

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 6:51

R₁. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven,
says the Lord; / whoever eats this bread will live forever.

R₂. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel Mark 14:12-16, 22-26; L168B

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,

when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, Jesus' 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, 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.

Reflecting on the Gospel

A middle schooler looked over the menu of the fine restaurant. The waiter had given her a cloth napkin. That's how she knew it was a "fine" restaurant. As she read the headings of the menu there were some strange-sounding titles: antipasti, vegetali, pesci, carni. But under the carni heading there were some familiar dishes. But to be sure, she finally asked her mother, "What's carni?" "It's plural for 'meats,' but literally, 'carne' means 'flesh,'" was the reply. That would do. She loved meat, even though she didn't like to think of it as flesh.

The graphic image of "body and blood" comes from the ancient world where the body is flesh and "blood is life" (Deut 12:23). The bread and wine of the eucharistic banquet become the Body and Blood of Christ, in a *transubstantive* way.

The gospel reading for today is Mark's version of the Last Supper, which for him was in the context of the Passover meal. Even the singing of the hymn, which Mark is certain to include, is an integral part of the Passover to this very day. But according to the Synop-

tic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) Jesus gave new meaning to the Passover meal. The bread that he takes, blesses, breaks, and shares is his Body. The cup of thanksgiving that is shared is his covenantal Blood. Anyone who has been to a Jewish Seder meal likely has a profound appreciation for these symbols of bread and wine, and how they were appropriated in the Christian tradition. The Passover meal, which commemorated the people's delivery from Egypt, would now commemorate Jesus' death and ultimate delivery from death to resurrection. Our participation in consuming the bread and wine is a participation in the life, death, and subsequent resurrection of Jesus.

We who gather around the table of the Eucharist (which is a Greek word meaning "thanksgiving") are fed by Christ and become one in him. The eucharistic feast actually causes the unity, which is why it is scandalous to have disunity at such a meal, as Paul reminded the Corinthians. The celebration of the Body and Blood of Christ is much more than the celebration of something to be revered. By necessity, the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ causes the unity shared by Christians by their participation in the eucharistic feast. That unity was Jesus' own desire expressed by his prayer to the Father. May we be instruments of that unity by our own share in that same Eucharist.

Living the Paschal Mystery

Catholicism is a sacramental faith. We are an earthy people, needing to touch, taste, see, smell, and feel. Is it any wonder that the way we connect with the incarnation of God is to consume the Body and Blood of that incarnation? Rather than merely listen to the word of God, we consume that Word of God made flesh. The sacramental reality reaches something deep within. Our faith is not



simply a head trip, or the summary of what can be learned in books. Our faith is something we experience with our senses. We taste bread; we drink wine. By consuming this sacramental meal we participate in the life of Christ and his paschal mystery.

The very word “incarnation” has “carne” (flesh) in its root. We can say that the “incarnation” of the word of God is the “enfleshment” of the Word of God. The graphic nature of the image might repulse us. But we are not disembodied spirits upon this earth. We are earthy, organic omnivores. Our sustenance comes from consumption, and our spiritual sustenance comes from consumption as well. The bread and wine, our sacramental meal, is our living the paschal mystery.

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Today’s celebration of the Body and Blood of the Lord originated in the Diocese of Liege in 1246, under the title of the feast of Corpus Christi. In the reforms of Vatican II, Corpus Christi was joined with the feast of the Precious Blood (July 1) to become the solemnity of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Today’s solemnity focuses on Jesus’ gift of the Eucharist, the “source and summit” of our life together as the church. Today’s gospel is Mark’s account of the Last Supper. Jesus gives new meaning to the ancient Passover ritual.

Focusing the First Reading

Exod 24:3-8

The ancient Israelites believed that life itself was contained in blood—blood, therefore, belonged to God alone (which is why even today a devout Jew will never eat any meat that is not completely drained of blood). As such, blood was revered as life and as a means of purification. In today’s reading from Exodus, Moses returns to the Israelite camp from Sinai where the Lord gave Moses the law. To affirm their unanimous acceptance of the law, the people sacrifice animals to God. During the ritual, Moses splashes half of the sacrificed animals’ blood on the altar, a symbol of God, and then sprinkles the other half on the people, as a sign of their belonging to God through this covenant.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18 (13)

Psalm 116 is also the responsorial psalm for Holy Thursday. The latter part of Psalm 116 is the prayer of someone desperately ill and facing death. Yet despite his distress, the psalmist expresses his trust in God and gratefully acknowledges the many blessings he has experienced. With confidence in God’s continued mercy, the psalmist continues to offer public acts of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, “tak[ing] up” the “cup of salvation” in humility and hope.

Focusing the Second Reading

Heb 9:11-15

This understanding of the sacredness of blood is key to the theology of the letter to the Hebrews. The crucified Jesus is both priest and victim, whose own blood cleanses us of our sins (as the blood of sacrificed animals cleansed the Israelites in their worship [first reading]) and seals a new covenant between God and those he calls in Christ.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

How can we be “Eucharist” to another? How can we bring the Eucharist from our church into the world?

How do our own family rituals at dinner-time and around the family table reflect the Eucharist?

What ministries and projects of our parish are especially inspired by or connected to our celebration of the Eucharist?

The word Eucharist means “thanksgiving.” How can our sharing of the Body and Blood of the Lord be an act of thanksgiving, even when we gather under the most painful of circumstances?