

SESSION ONE: the Origin of the Holy Eucharist as the Sacrament of His Presence and the Sacrifice of Perfect Thanksgiving to God

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.

This quotation from the great Apostle, St. Paul, reminds us of the futility of looking to explanatory genius to provide answers to the essential mysteries of the Faith. The Holy Eucharist is the Sacrament of worship and prayer, sacrifice and thanksgiving for the Church; its graces represent spiritual nourishment and provide the 'source and summit of the Christian life' for clergy and laity. Its truths defy material analysis yet define the heart of the Catholic Faith. Trust is the ultimate virtue and necessary attitude to understand and to believe!

Luke 1:37@ "for nothing will be impossible for God!"

Mt. 19:26@ "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible!"

John 20:29@ "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Hebrews 12:28@ "Therefore, we who are receiving the unshakable kingdom should have gratitude, with which we should offer worship pleasing to God in reverence and awe."

Our series of study on the Holy Eucharist will consider and ponder the origin, history, spirituality, and theology of this fundamental Sacrament in the context of Catholic worship and belief.

The basic elements of bread and wine as used and offered in our Catholic Mass have been important sacrificial offerings for centuries and centuries. Such unbloody offerings (not involving the slaughter of animals) are associated with acts of worship and thanksgiving in the Old Testament and point to one of the most important aspects of the Eucharistic Sacrament--- bread gives life but is not life, wine adds joy to life but is not joy! By His Real Presence, through His Body and Blood of the Sacrament, Christ gives true life and joy in abundance to His servants.

Bread and wine were among numerous types of offerings prescribed by God for His worship at the Jewish temple and, in turn, by the priests of the Old Covenant in obedience. Incense too was a commodity burned in the morning and evening as an oblation to the Most High God. Such gifts provided praise to God and expiatory

healing to the giver. The essence of sacrifice is to allot a portion of one's wealth without counting the cost!

Old Testament pre-figurations and types of sacrifice (the Old Testament background for the use of bread and wine in religious ritual)—

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis (chapter 14:17-20), we discover that the Priest of God ('Kohen El'), known as Melchizedek, brought out bread and wine, and presented these gifts as a thanksgiving offering for the victory of Abram (Abraham) over a gang of thieves and marauders:

When Abram returned from his victory over Chedorlaomer and the kings who were allied with him, the king of Sodom went out to greet him in the Valley of Shaveh... Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, and being a priest of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Among the laws of Moses, from the Book of Exodus, chapter 12:16-18, is the Institution of the feast of Passover, a yearly remembrance by the Hebrew people of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt by the hand of God. For this ritual meal, unleavened bread is a key and critical element, representing the 'haste' by which the people of Israel left the land of Egypt to escape the wrath of pharaoh:

On the first day you shall hold a sacred assembly, and likewise on the seventh. On these days you shall not do any sort of work, except to prepare the food that everyone needs. "Keep, then, this custom of the unleavened bread. Since it was on this very day that I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt, you must celebrate this day throughout your generations as a perpetual institution. From the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month until the evening of the twenty-first day of this month you shall eat unleavened bread."

In the Book of Exodus, chapter 16:6-14, God feeds the people of Israel in the desert with 'manna,' which is miraculous bread sent for them to collect in the morning. As 'heavenly food,' the gift of 'manna' is provided along with flocks of quail in the evening, so the providential food for Israel is 'flesh and bread':

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will now rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not. On the sixth day, however, when they prepare what they bring in, let it be twice as much as they gather on the other days." So Moses and Aaron told all the Israelites, "At evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning

you will see the glory of the LORD, as he heeds your grumbling against him. But what are we that you should grumble against us?

When the LORD gives you flesh to eat in the evening," continued Moses, "and in the morning your fill of bread, as he heeds the grumbling you utter against him, what then are we? Your grumbling is not against us, but against the LORD." Then Moses said to Aaron, "Tell the whole Israelite community: Present yourselves before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling."

When Aaron announced this to the whole Israelite community, they turned toward the desert, and lo, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud!

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them: In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that I, the LORD, am your God." In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground.

