



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 3, 2018

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

The Scriptures for this feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus offer an opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice of Jesus, and to find a deeper understanding of all that it has achieved for us.

The first reading from Exodus is a description of the affirmation of the covenant made between God and the Israelites, mediated through Moses. Moses received the word of the Lord and brought it to the people. He wrote down the Laws given by God and the people agreed to obey them. Though God's initiative and the people's assent, a covenant was made between them. The blood of sacrificed animals was used to seal the covenant. In those times, the blood of an animal— a precious commodity that represented a real sacrifice on the part of the person or persons offering it— demonstrated the serious intent of the parties making a covenant. However sincerely offered, the blood of animals did not change the people involved. It only symbolized their intent to live as God desired. This is why the Israelites continually failed to live up to their promises. They said yes to God with the best of intentions, even sealed their promises in blood, but their unchanged, sinful hearts eventually led them to break those promises again and again.

Today's excerpt from the letter to the Hebrews goes right to the heart of the superior sacrifice of Jesus. Under the Law, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies once a year and sacrifice an animal in atonement for the people's sin, but the effect of this sacrifice was only symbolic. In contrast, Jesus made one perfect sacrifice for sin by the sacrifice of his life. The blood that Jesus shed was not the price of redemption required by God; it was not his blood per se that frees people from sin. Rather, it was Jesus' perfect sacrifice—his complete, self-giving, and total obedience to God's will, offered even in the face of impending death—that won eternal redemption for those who believe in him. Jesus' perfect sacrifice did what the symbolic sacrifice of animals could never do: it has the power to cleanse a person of sin. According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus' sacrifice was able to cleanse one's conscience, allowing the believer to fully enter into a relationship with God, where love, worship, and service are the expressions of someone who knows that she or he has been saved through Jesus.

The Passover was celebrated in remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. When Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples for the last time, he used the rituals of that celebration to institute a New Covenant. Bread and wine would then and forever represent the sacrifice that Jesus was about to complete for all who believe in him. His sacrifice would achieve what symbolic sacrifices could not: freedom from sin and new life. Those who celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of this saving sacrifice of Jesus are constantly transformed, so they can become the men and women that God created them to be.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Exodus 24:3-8

God has made a covenant with us.

- The reading from Exodus is the story of the sealing of the Sinai covenant.
- The Sinai covenant was sealed with two ceremonies: a meal and a blood rite.
- Each of these signified the sharing of life.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116: 12-13, 15-16, 17-18

I will take the cup of life, and call on the name of the Lord.

Reading II: Hebrews 9:11-15

We will receive the promise of eternal salvation.

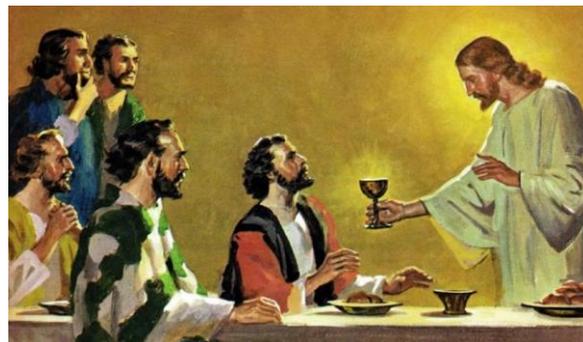
- The author of the Letter to the Hebrews points out the difference between the old and new covenants.
- Christ's blood was shed to reconcile and reunite humans and God.
- Jesus is the bond of the new covenant.

Gospel: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

He took bread, blessed and broke it.

- The Gospel tells the story of the sealing of the new covenant.
- Mark associates the cup of wine with the blood covenant of old.
- At the Passover supper, Jesus shares a cup of wine with all the disciples.
- It is the true sign of the shared blood that seals the covenant.

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Be What You Receive

Some years ago, Franciscan Friar Scott Surrency composed a poem “Can you drink the cup?” and the opening verses pose the key question of today’s liturgy. Can you drink the cup?

Drink, not survey or analyze,
ponder or scrutinize –
from a distance.

But drink – imbibe, ingest,
take into you so that it becomes a piece of your inmost self.

Surrency’s poem creates a question from the challenge St. Augustine gave his people when he preached on the sacrament of the Eucharist in the fourth century. When Augustine spoke of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, he said they “are called sacraments because in them one thing is seen, while another is grasped. ... what is grasped bears spiritual fruit.”

Today’s Liturgy of the Word guides us through the religious developments that led to our Eucharist. We begin as Moses leads his people in a spectacular liturgy of sacrifice. In what was almost participatory theater, the people renewed their covenant with the God who had led them out of Egypt and gave them commandments to assure a good life. The people listened and kept silence while Moses wrote. At the climax, he sprinkled them with blood representing the life they shared with God and would lose if they were unfaithful.

This celebration evolved into the Temple liturgies that kept Israel conscious of her covenant relationship with God. They provide the context for the portrayal of Christ as the final high priest in the Letter to the Hebrews, showing how he accomplished once for all what Moses and his successors celebrated with their people. Hebrews explains that the priests used animal blood to cleanse a defiled people, but Christ who shed his own blood, cleansed or transformed people’s consciences. Christ gave them new access to God whose reason for creation was to share life with them.

Mark’s account of Jesus’ Last Supper with his disciples brings this theology down to earth through a poignant story. When the disciples talk to Jesus about his [own] Passover, he reminds them that eating that meal together pledges them to share the same commitment and fate. While they were at supper, Jesus shockingly altered their ritual prayers. Instead of simply thanking God for the saving actions of the past, Jesus added his own name to the traditional litany of blessing. By doing so, he bade his friends to partake in his own self-giving.

When Jesus took the cup, a blessing cup they were accustomed to sharing, he gave it to them and they all drank of it. After they had drunk, he explained that it was the cup he had promised they would drink with him (Mark 10:39). It was their share in the cross he would take up, the symbol of losing their lives for him and the Gospel in such a way that by losing their life they would be saved. When they drank from that cup they signed a blank check of solidarity with him and his cause. They pledged themselves to full communion with him and he with them.

Today we are bidden to ponder Christ’s question, “Can you drink the cup? Do you want this communion with me?” We are tempted to join Jesus’ followers who too easily answer, “Yes! We want to see your glory!” Like the disciples who asked Jesus where they should prepare for him to go through his passover sacrifice, we facilely thank God for the eucharistic presence. We behave with reverence in our temples and pray, “I am not worthy ... but only say the word” before we process to the altar to receive the Eucharist. But Christ doesn’t let his disciples off so easily. After he said, “Take and drink,” he said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.” That was what they imbibed. That was what they took in so that it could become a part of their inmost self.

When Augustine taught about the Eucharist he offered these time-honored insights:

So now, if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle Paul speaking ... “You are the body of Christ, member for member” [1 Cor. 12.27]. ... You are saying “Amen” to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. ... Be a member of Christ’s body, then, so that your “Amen” may ring true!

When we take our place in the Communion procession, Christ invites us not just to see and touch and taste. He calls us beyond our hymns of praise to where we can truly grasp what he offers and allow it to grasp us.

We cannot allow our marvel at the transformation of bread and wine to obscure how we are called to allow ourselves to be consecrated. Christ present in the Eucharist says to us, “Receive what you are and become what you receive; be flesh and blood given for the life of the world.”

Sister Mary McGlone.

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