

26. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
“Bread of eternal life”

Jn 6:41-59

The Jews then murmured at Jesus, 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.’ Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that any one 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 any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Caper'na-um.

It was certainly not easy to understand what Jesus was trying to tell the Jews. From a purely human point of view, we could even say that it was impossible. However, the Lord does not expect something from us without giving us the grace to understand it. With the Son of God comes the grace of entrusting ourselves to Him, knowing that even if we do not understand everything yet, what He is saying is true and His Spirit will reveal it to us more fully when the time comes. Indeed, this is still the case today.

We too cannot understand everything immediately and fully, but must wait for the Holy Spirit to make us understand it more fully.

The Jews began to murmur because Jesus was telling them things they did not want to accept. In particular, they refused to believe the truth that the Lord repeated over and over again: that He had come down from heaven. Nor did they ask Him sincere questions to understand Him, as the Pharisee Nicodemus did at that time; but they expressed their incomprehension in such a way that Jesus had to rebuke them: *"Do not murmur."*

It is important to understand that murmuring is a kind of inner rebellion that blocks people and prevents them from following a higher truth than they had previously thought. But it was the Son of God Himself who spoke to them, and He made it clear again in these words: *"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.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."*

As Jesus emphasises again and again, trying to get across to the Jews, His authority comes to Him from the Father. His knowledge of the heavenly Father is on a totally different level than anyone else could ever attain: *"Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father."*

So Jesus brings us the authentic proclamation of the Father's throne. This is what the Jews were to understand by hearing His words and seeing His works. And it was not an impossible task, for God Himself would have drawn them to understand the Son.

In the first number, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

"God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life."

The prerequisite for understanding the discourse on the bread that has come down from heaven to feed men is to have confidence in the Person of Jesus. Only then will it not be a cause for scandal to hear Him say that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to remain in Him and He in us.

The institution of the Holy Eucharist reveals the deepest meaning of these words of Jesus, which are fulfilled sacramentally. The Church has guarded this mystery of love for us to this day. When we receive the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of Jesus, we know by faith that exactly what Jesus said to the Jews in His discourse on the bread of life is happening. We know that through Him we will live forever, just as He lives through the Father.