

1. What are you looking for?

"You seek me not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten bread to your fill." Jn 6:26

We wanted this verse to be the opening verse of this theme on the Eucharist that will accompany us during this year. We understand that, before approaching its full meaning, we must be able to stop and reflect on the way we approach the mystery of the Bread of Life, allowing ourselves to be questioned by the Master and asking ourselves about the profound meaning that the celebration of the Eucharist has for us.

In the same way, Pope Francis, as he began his catechetical journey on the Eucharist in 2017 and 2018, began by helping us to situate ourselves before our way of celebrating it, recalling the witness of so many Christians who died to defend it: "This is a witness that challenges us all and calls for an answer as to what it means for each of us to participate in the sacrifice of the Mass and to approach the table of the Lord. Are we looking for that fountain that "flows with living water" for eternal life, that makes of our life a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and makes of us one body with Christ?"¹

Why do we celebrate the Eucharist?

In order to give an answer to this central question of our faith in this chapter, we will delve into a part of the discourse of the Bread of Life. Let us recall that it is composed of three main parts. The first (Jn 6:1-21) narrates two miracle stories: the multiplication of the loaves and fishes and Jesus walking on the water. The second contains the discourse on the bread of life before the crowd in the synagogue of Capernaum (Jn 6:22-59). The third exposes the dialogue that follows this great discourse and that confronts Jesus with his disciples (Jn 6, 60-71)².

We focus on the second part when the Master, after performing the miracles, meets the crowd that goes in search of him on the other side of the lake and asks him: "*Master, when did you come here?*"

If we look closely, Jesus does not answer the question they asked him, but reveals the motive behind it: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you do not seek me because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten bread to your fill*" (Jn 6:26). Jesus realizes that the crowd has remained with the material sign he had performed earlier, that of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. They are satisfied with the satiated need and do not go beyond it. They do not understand the depth of the meaning that this sign holds.

¹ Pope Francis, General Audience of Wednesday, November 8, 2017.

² Jean Zumstein, *El evangelio según Juan*, Sígueme, Salamanca, 2016, p. 265.

This encounter between the teacher and the people who followed him reminds us of the conversations and debates that sometimes arise among the faithful about the precept, or about the "validity" of the Saturday Mass for Sunday or about how well or how badly the local priest is focusing upon it. Many people concentrate on the ancillary instead of looking for the essential, the deep meaning of the Eucharistic celebration. If we go to Mass just because we are commanded to do so by the first commandment of Holy Mother Church, we miss the depth of the gift that is meant to be given to us.

We go to Mass because we need this bread that gives us eternal life and is essential for us. Precisely for this reason, the Church sends it to us as a precept, like a mother who cares for her children, because she loves them.

Human beings have needs

Among the vital needs of the human being are the most crucial: eating and drinking. That is why food is the first gift that God gave to man in the Genesis account as a paternal act: "*Behold, I give you all the herbs that yield seed on the face of the earth, and all the fruit trees that yield seed: they shall be food for you*" (Gen 1:29). This gift becomes the response of a father God to the need of the human being, of a son of his own.

This need cannot be satisfied in any way. Everything edible is not advisable because everything edible is not digestible. That is why God in Genesis (2:16) says to Adam, "*You may eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you must die.*" God does not point out to us on a whim the foods that we cannot eat. He does so out of the love of one who knows what we cannot digest and warns us, in the same way as does the father who goes through the forest and says to his son, "Do not eat those fruits or those mushrooms, for they are poisonous."

Need to satiate ourselves

We are all willing to do whatever it takes to achieve our desires, to be satisfied. And like the crowd, we ask Jesus: What must we do?

Jesus denounces the illusion of the human being who attempts to reach by his own means the things that are necessary to satisfy his cravings. When we seek to satiate ourselves with everything without measure or discernment, voracity marks our way of relating to food in a toxic way. To this point, we often feel that we are only good when we feel pleased, and are satisfied that we have gotten what we wanted. We call this "gluttony" and it becomes a form of idolatry that, like so many others, seeks in what is not God, to satiate our life and fill it with meaning.