In Exodus, chapter 25:22-30, among the weekly offerings were the 'Bread of the Presence,' twelve loaves of unleavened bread, in two rows of six, placed within the Holy of Holies of the Temple upon the golden table along with cups of wine and incense. These loaves of unleavened bread were consumed and renewed once a week on the Sabbath:

There I will meet you and there, from above the propitiatory, between the two cherubim on the ark of the commandments, I will tell you all the commands that I wish you to give the Israelites.

"You shall also make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. Plate it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. Surround it with a frame, a handbreadth high, with a molding of gold around the frame. You shall also make four rings of gold for it and fasten them at the four corners, one at each leg, on two opposite sides of the frame as holders for the poles to carry the table. These poles for carrying the table you shall make of acacia wood and plate with gold. Of pure gold you shall make its plates and cups, as well as its pitchers and bowls for pouring libations. On the table you shall always keep showbread set before me."

An incident is recorded in the 1st Book of Samuel, chapter 21:1-6, and tells of David and the soldiers of his entourage who eat the Bread of the Presence (aka 'Showbread'). Before he was king, David was on a military mission for King Saul and he arrived at the temple of Nob. He asks for bread to feed his men but the priest of the temple has only the 'Bread of the Presence' to provide for David's soldiers. He allows the men to eat this bread on the assurance of David that they have abstained from unchaste actions with women and have been consecrated for their mission in holiness (see also Mt 12:1-6).

In texts outside of the Bible and closer to the time of Christ, we find the custom of the High Priest of the Temple of Jerusalem bringing the Bread of the Presence into the Courtyard of the Israelites on the three great days of pilgrimage (Passover, Tabernacles, and Shavuot. On these days, the loaves were removed from the Holy of Holies and carried upon the golden table and shown to the men with the pronouncement, "Behold, God's love for you!" The loaves of bread were deemed as miraculous, having the brightness of God's glory upon them.

Otherwise, in the Book of Exodus, chapter 29:38-42, gifts of bread, wine, and roasted lamb were commanded as offerings to God, presented twice a day at the Temple as follows (the Temple was a portable tent at this point, not yet a permanent fixture of Jerusalem):

Now, this is what you shall offer on the altar: two yearling lambs as the sacrifice established for each day; one lamb in the morning and the other lamb at the evening twilight.

With the first lamb there shall be a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a fourth of a *hin* of oil of crushed olives and, as its libation, a fourth of a *hin* of wine.

The other lamb you shall offer at the evening twilight, with the same cereal offering and libation as in the morning. You shall offer this as a sweet-smelling oblation to the LORD.

Throughout your generations this established holocaust shall be offered before the LORD at the entrance of the meeting tent, where I will meet you and speak to you.

Of these examples, the most significant is the Passover Meal, which was the yearly Jewish celebration of the deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, and the context of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist as initiated by Christ Himself at the Last Supper. As laid out in the Scroll of Exodus, the Passover Meal consists of the roasted flesh of sheep or goat (lamb), unleavened bread (bread made with no yeast), and bitter herbs (greens with a sharp taste). During Passover, Jewish families, are forbidden to have any bread made of yeast within the household, and consume only unleavened bread for seven days. Unleavened bread is of course easier to make than leavened bread since it does not require the added effort and time of kneading the yeast into the flour and water and waiting for the dough to rise before baking.

By the era of Christ, the Hebrews had an elaborate liturgy or ceremonial to implement the command of God to observe the Exodus Passover and to remember and to relive the night of their miraculous departure from Egypt. This ritual is lengthy in itself with rich texts to allow every family to understand the meaning of the feast and includes the use of several goblets of wine to 'toast' the Almighty and 'to give thanks' for His promises on their behalf, fulfilled in making them a free people and a special people in Covenant with His Divine Being. Out of all of the nations, God had selected the Israelites as His very own nation and provided to them the Promised Land, a 'land of milk and honey' for their habitation and inheritance.

Thus, the Passover meal is a ritual supper taken from a format called the Haggadah, which retells the story of the exile of the Hebrews in Egypt, their humiliation and toil under the yoke of slavery, and the incredible works and wonders of God in bringing them from slavery to freedom in the land of Canaan; this ceremonial meal contains much symbolism and explanatory exposition to illustrate its lessons for the Jews of every generation. The Haggadah remains the form of the Passover meal to this day, also known as the Seder, and is celebrated in the 15th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (always Springtime). It is lead by the father of each household or by a local rabbi for his community.

