

(English translation)

August 2000

Word of Life

‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’ (Jn 6:35).

In his Gospel John tells how, after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus went to Capernaum. There he gave his discourse on the bread of life during which he said: ‘Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you’ (Jn 6:27).

For those who were listening to him it was a clear reference to manna and also to the awaited ‘second’ manna that would come down from heaven in the Messianic age.

Shortly afterwards, in that same discourse, to a crowd that still did not understand him, Jesus presented himself as the true bread come down from heaven, which is to be accepted through faith:

‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’

Jesus already sees himself as bread. In the end, therefore, this is the goal of his life on earth. He is to be bread so as to be eaten. And to be bread so as to communicate his life to us and to transform us into himself. So far the spiritual meaning of these words, with their references to the Old Testament, is clear. But later on Jesus’ words become mysterious and difficult when he says of himself: ‘The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh’ (Jn 6:51) and ‘Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you’ (Jn 6:53).

It is the announcement of the Eucharist, and it shocks and puts off many disciples. Yet it is the most immense gift Jesus wants to give humanity: his presence in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which gives satisfaction to soul and body, the fullness of joy, through intimate union with him.

When we are nourished by this bread, there is no room for any other hunger. All our desires for love and truth are satisfied by the One who is Love itself, Truth itself.

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Therefore this bread nourishes us with him already here on earth, but it is given to us so that we, in our turn, may satisfy the spiritual and material hunger of the people around us.

Christ is proclaimed to the world not so much through the Eucharist, as through the lives of Christians who are nourished by the Eucharist and by the Word. They preach the Gospel with their lives and their voices, making Christ present in the midst of humanity.

The life of the Christian community, thanks to the Eucharist, becomes the life of Jesus. It is, therefore, a life capable of giving love, the life of God to others.

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By using the metaphor of bread, Jesus teaches us the most genuine, the most ‘Christian’ way to love our neighbour.

What, in fact, does loving really mean?

Loving means 'making ourselves one' with everyone, making ourselves one in all the others want, in the least and most insignificant things and in those that perhaps might be of little interest to us but are important to them.

And Jesus gave us an amazing example of this way of loving by making himself 'bread' for us. He makes himself 'bread' in order to enter into everyone, to make himself edible, to make himself one with everyone, to serve, to love everyone.

May we too make ourselves one to the point of allowing ourselves to be 'eaten'.

This is love, to make ourselves one in a way that makes others feel nourished by our love, comforted, uplifted, understood.