

Body and Blood of Christ 2021

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 + Exodus 24:3-8

“...Having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and 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 aloud to the people, who answered, ***‘All that the Lord has said, we will heed and 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.’***”

Exodus describes how, when Israel became a people at Sinai, Moses acted as mediator between God and his people. He told them what God required of them as their part of the covenant. They signified their acceptance of these conditions by performing rites familiar in religions of that age and culture. They build an altar, sacrificed animals and sprinkled blood. They declared publicly their commitment to obey the commandments of God. This obligation was ratified when Moses cast over them the blood of the animals their young men had slaughtered.

Fortunately, we don't slaughter animals for sacrifice anymore nor do we sprinkle blood. (Imagine the women of Israel trying to get the blood stains out of their husbands' white garments and everyone else that day who got splattered!) Here in the US, we used to have ritual slaughtering of thousands of turkeys every Thanksgiving. Now we just go to the supermarket. We as a nation would ratify through our Thanksgiving meal all that we as a nation was thankful for in our lives. Remember that the Greek word for Thanksgiving is ***‘Eucharist.’***

We don't slaughter animals for sacrifice, but we do enact the last supper where Jesus stood in for the lamb to be slaughtered. We don't bless and ratify the people who pledged through our recitation of the Creed our commitment to God what we believe with the blood of lambs or bulls, but we do use Holy Water as a sign of our Baptismal Promises. We don't sit down and eat a meal from the portions of the animals that we have sacrificed, but we do partake of the Body and Blood of Christ truly present in the Bread and Wine.

Jesus took bread, blessed it in accord with custom, and then gave it to his disciples, describing it as his body. He took a cup saying, “This is the blood of the Covenant,”

the same words that Moses used in Exodus of the animal blood with which he had sprinkled the people as a sign of their commitment. To take the blood of Christ, is to commit oneself to live according to his teaching. This blood would be poured out for many, words reminiscent of the Isaiah Servant song. Many here means all, a fact shown clearly from a parallel in Paul's letter to the Romans. Previously, Jesus had identified with the Servant when he described his death as a ransom for many.

Jesus adds a saying about his drinking new wine in the kingdom of God. This reminds us that the Eucharist is an *eschatological gift*; it is for the *last times*. With the death of Jesus, the final days have begun and will end with his return. The new wine is now a reality.

Before I joined the Marianist my mom would have me drive her to Emmanuel Parish on Tuesday evenings during the summer where they had Adoration and Benediction. The Marianist took over the parish and she liked going in the evening during that time of the year when the sun was still up after the service. But it was after dinner and sometimes very warm in the church, conditions that make it very hard for me to stay awake. But my mom was a real trouper and usually stayed attentive, except for this one night that I will always remember. Just as I was about to doze off a loud noise reverberated throughout the church that sounded like the End of Times Parousia! Everyone almost jumped out of their seats, even my mom. And then she started to laugh, eventually uncontrollably. I was shocked at first until I realized what had happened; the organist fell asleep and slumped over onto the keyboards with all the organ stops at full throttle.

Later I told my mom that I felt she had spoiled the Adoration time, but mom just replied that the Lord was happy just to have us there, whether half-awake or half-asleep. That always stuck with me, especially during the times when I had volunteered for Hospice. I had the privilege to sit with several people during their last hours of life, and it seemed like I was at Adoration, except being in the presence of the Risen Lord, I was now in the presence of something very similar, only a departing.

As Paula Huston writes in Give Us This Day, "We set off behind a *Water-Bearer*, following him bewilderedly down unfamiliar passageways, arriving finally at an unknown destination in a neighborhood we've never been before.

But once we climb the stairs to the ***Upper room***, we realize where we are: finally at home with God where we belong. And thanks to the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood we can stay and share in the divine life.”

Hopefully at one point in our lives we will recognize the Divine Presence in our coming and going, whether at births or deaths, a sacredness that reminds us we are always in the presence of divine life whether at Eucharist or in our daily lives.