the blessed Eucharist” (*The Way*, 432).

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