

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116 (115); Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God

Mark 14:12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Mark 14:26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

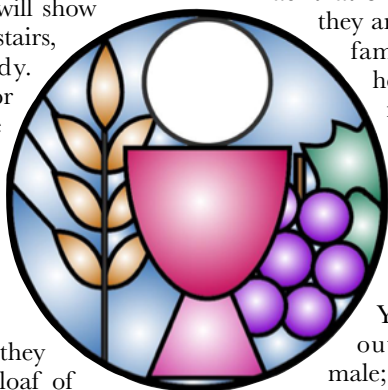
INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Lord's Supper, as an event in the life of the historical Jesus, combines a proclamation of the Kingdom of God

and an interpretation of the death of Jesus. In all probability, it was not Passover, but undoubtedly the context is the feast is significant.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night,



Thought for the day

Hospitality is deeply embedded in human nature and to say someone is hospitable is a lovely compliment. It is no accident that Jesus made use of table fellowship to give people a concrete experience of the indiscriminate love and compassion of God. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we experience again that proclamation of the Kingdom. We join our prayer with the prayer of Jesus and the great events of salvation are made present in our time and place. Welcomed as we are, it is our calling then to show the same love and compassion in our daily lives.

Prayer

God of welcome and compassion: we thank you the Holy Eucharist, in which we know again your love and compassion. Help us to become what we have received. Amen.

and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." (Exodus 12:1-13)

KIND OF WRITING

These connected scenes are two *chreiai*, that is anecdotes about a figure. Both are action *chreiai*, with the first leading to the preparation for Passover and the second, combined with a *prophetic gesture*, interprets the death of Jesus.

Prophetic gestures are common in the OT and the NT. By an unusual action, usually with accompanying words, the protagonist illustrates a message in order to shock and attract attention. In the case of Jesus, the action with the bread and the wine builds on the Passover symbolism and at the same times is the climax of the open table-fellowship by which Jesus made the preaching of the kingdom concrete.

MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	PAUL
Matt 26:26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “ <i>Take, eat; this is my body.</i> ”	Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “ <i>Take; this is my body.</i> ”	Luke 22:19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he <u>had given thanks</u> , he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “ <i>This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.</i> ”	1 Cor 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he <u>had given thanks</u> , he broke it and said, “ <i>This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.</i> ”
27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “ Drink from it, all of you; 28 <i>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.</i> ”	23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, “ <i>This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.</i> ”	20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “ <u>This cup that is poured out for you is the <u>new covenant in my blood.</u></u> ”	25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “ <u>This cup is the <u>new covenant in my blood.</u> Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.</u> ”

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

There are four versions of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Take a moment to look at the chart above. Matthew and Mark resemble each other; Luke and Paul also resemble each other. All versions are influenced by the evolving liturgical traditions of different places. It is possible that the earliest form we can get back to would have looked something like this:

He took bread, and giving thanks [or: pronouncing a blessing],

broke [it] and said: “this is my body”. Likewise also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the covenant in my blood.”

Notice that the Roman Missal shows a further combining of texts.

ST PAUL

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, 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 Lord's death until he comes.” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 12 It is likely that the chronology in John is correct, which places the death of Jesus on the afternoon / evening of Passover. But, even if the last supper was not a Passover meal historically, the con-

text was certainly present and the connections are clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Verse 13 This suggests a sense of caution, by means of a pre-arranged signal. Men did not carry water jars.

Verse 14 A strong tone of authority. In any case, it is within the week of Passover.

Verse 15 This completes the reply to the disciples' request.

Verse 16 A very succinct fulfilment, suggesting God's plan is unfolding.

Verse 22 The action with the bread is interpreted by the words. Looking forward historically, this gesture interprets the death and provides those present with a path of understanding. The message is that Jesus' death will be their source of life and nourishment.

Verse 23 The important action here is the distribution and drinking. The giving points to Jesus' death as a gift. The drinking points to the life received by those who take part in it.

Verse 24 The connection with the covenant is made clear. There is also an echo of the Suffering Servant poems in Isaiah 40-55.

Verse 25 This makes the vital link between Jesus' proclamation and the outcome of his life. In our Western tradition, the death is really cut off from the life—a sudden payment of a price. But in the NT, the death of Jesus is of one piece with his ministry. The ministry not only leads to the death (historically) but the death brings about the kingdom (theologically). The language is apocalyptic and looks to the future fulfilment.