After the miracles, the discourse and the encounter, the crowd continues to ask for bread, which is not what Jesus is offering. The same happens with the Samaritan woman

who asked for water that had nothing to do with the spring of eternal life that Jesus was offering her, or with Nicodemus who was offered to be born again.

In the same way, we often ask for Eucharistic celebrations that have nothing to do with what Jesus is giving us. We have team meetings that are far removed from the gift we are being offered. We have a married life that is far removed from the vocation God has given us. We have a good family, which is not the domestic Church instituted on our wedding day.

We approach Jesus, asking him to respond to some needs, which are certainly legitimate, but which fall far short in comparison with the gifts he wants to offer us.

This reflection invites us to rethink our true needs--those that will really quench the hunger and thirst that our life, our marriage and our family have. We must rediscover Jesus' offer and to trust in Him again.

Christ, the only food that satisfies

It is at this moment that Jesus reveals to the multitude that the works that are expected to satisfy their lives do not consist in a "doing", but in a "believing", which orients the doing and empowers it. It is not a service to be fulfilled, but the acceptance of a gift. One must decide: To let oneself be loved?, to identify true nourishment?, to trust or not to trust one's father?, to eat or not to eat those mushrooms in the forest that seem "appetizing"?

And we do this as children who live in a process of maturation. The Father is always there, at our side, taking care of us, accompanying us, even pampering us. We are called to discover the love he has for us--to receive his Bread of Life. This is because He can speak to us like this, as the song says: "If for a second you saw how I look at you, you wouldn't want to see anything else (...) and I tremble to imagine when you get to heaven, it will be hard to breathe in the embrace we will give each other" ("One Second," Hakuna Group Music).

We are invited to believe that all the needs that make us seek and seek, crave and crave, are substitutes for one true need: the love of God manifested in his Son Jesus. For this reason, Jesus will proclaim: *"I am the true bread of life"*.

Like the multitude, we have had precious experiences of being satiated by the Lord; but like the multitude, we continue to demand signs that satisfy our most basic needs and respond to our hunger. Is it worthwhile to continue in this endeavor? Sometimes we are very stubborn. To combat this, we suggest that you reflect on how or when Jesus has satisfied our deepest needs through the Eucharist, through our personal or conjugal prayer, or through our team.

Let us also try to approach the Eucharist from the point of view of the couple, so that we do not think only in an individual way. Let us also see how we can be nourished by

it in our married life. Father Caffarel made the reflections that led to the text *Marriage and Eucharist*, of which we will refer in extracts in the following chapters. When he was in Rome during the spring of 1959, he was giving communion, together with other priests, to the thousands of pilgrim homes of the Teams of Our Lady. He indicates that, at that moment, he had the intuition of the close link between the two sacraments, marriage and Eucharist. In his text he proposes a prayer that allows: "that the Eucharist "build" your home, "build" your unity (...) Why, when you have just received communion and you are side by side in the Church, do you not recite it together? Lord, pour out your spirit of love on us; since you have just filled us with the paschal sacrament, may your love give us one heart".³

Word of God

We read the Word of God taking into account all that we have previously discussed in the chapter itself, which is, in short, an introduction to this biblical text.

John 6:24-34

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Master, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate bread to your fill. Work not for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give you; for him the Father, God, has sealed." They asked him, "And what must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this, that you believe in him whom he has sent." And they said to him, "And what sign do you do, that we may see and believe in you? What is your work? Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to him, "Lord, give us of this bread always."

³ Henri Caffarel, *Marriage and the Eucharist* published in the review, *L'Anneau d'Or* -Le mariage, route vers Dieu *Numéro spécial 117-118 - mai - août 1964* - (pp. 242-265). Henri Caffarel, *El matrimonio, aventura de Santidad*, Madrid: PPC, 2022, p. 258.