

The Eucharist

Are the bread and wine really the Body and Blood of Christ?

Looking at the Passover from the lamb's point of view, every time the celebration was repeated, it certainly wasn't merely symbolic, it was total commitment. Scripture tells us that even Judas rejected Jesus' teaching (John 6:70-71). If in fact Jesus was speaking symbolically in John 6 as some non-Catholics suggest, He should have been severely chastised for allowing so many to leave Him because He did not call them back and explain that He was speaking figuratively and not literally (John 6:66). Many souls were lost forever because of His negligence. Instead, what do we find? He then asks the twelve if they intend to leave also. The pattern is clear:

The time is that of the celebration of the Passover, the most important national feast of the Israelites, one year before Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The place is Capernaum on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has in the days just preceding this event, in Matthew 14:13-21 and John 6:1-15, fed the 5,000 men (women and children were not counted) with 12 baskets left over, representing that there was enough for the whole church (12 apostles, 12 tribes). He has also most recently just completed the feeding of the 4,000 men (Matthew 15:32-38) with 7 baskets left over; this number being the number of pagan tribes who had occupied the promised land when Joshua completed the exodus and let the twelve tribes into it: There is enough left for all the pagans.

- Jesus recognizes that the crowds are not following Him because they have seen signs, but because they are looking for free food [citations from John unless otherwise noted] (6:26).
- The disciples ask for a sign, saying that Moses gave their ancestors bread [they are still looking for free food] (6:30,31).
- He swears an oath (the Latin for this oath is *sacramentum*) and tells them that God gives them the true bread from Heaven (6:32). This oath is variously translated as Amen, Amen; or Truly, Truly; or I tell the truth; or some other variant but relates back to Deuteronomy 17:6 where 2 or more witnesses are required to testify to put someone to death and in this case Jesus is assuming the responsibility of both witnesses. This points out the gravity of the situation -- it is a life and death situation. Jesus can swear both parts because He is God and God did just this same thing when dealing with Abraham (Genesis 15:17).
- They believe His oath and ask for this bread (6:34).
- He tells them that He is the bread that comes down from Heaven [the sign they asked for] (6:35).
- They grumble [they expected a visible sign -- free food] (6:41).
- He reaffirms the oath and repeats the statement (6:47-48).

- They argue among themselves about the meaning of His statement (6:52).
- He swears yet again the oath and tells them four times in succession that they must "eat His flesh and drink His blood" [the Greek word used here for 'eat' literally means 'chew, gnaw'] (6:53-56). In Hebrew, the expression "eat one's flesh," when taken figuratively, means to backbite, to slander, to persecute. If Jesus had been speaking figuratively, He would have been commanding them, under pain of eternal damnation, to slander Him. The hearers know that He is speaking literally, not figuratively.
- He then repeats the statement that He is the bread that came down from Heaven (6:58).
- They say that it is a hard teaching (6:60) [see Leviticus 17:10 for prohibition against drinking blood, the result of which would have been expulsion from the tribe]. In fact, the breaking down of the tribal barriers and the unification into one family of God is what Jesus is accomplishing.
- He predicts His ascension and teaches that the condition of the physical is unimportant but that the condition of the soul determines everlasting life [this is what He promised for eating His flesh and drinking His blood] (6:62-63).
- Many leave Him because they have not accepted the sign they asked for **[the only time recorded in scripture where disciples abandon Jesus for doctrinal reasons]** (6:66).
- He asks the Apostles if they want to leave too (6:67). He doesn't say "I really blew this teaching, I was only speaking symbolically", does He? Every place in Holy Scripture where He has been misunderstood, He corrects the misunderstanding but He doesn't do so here because there is no misunderstanding.
- Peter answers that He has the words of eternal life [he who eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood will be raised up on the last day] (6:68).

The time is now one year later, again at the time of the Passover, and we are now in Jerusalem.

- Jesus says that those who do not believe His words will be condemned on the last day and that the words are not His but those of the Father who has commanded what is to be said and how it is to be said (12:48-50).
- During the Passover meal Jesus takes bread, says the blessing, and breaks it saying "this is My Body (the Lamb of God) take it and eat" [note that He did not self-communicate] (Matthew 26:26). It is important to note here what is said in John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When He speaks, He creates. It is interesting to note here that to the Hebrew mind, to bless anything and pronounce a thanksgiving over it are not

two actions but one which is summed up in a single word *barak* which translates into a single Greek word *eucharisteo*, from which we get the name *Eucharist*.

- Jesus takes the cup of wine and says "drink from it, this is My Blood" [again no self-communicating] and He also says that this is "the blood of the covenant" [the only time Jesus ever uses the word 'covenant' - a family bond which is sealed in blood (not figuratively but literally)] (Matthew 26:27-28).
- Jesus says that He will not drink wine until the day when He is in the kingdom of His father (Matthew 26:29)
- Judas, having participated in the meal but not discerning the body and blood of Jesus, leaves to betray Him as foretold at Capernaum (John 13:30).
- Jesus institutes His priesthood, bestowing upon the Apostles a kingdom like the one the Father has bestowed on Him so that they may be able to eat and drink at the table of the Lord (Luke 22:29).
- Jesus and the Apostles leave the Upper Room without having completed the Passover liturgy; the fourth cup (the cup of completion) hasn't been drunk (Mark 14:26). The hymn they sang was most likely the Great Hallel (Psalms 114 through 118) which preceded the drinking of the fourth cup in the liturgy.
- Jesus prays in the garden that the cup be taken from Him [the final cup signifying completion of the Passover liturgy] (Mark 14:36).
- On the cross Jesus drinks wine (the cup of completion) from the hyssop branch (the instrument used to sprinkle blood on the door posts and lintel in the original Passover), declares "It is finished" and dies (John 19:30). What was finished? The Passover liturgy started in the Upper Room wherein Jesus, the first-born Son of God, became the High Priest and the sacrificial lamb. Not a symbolic sacrifice but a very real one which began in the Upper Room and ended at Calvary.

The time is now some 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

- Paul declares that Christ our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed and we are to keep the feast (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). What feast is this? The feast of the New Passover (New Covenant) where we share in the Bread of Life proclaimed by Jesus (Eucharist). As in the original Passover, if you don't eat the Lamb you will die. For the original Passover this was a physical death and in this New Passover it is the loss of everlasting life. In the original Passover if the lamb had been killed, it's blood sprinkled on the door post, and the lamb roasted but not eaten, the first-born of the family would not have been passed over; the instructions on what they were to do were very explicit (see Exodus 12:7-9).
- Paul tells us that if anyone eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment upon himself (1

Corinthians 11:29). They will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27). In other words, anyone who does this action unworthily makes His death meaningless for them. These are very strong words and are not to be taken lightly. Remember what happened to Judas whom Holy Scripture tells us did just that.

Is all of this a hard teaching? You bet it is! One must believe what has been recorded in Holy Scripture. This takes faith. All the requirements are clearly stated but fly into the face of reason. Again, we've got to look at the sacrifice from the perspective of the Lamb of God rather than from the perspective of an observer. This is why it is written that "Blessed are those who do not see but yet believe." We must take the advice of the Blessed Virgin and "Do whatever He tells you." If we are chauvinists and refuse to take the advice of a woman, then we must still do it because God the Father said at the Transfiguration "Listen to Him."