Verse 26 The link with Mount of Olives makes it clear that we have been dealing all along with the meaning of Jesus' death.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The symbolic gesture of Jesus at the Last Supper symbolised the offering of himself that he would make on Calvary, giving his life for others. Sometimes we also are called to give our lives for others. We can do this grudgingly or with a generous heart. What difference has it made for you when you were able to give yourself freely?

2. In his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, ‘A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is essentially fragmented’. What has helped you to be aware of the importance of the link between the Eucharist and your lifestyle?

3. Jesus involved his disciples both in the preparation for the Last Supper and in its celebration. Recall times when you had a heightened awareness of participation and involvement in the Mass. What helped to give you this awareness? Are there lessons from these experiences that you can bring with you to the Sunday Mass?

PRAYER

God ever faithful, you have made a covenant with your people in the gift of your Son, who offered his body for us and poured out his blood for all.

As we celebrate this Eucharistic sacrifice, build up your Church by deepening with you us the life of your covenant and by opening our hearts to those in need.

For this reason, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant

Heb 9:11 But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

Heb 9:15 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Although appropriate to the feast, this reading does need careful handling. It is almost impossible for people brought up on the *Anselmian* doctrine of redemption not to read the medieval theology back into a first century text. The Letter to the Hebrews comes from a completely different context and reflects a radically different set of concerns.

The Letter teaches that Jesus is a priest (unexpectedly, because he was of course a layman) but not because of spilling of blood and suffering but on account of prayer, faithfulness and communion. The biblical roots of this radically different priesthood lay not in Levi but in Melchizedek. The teaching of Hebrews is consistent with the ministry of Jesus who was himself an insistent critic of the Temple “system.” In this way, Jesus’ ministry and death broke down for ever the ancient distinction of sacred and profane.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Hebrews is cited by Clement of Rome, so the Letter is not later than 95/96 AD. Timothy (13:23) seems to be still in ministry, in the second generation Pauline churches, yielding a date some time after 60 AD at the earliest. The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD obliged a radical re-think, giving birth to Rabbinic Ju-

daism as a religion of the book. Given the tremendous focus on Temple and priesthood in Hebrews, it is possible that the Letter was also a deeply considered response to the catastrophic ending of Temple sacrifice.

The author is unknown. All we can say that s/he was a master of Greek language and rhetoric, was highly educated (Middle Platonism), and consistently used the Septuagint (the Greek OT or LXX).

The title “To the Hebrews” is both secondary and misleading. The Letter was addressed to a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians, experiencing some kind of harassment. In all probability, it was written to Roman Christians by a Roman Christian teacher, writing from abroad.

KIND OF WRITING

Hebrews is perhaps the most culturally sophisticated document in the NT. It moves between doctrinal sections and exhortations. In a way, it is a sermon which itself contains several sermons (and not unlike Deuteronomy, also a sermon with sermons within). Our passages comes from the central section on the priesthood of Jesus, 7:1-10:39. The writer sets a complex pattern of fulfillment, abolition and perfect realisation. His use of Middle Platonism—cf. the ideal transcendent world of the greater, more perfect tent—places him in the same category as Philo of Alexandria, another culturally adept Jew of the period.

RELATED PASSAGES

And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” (Hebrews 2:13)

Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’ (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).” Then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. (Hebrews 10:7, 9)

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. (Hebrews 13:12–13)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 11 The good things are perhaps access to God and cleansing of conscience (vv. 8-9). The Temple in Jerusalem was a sign of the more perfect sanctuary in God’s presence. This transcendent place of meeting is not of human construction or creation. Jesus took worship beyond appearances and into the real presence of God.

Verse 12 Both continuity and difference place a role here. Unlike the earthly priesthood with its repeated sacrifices, Jesus entered into the true Holy of Holies on high and brought about final and full redemption. Redemption here means being set free. The earthly priests made use of animal blood; in contrast, Jesus comes with his own blood, that is, his very self. This inner disposition of Jesus is repeatedly underlined in Hebrews: Heb 2:13; 10:7, 9 (see above).

Verses 13-14 Technically, this is an *a fortiori* argument (along the lines “if so... how much more”). The reason for mentioning the heifer is perhaps the slaughtering *outside the camp*, just as Jesus was put to death outside the city. See Heb 13:12-13 above. Jesus thus fulfils and does away with the OT priesthood.