During the Seder Meal, God's four promises to Moses are recalled as recorded in Exodus, chapter 6:6-9:

Therefore, say to the Israelites: I am the LORD.

I **will** free you from the forced labor of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery. I **will** rescue you by my outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I **will** take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God. You **will** know that I, the LORD, am your God when I free you from the labor of the Egyptians and bring you into the land, which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you as your own possession - I, the LORD!"

These divine promises represented in the form of 'I will' are commemorated in turn by each of the cups of wine at the Seder and the prayers that were recited with each cup. Scholars believe that the third or fourth goblet of wine is the one compatible with the astonishing declaration of Jesus, "THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD"—either the "cup of blessing" or the "cup of praise." St. Paul actually calls the Eucharistic drink of consecrated wine as the "cup of blessing," perhaps suggesting the third cup of the Passover Meal was the one chosen by Christ for His Precious Blood and matches up with God's promise, "I **will** take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God." Of course, equally astounding is the statement of Jesus over the unleavened bread, "THIS IS MY BODY!" No such texts are found in any version of the Haggadah, so these words have been added to the ritual by Christ Himself and have no equivalent in the entirety of the history of the Seder!

The calendar of the Jewish people was similar to that of the Egyptians, based on the 30/29 day cycle of the moon. Lunar calendars are inaccurate and cause the loss of a handful of days by the end of each year; over the course of many years, this necessitated correction. The Egyptians fixed their calendar every hundred years or so, but we have no idea of the accuracy of the Hebrew calendar during the life of Christ. It has been suggested that Jesus followed an alternate religious calendar based upon the Essenes, a Jewish community in the desert that produced the Dead Sea scrolls. Nonetheless, Passover and its celebration generally fall within the months of March and April. As a result, our celebration of Easter Sunday — the Resurrection of Christ — likewise takes place within the Springtime. The Gregorian Calendar of Pope Gregory XIII establishes the dating of particular feast days, and

follows the more accurate solar calendar utilized for all modern dating to this day. In Catholic Church of the Roman rite, Easter is always celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the first day of Spring (this provides for a full moon on the night of Holy Thursday, which reflects the tradition that, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the arrest of Christ happened under light of the full moon).

New Testament references to the Eucharist (direct and otherwise)—

Two miracles of Christ involved bread and wine: the multiplication of loaves and fishes, and the transformation of water into wine. All four gospels record the multiplication of the loaves and the feeding of the 5,000/ while only St. John records that of the water-made-wine at the wedding feast of Cana. Such miracles of this type are rare in the whole of the Bible. Of the numerous miracles enacted by Jesus such as the healing of the sick, the expulsion of demons, the defiance of the laws of nature, these miracles clearly parallel the ideas of the Exodus Passover: God feeding His people (first by His Word and then with the super abundance of loaves and fish) and God establishing a new Covenant in the 'new wine' of redemption.

St. John, chapter 6, is comprised of the miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the discourse of the 'Bread of Life.' The discourse includes the declaration of Christ, "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven..." and serves as a commentary on the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, for he "took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them..." — clearly language that parallels to the Last Supper. "To give thanks" in Jewish prayer language is also known as 'a blessing' because these prayers of thanksgiving typically begin with "Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel..." A deeper analysis of this discourse will be provided in the next session.

Of the four gospels, Sts. Matthew, Mark, & Luke include an account of the Last Supper, the final meal of Christ with His Apostles. Christ interrupts the ordinary sequence of the Passover Meal and takes bread and later a chalice of wine and associates His life and death with these earthly elements in solemn declarations. Thereby, He commences the establishment of the New Covenant in His Body, to be broken on the Cross, and likewise of His Blood, to be poured out during the Passion. As a result, the Exodus Passover commemoration and remembrance becomes His own Passover commemoration and remembrance— the anticipation of and realization of his own passage from life to death to life again! A more careful analysis of the language of the Last Supper will be supplied in another session.

