

Today's passage of our Lord's Rabbinic sermon on the feeding of people introduces a second quotation - which is something every Rabbi used to do - to illuminate the first. The first quotation - *He gave them bread from heaven to eat* - is illuminated by a second: *They will all be taught by God*. What Jesus is saying is that God feeds his people, not with physical bread of any kind - *food that cannot last* - but with the bread of teaching, which leads to the life of faith, and the life of faith leads to the life of eternity. This teaching, received and assimilated, is *the bread of eternal life*.

How we receive this teaching is a deep mystery. It isn't the reading of a catechism or the acceptance of the Bible. It is by the receiving of the whole Jesus Christ, who gives himself for us by coming to the earth and ministering to us the knowledge of God; and he does this most clearly in his dying for what he proclaims.

We are to receive him, therefore, as a living teacher, as the lover of us all, as the one who unites us (and this means, by the way we live according to his word, the way we live in love, the way we live in unity with each other in the Church).

It is only here, as we reach the heart of his self-giving, that John introduces the great theme of the Eucharist. It does not belong here, in the synagogue at Capernaum, halfway through his life as a travelling rabbi. It belongs in that narrow door and place, as the forces of the world close around him, and the last supper is served. The words that follow from this last line of today's Gospel are not the words thrown to pigs, to be trampled underfoot: they are the treasured pearls of the Church, and they have been brought into this chapter from the sacred space of the Upper Room, because the message accepted or rejected in the synagogue will determine the possibility of our sharing in the communion with Christ which implies his death.