Verse 15 The writer returns to the significant theme of the new covenant, with a background Jeremiah and a foreground the Last Supper. How can the death of Jesus set us free from sin? He makes for us the journey to God through his fidelity and obedience and his communion with us shows us God’s love and forgiveness reaching into the heart of human brokenness. Thus, in him, we have moved from the first covenant prohibitions and transgressions to the new covenant in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What is your understanding of “the great events that give us new life in Christ”? Does Hebrews speak to me?
2. In Jesus, we come into the very presence of God himself. How “Jesus-centred” is my life of faith and prayer?

PRAYER

God of the covenants, you hold out to us an example of faithfulness and communion in Jesus and in him you offer us our inheritance as your children. Help us receive with joy these gifts of grace and to live our new covenant with the his own fidelity of heart and life.

All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient

Ex. 24:3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." 4 And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. 7 Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." 8 Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In a time when many biblical expressions have lost their natural resonance, it may be that even so basic a word as covenant not longer really means much. It would be interesting to replace it, at least mentally, with the word treaty in the reading above (cf. "the cup of the new and everlasting treaty"). At the very least, it implies "signing up" for something and that sense of commitment might be a good place to start. The significance of this kind of the religious symbolism / language continues in the New Testament, e.g. He 9:18-22.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

- 1:1–15:21 The story of oppression in Egypt and the exodus.
- 15: 22–18:27 Israel's journey through the desert to Mount Sinai
- 19: 1–24: 11 The covenant on Mount Sinai
- 24: 12–31: 18 The Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle
- 32: 1–34: 35 Golden Calf incident; covenant renewed
- 35: 1–40: 38 The Tabernacle is built; God's glory descends upon it

Exodus is not history we would understand it. It is rather a theological reading

of the past with a firm eye to contemporary religious practices at the time of writing. There are problems of historical corroboration with the following "facts": the presence of Israel in Egypt; the lack of any specific information about particular pharaohs; the lack of evidence for the exodus itself and indeed for the entry into the land. At the same time, the book shows signs of sources within it. For example, it looks as if all the material about the Tabernacle in Ex 25-31 and 35-40 has been added to a fundamentally Deuteronomistic account (D). This added material reflects the priestly interested precisely in the Tabernacle and is evidence that the final editing was done at priestly hands (P).

The last event recorded is the release in King Jehoiachin in 561 BC) in 2 Kgs 25: 27- 30. Thus a post-exilic context seems not unreasonable. For our particular text, it seems clear that vv. 3-8 reflect a tradition independent of vv. 1-2 and 9-11.

KIND OF WRITING

Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) treaties show the following features:

- a. Identification of the Covenant Giver
- b. The Historical Prologue
- c. The Stipulations
- d. The Provision for Deposit and Periodic Public Reading
- e. The List of Witnesses to the Treaty
- f. The Blessings and Curses
- g. The Ratification Ceremony

Exodus 20 contains the first three elements above (a, b and c) and Ex 24:3-8, is a ratification ceremony (g).

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Cf. Gen 15:17-21 and Exod 2:6-9.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 3 The references seem to be to the Decalogue ("words", Exodus 20) and to the laws ("ordinances"; Exodus 21). Earlier in the narrative, the people had made a similar commitment (Ex 19:8; 20:16).

Verse 4 Writing it all down again marks the seriousness of the undertaking. The symbolism is clear: the altar = God; the twelve pillars = all Israel.

Verse 5 Sacrifices establish the relationship with the transcendent God. Young men have to be used because there was as yet, in the biblical narrative, no priesthood. Peace offerings were communion sacrifices because the people ate the meat.

Verse 6 The blood, symbol of life, is sacred. In kosher law, blood is highly polluting because of its immediate link with life, God and the sacred. The division may reflect covenant curses. Cf. Jer 34:18–20).

Verse 7 The repetition here is awkward and may point to some even earlier version behind parts of the narrative. The repetition of commitment forms a kind of frame.

Verse 8 Moses speaks the performative words, which seal the covenant. The blood dashed, perhaps on the symbolic pillars in purification and atonement, binds the people to their oath and covenant with YHWH. Some communion of life between Israel and God is intended. Even if the precise meaning of the gesture is not explained, the sealing of the covenant is sufficiently clear.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. A useful experiential way into a passage which could seem very remote might be to reflect on your own experience of commitment (e.g. the marriage covenant, or indeed any life-long commitment). What helped me to make the commitment? What kept me faithful? Similar questions could be asked on the basis of baptism (our entry into the new covenant).

