

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 6, 2021

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' passion and death is more accurate than that which is 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 that sacred meal. This means that Jesus' final meal with his disciples was not a Passover meal according to the feast date.

However, when Mark and the early Christians gathered to remember that last meal with Jesus, they understood it as a kind of new Passover. The celebration of Passover was not just a remembering of what had happened one night in Egypt. By their yearly celebration of Passover, the Jews believed that they were once again making present that night when Yahweh acted on their behalf to turn them from being Egyptian slaves to being God's chosen people. Now the early Christians believed that by their celebration of Jesus' last meal with them, they were renewing that new relationship with Jesus and God that Jesus had begun at the holy meal. So, when they remembered and retold that event, it was described as a Passover meal. It was a way for his followers 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 a much deeper understanding of 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. How aware are you of the kinds of foods you eat? How aware are you of when your body is hungry or thirsty? How aware are you of the effects that certain kinds of foods have on you?
2. Can you recall a time when you have used a meal to help communicate to another how you felt about that person?
3. When you think of Jesus having eaten with others in the gospels, which stories come to mind? What kind of message is being communicated by those meals?
4. In the first part of this gospel, Jesus tells his disciples how to find the room that they should prepare for the Passover. The events unfold just as Jesus had predicted. What is being revealed here? Why?
5. Why do you think Jesus did not use something else, like pebbles and wildflowers, to represent his body and blood? What would have been the benefit of pebbles and wildflowers over bread and wine? What would be missing?
6. If you consider the Eucharist as an expression of God's desire, what is being communicated to you?

7. What are you communicating by standing before the person holding the host with your hands outstretched?
8. Can you take some time to talk to God about your thoughts and feelings around the Eucharist, or about this feast, or about 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

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for June 6, 2021, 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

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for June 6th (the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ), as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel tells Mark's rather short version of the Last Supper. It includes the narrative where Jesus blesses the bread and the cup of wine, and he distributes these to the disciples, telling them, "Take it, this is my body," and "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many." The other readings also refer to blood and sacrifice and the covenant. In the first reading from Exodus, Moses reads the book of the covenant to the people, and then sprinkles blood from sacrificed bulls on them, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you." Psalm 116 proclaims, "To you I will offer sacrifice of thanksgiving. I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." In the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, Paul writes, "When Christ came as High Priest, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and bulls, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption."