

If we listen to the things Jesus asks of his hearers today, it will fix in our minds the meaning of this vital chapter of John. As we saw yesterday, Jesus is making a breathtaking claim for himself, a claim on his hearers to accept him as they have never accepted any other relationship:

*I am the One who has been sent by God from heaven to earth,
and I am the bread from heaven to give you life.*

The crowds asked him at the start, *What must we do to accomplish the work of God?* See what he tells them to do: *Come to me...believe in me...see me and believe in me.* These are quite unmediated demands. He is not speaking about any article of faith, he isn't making any claims about the Church - and there is certainly no involvement here with the Eucharist. It is Jesus himself, standing before us and looking into our eyes, who says *Come to me, see me, and believe in me.*

Jesus now gives them a window into the mind of God, who is at work not only in Jesus but in his hearers. Some of them will be *given to Jesus* by the Father; all who are so given will come to him, and he is to welcome them. This welcoming admits them to the wonder of the relationship between Father and Son which is the divine life: we could also say that they will become children of God, that they will receive the Holy Spirit. But this all lies in the future. For the moment it is simply vital that they accept him as God's ultimate, total messenger, who offers them eternal life in himself. Resurrection on the last day, eternal life, these are strange concepts for the crowd to hear; but it is part of his opening salvo towards them:

do not work for food that cannot last; work for food that endures to eternal life.

Jesus claims that the present encounter, this very moment in which they are involved, in the synagogue at Capernaum, is a moment charged with eternal significance; they are all on trial, and the verdict they deliver is of eternal meaning and importance. The vital realisation is that God the Father himself is involved, and has an intention which must govern what happens:

*It is the will of my Father
that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life,
and that I shall raise him up on the last day.*

We should see this pattern expressed like a scene in a sacred icon: the Son, sent and revealed by the Father: the faithful, drawn to the Son by the Father, and given to him; and the light of eternity breaking around them as they make their act of submission to the will of the Father, and the ministry of the Son. So we are caught up into the life of God, and we are being fed by his Word, the bread that gives us true life.