2. The mass, too, is a kind of covenant renewal ceremony, as it apparent in the words over the cup. When did I myself come to realise that mass "binds" me to Gospel living? How has that touched my life?

3. The words of the people—all that the Lord has spoke we will do and we will be obedient—imply a deep listening to the word of the Lord before undertaking living it out in obedience. What is my own experience of such listening? What about my experience of the scriptures as the word of God?

PRAYER

God of all grace, we commit ourselves to the new covenant you have established with us in Jesus Christ and we ask your continued help in living out our baptismal promises.

THE LITURGY

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116 (115); Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading is chosen for today, Corpus Christi, to bring out some of the Old Testament language and thought which lie behind the expression “blood of the covenant” found in the Gospel reading and, of course, in the words of consecration over the cup.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 116 (115 in the liturgical numbering) fits extremely well not only because it takes up the theme of “vows” to the Lord, but also because the cup points forward to cup in the Gospel. The appointed response is very helpful.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Exodus 24:3-8

At every Mass we here the words “the blood of the new and eternal covenant” and we may wonder what such words might mean. Part of the background is in today’s first reading, when the people of Israel commit themselves to the covenant and the commandments using basins (!) of blood. The link between liturgy and life, worship and discipleship could not be clearer.

Second reading

Hebrews 9:11-15

Our reading comes from the long and carefully argued Letter to the Hebrews. It teaches that Jesus’ death was not simply a better version of the old priesthood but that he replaced it with an altogether different kind of priesthood. The “quantum” shift is that Jesus can help us precisely *because he is like us and not because he is different from us.*

Gospel

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

As we listen, notice the important line about not drinking the cup until he drinks it “new in the Kingdom of God.”

This makes the vital link between the proclamation of Jesus and his destiny. Ultimately, his destiny was also part of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 8 June

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Today we begin reading from 2 Corinthians and, as usual, after the greeting, there is a thanksgiving. Much is made of the exchange of consolation between Paul and the Christians in Corinth.

Tuesday 9 June *St Columba, Abbot*

Colossians 1:24-29

St Columba experienced a good deal of suffering so this reflection precisely on suffering is very fitting for the feast and, perhaps, for our own lives too.

Wednesday 10 June

2 Corinthians 3:4-11

Our reading is a little dense today. Paul is contrasting the how things were before Christ and how things are now that Christ has come. He refers to a biblical tradition:

Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. (Ex 34:29-30)

Thursday 11 June *St Barnabas, Apostles*

Acts 11:21-26, 13:1-3

The excerpts from Acts 11 and 13 are chosen to illustrate the ministry of Barnabas. The famous line about when the disciples were first called Christians is mentioned here.

Friday 12 June *Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9

We tend (alas) to think of the God of the OT as remote and violent. This delightful reading from Hosea should put us right.

Saturday June

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

This is a terrific reading and many aspects could be underlined. Perhaps the centre is this: *All this is from God, who rec-*

onciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor 5:18-19)

REFLECTIONS

The Christ of Communion

Brother Alois, prior of Taizé (IEC 2012)

If you had asked Brother Roger what the essential of the Christian faith was, the focal-point of the faith confessed in baptism, he might have quoted the words of Saint John, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). For him, the heart of the Gospel was there. The vision of God as a stern judge had wreaked havoc in the consciences of many. He took the opposite tack, affirming that “all God can do is love.”

He would also sometimes tell the young people gathered in Taizé, “If Christ were not risen, we would not be here.” The resurrection is central to the faith; it is a sign that God loves without limits. It brought together the disciples dispersed by Good Friday and it continues to bring Christians together; its first fruit is the new communion born of its mystery.

The centre of our faith is Christ, the Risen Lord present among us, who is in a personal bond of love with us and who by a common baptism brings us together. Brother Roger called this reality “the Christ of communion.”

In his last book, Brother Roger wrote: “Christ is communion.... He did not come to earth to start one more religion, but to offer to all a communion in God... ‘Communion’ is one of the most beautiful names of the Church.”

Personally, I can say that it was this vision of the Church as communion that struck me on my first visit to the hill of Taizé. Still very young, I was impressed on the one hand by the prayer and silence, but also by the communion which was lived out concretely—the Gospel lived not individually, but in community. And I can affirm that, as a Catholic, it was in Taizé that I discovered more deeply the catholicity of the Church.