

## Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

August 22, 2021

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Brothers and Sisters,

After the Solemnity the Assumption of Mary into heaven, we continue with the reading from chapter 6 of John's Gospel, from the long discourse that Jesus made at the synagogue in Capernaum the day after the multiplication of the loaves. As it is a dense text, I will focus today's homily on the commentary of the Gospel, leaving a brief reference to the other two readings at the end.

### **Gospel according to John 6:60-69: the end of Jesus' discourse on the bread of life**

Jesus made this discourse at the synagogue in Capernaum the day after he had fed more than five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish offered by a young boy. He explains the meaning of this miracle: Jesus himself is the true bread, the new manna, that God gives to humanity.

The people and the disciples were enthusiastic about Jesus because of the miraculous signs he performed, especially this last sign of feeding thousands of people for free right among them. They believed that he was the Messiah promised by God through the prophets of the Old Testament and immediately wanted to proclaim him king. But Jesus is very clear that this was not God's will, nor his. Because of this, many of the disciples were also disappointed in Jesus.

### **Jesus' explanation disappointed people: it was difficult to accept**

Jesus, through the multiplication of the loaves, revealed that he was sent to offer his own life, and that those who want to follow him must unite themselves to him in a personal and profound way by participating in his sacrifice of love.

For this reason, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist at the Last Supper so that his disciples could remain united to him and continue the mission from him to be instruments of salvation for the nations.

Listening to this discourse, the people understood that Jesus was not a Messiah as they wanted. They wanted an earthly king. Jesus was not seeking consensus to conquer Jerusalem. Rather, he wanted to go to the holy city to share the destiny of the prophets: to give his life for God and for the people.

Those loaves of bread, broken for thousands of people, were not intended to provoke a triumphal march, but to announce the sacrifice of the cross, in which Jesus becomes Bread, body and blood offered for the salvation of men.

Jesus taught this not to make the crowds hope and expect but to provoke a decision in his disciples, but many of them fell away.

### **A problem of interpretation and understanding for us today**

The scandal and misunderstanding that Jesus' words produced in the disciples and the crowd, as well as in the early Christians, can also be produced in us today. One reason is our misinterpretation of the Eucharist. We often remain like those bewildered disciples.

That is, when Jesus said that we have to eat him as the Bread of life, it does not mean that we have to eat Jesus of Nazareth. We too often make the mistake of taking this verse in John's Gospel literally. Therefore, we must be careful to emphasize that when we receive the consecrated host, we eat and enter into communion with the risen Jesus. The Eucharist is the sacrament of faith par excellence for the Christian. Hence, at Mass, after the consecration, the priest says, "The mystery of faith," and the people respond, usually by singing, "We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again."

If those bewildered disciples had lived in this union with Jesus, they would not have been separated from him after the crisis of Capernaum. Even when life's

trials assail us, we will not leave Jesus because the Spirit of the risen Jesus always gives us the necessary strength to go on to the end.

**First reading: Joshua 24:1-2a,15-17,18b**

Israel, after the Exodus, being already in the Promised Land, feels the need to organize itself as a people, because the tribes that made up the inhabitants there had very different cultural and religious origins. Faced with this reality, Joshua, Moses' successor, realized that in order to unite all these tribes, a firm legislation and a common religious belief was needed. And from there, he proposes faith in the God of the Exodus who gave Moses a way to organize themselves on the basis of legislation, based on the Ten Commandments. He also calls the tribes to live together in the same territory through the covenant to help and protect one another. This act of the birth of the new people of Israel is known as the "Covenant at Shechem".

**Second reading: Ephesians 5:21-32**

St. Paul confirms that the new people of God, the Church, is the community of those who truly believe that Jesus, dead and risen, present in the Eucharist, is the true Messiah announced by the prophets.

The Church is a human community made up of many different races, languages and cultures, but united by faith in the risen Christ and by the ideal and goal of life announced in the Gospel he preached.

May we too, like Peter and his companions, allow ourselves once again to be surprised by the words of Jesus and rediscover the meaning of the sacrament of the Eucharist. May the Virgin Mary, who gave the world the Bread of Life, Jesus, teach us to live always in deep union with him.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).