After the Resurrection of Christ, in the Gospel of St. Luke, chapter 24, Jesus appears to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus but they do not know who He is; as Mary Magdalene discovered in the aftermath of the Resurrection, His physical appearance has a different dimensionality and distinctive realm of presence that defies the ordinary. In this case, by means of the pattern of the Mass, Christ revealed His identity to the two disciples as the Lord arisen from the dead: He quotes

explains the Scriptures (the sermon/homily), and takes bread, gives thanks, and they recognize Him in the 'Breaking of the Bread' (*fractio panis*). The Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Liturgy of the Holy Eucharist, is the two-fold gist of the Catholic Mass and liturgy. In fact, every Eucharist rite of the Church has found its foundation and formation by this same pattern: Proclamation and Instruction in the Word of God, and the Offering and Consecration of the Sacrament of His saving Life and Redeeming Death.

In the Gospel, St. John, chapter 21, Christ invites His Apostles to have breakfast with Him at the Sea of Galilee. He eats with His Apostles to show that He not a ghost or apparition but remains possessed of His physically (He remains the Incarnate Son of God) though at a different modality. In an indirect manner, this interaction between Christ and His disciples underlines the interaction between the bishop/priest who represents Christ (*in persona Christi*) at Catholic worship and the faithful gathered in assembly as the bishop/priest teaches in the manner of Jesus and feeds the flock with nourishment that is spiritual, life-giving, and both speaks to and transcends human nature.

Among the activities of the early Church, the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2:42&46, states that they worshipped and prayed together on a daily basis. As the author of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke uses the term "the breaking of the bread" to refer to the Eucharistic rite and not simply to describe a common meal. Since the early believers had no temples or synagogues or other buildings outside of their own homes to gather for 'liturgical' prayer, their houses became the locus of the communal life of the early community.

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes.

This ideal vision of the early Church arose through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the disciples within the upper room, affording unity, energy, and authority to them to act in the name of Christ, and to call the nation of Israel to repentance from sin, faith in the Jesus as the Messiah, and reception of Baptism.

In St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapters 10 & 11, the Apostle offers teaching and guidance to the Corinthians on matters related to the celebration of the "Lord's Supper," i.e., the Holy Eucharist. This is not a structured essay or ordered treatise on the question of the Holy Sacrament but a commentary on various issues brought to his attention. He admonishes the Corinthians to avoid holding a 'potluck' as part of their assembly and to hold to the strict tradition he has received and passed onto them. In consequence, he records the earliest written text of the 'Words

of Institution,' meaning those pivotal words by which Christ changed the substance of bread and wine into the reality of His Body and Blood.

From perhaps 55 A.D., here is the oldest reference to the Holy Eucharist within the New Testament (1 Corinth., chapters 10:13-17, 11:23-27):

God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, avoid idolatry. I am speaking as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I am saying.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.

What is the unworthy reception or receiving of the Sacrament? Answer— those who do not believe they are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ! (1 Corinth., chapter 11:28-32):

A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; but since we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

To summarize—

- 1) Bread and wine were sacrifices of thanksgiving in the Old Testament, uniquely used to give thanks to God in gratitude for the blessings of the Old Covenant
- 2) A special bread was kept in the Temple of Jerusalem known as the Bread of the Presence; changed every Sabbath, twelve loaves sat on the golden table within the Holy of Holies along side of cups of wine and incense.

- 3) Unleavened bread and four cups of wine were part of the Passover meal in Jesus' time; during the Seder, Christ took the bread and the last goblet of wine and declared these to be His Body and His Blood
- 4) "Do this in Remembrance of me"— this command of Jesus to His Apostles became the specialized and unique rite of the Church to receive the Presence of Christ into her midst, into her life, into her being through the Sacrament and Sacrifice of the Mass.
- 5) St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians and in the letter to the Hebrews explains the parallel between the bestowal of bread in the form of 'manna' in the desert and the rituals of worship upon the Jewish people and now bestows 'the Body of the Lord' and true worship upon the New Israel, the Church, through the mediation of Christ the High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant. The Old and New Testaments point to and affirm the ultimate teaching of the Church that what nurtured the Israelites before the era of Christ foreshadowed and promised what today nurtures the People of God, the Body of Christ, i.e., the Eucharistic Body of Christ!

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