

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 3, 2018

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Background:

There is general agreement among scripture scholars that John's chronology of the events of Jesus' death is closer to how the events of Jesus' passion unfolded than that found in the synoptic gospels. Jesus died on the afternoon before the celebration of Passover began, and his body was removed from the cross before sunset as the Jews gathered to begin the traditional meal. This means that Jesus' final meal with his disciples was not a Passover meal.

Nonetheless, Mark and the early Christians understood their celebration as a new kind of Passover. Just as the celebration of Passover was not just a remembering of what had happened one night in Egypt, but a renewal of the relationship that was formed on that night, so the early celebrations of the Lord's Supper by his followers was a way to enter again into Jesus' last meal with his disciples and the relationship that was founded in that celebration. Their understanding and appreciation grew as they participated in the ritual itself and reflected on its meaning. The condensed description of Jesus' celebration of the Passover with his disciples that appears as our text reflects years of reflection on their old traditions, their remembrance of Jesus, and their new experiences as people who believed Jesus to be the Messiah.

Reflection Questions:

1. What kind of thoughts and feelings come to mind as you think of your own body?
2. What kind of thoughts and feelings come to mind as you think of your blood?
3. In the first part of this gospel Jesus tell his disciples how to find the room that they should prepare for the Passover. The events unfold as Jesus had predicted. What is being revealed here? Why?
4. Why do you think Jesus did not use something else like pebbles and wild flowers to become his body and blood? What would have been the benefit of pebbles and wild flowers over bread and wine? What would be missing?
5. What does this tell you about God's desire to be with us in the sacrament of the Eucharist?
6. In another gospel Jesus says in a familiar parable: "Amen, I say to you, what you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40) This would seem to indicate another way Jesus' body is present to us. Are you aware of ways the most holy body and blood of Christ are present to us as we celebrate this feast?
7. Can you take some time talk to God about your thoughts and feelings around the Eucharist, or about this feast, or your own experience of your body and blood?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for June 3, 2018, The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

When Moses related all the words of the Lord, they all answered, "We will do everything the Lord has told us." Moses then wrote down all the words of the Lord and, rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, having sent certain young men to sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant, he read it to the people, who answered, "All that the Lord has said, we will do." Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

*I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.
How shall I make a return to the Lord for all the good he has done for me?
The cup of salvation I will take up, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.
Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.*

*I am your servant, the son of your handmaid; you have loosed my bonds.
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.
My vows to the Lord I will pay in the presence of all his people.*

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came as high priest, passing through the more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God. He is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant, those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He sent two disciples and said, "Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." The disciples then went and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Excerpts from Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116:12-18; Hebrews 9:11-15; and Mark 14:12-16, 22-26