

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

[Reading I: Exodus 24:3-8](#)

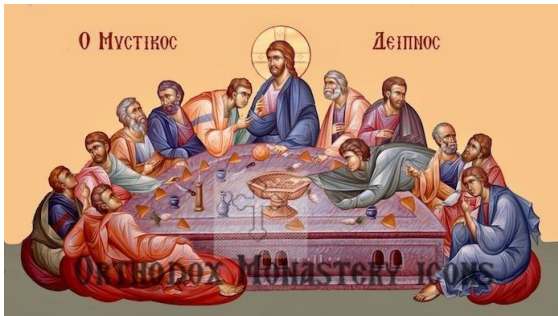
[Responsorial Psalm: 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18](#)

[Reading II: Hebrews 9:11-15](#)

[Gospel: Mark 14:12-16, 22-26](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/060224.cfm>



On Holy Thursday, the church commemorated Christ's gift of himself at the Last Supper. It was one of several important themes of those holy days. As the church enters back into the ordinary action of God, our attention is drawn to the vital role that the Eucharist plays in our lives week by week. In gathering for the Eucharistic liturgy each Sunday, we reconnect with the source of our life and our mission in life, to be the Body of Christ in this time and this place.

The Cycle B readings emphasize the blood aspect of the Body and Blood of Christ. Two themes are expressed. To understand these, one first needs to understand covenant.

Covenant is the bonding together of two individuals or groups into a common relationship. Ancient kings would establish a covenant with small villages. In this relationship, the king would protect the village as his own, and the village would honor and serve the king as their leader. The two had a common interest and a common life. Israel used this concept to describe God's relationship to them. God had chosen them to establish a relationship. God promised to protect them and called them to an ethical life.

In Catholic practice, we speak about two covenant celebrations. Baptism establishes a relationship between God and an individual and between an individual and the community. The person becomes a child of God, a daughter or son, a member of God's family. This covenant also links an individual to all other children of God. We become sisters and brothers to one another. With this covenant, we also have responsibilities to God and the other members of the Body of Christ.

The second covenant is celebrated in marriage. Two unrelated people are united into one life through God's love. They are no longer two but one, sharing everything. Their love for each other, their vulnerability, and their growth are all signs of God's love at work in them.

The first theme is that God established a covenant with Israel by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. At the Passover meal, the Israelites were showing their dependence upon God. In eating the Passover meal, they declared that they could not free themselves and needed God. The lamb was killed, and its blood was spread on the doorposts of the houses of the Israelites, and death did not touch them. God was their protector and savior.

Mark presents Jesus eating a Passover meal at the last supper, a meal which declares one's dependence upon God. In this meal, Jesus established a new covenant, a new relationship with God. Jesus offers "my blood of the covenant" to the disciples. In sharing the meal, they share in the life of Jesus, a life that is celebrated and strengthened each time a person shares in the Eucharist.

Secondly, the consequence of sharing life is expressed in the ritual at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Following Moses's encounter with God, he relates the principles and commandments of living God's life. The people accept these and pledge to live this life as God's people. To ritually express this, bulls were sacrificed, and the blood was poured on the altar as sharing with God

and sprinkled on the people. They both experienced and shared the same life by being connected through the one life in the blood. Blood was life to the Israelites.

We are not sprinkled with blood. Rather, we consume the blood that Christ has identified as his own. Some consequences flow from sharing in this life. The teachings that Jesus presents have a broader perspective and place greater responsibility on believers than simply some rules to be observed.

The call to forgive enemies, pray for persecutors, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, and live the fruits of the spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control, are all beyond our human abilities. Jesus asks the disciples (Mark 10:35), "Can you drink of the cup that I will drink?" Jesus says that not only can you, but you will share in this same life that Jesus lives. To share life with Jesus calls disciples to live radically.

When some of the more affluent Christians in Corinth gathered before the working members of the community, they shared the better portions, and only the leftovers remained for the poorer members. Paul challenged them: *"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself or herself and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself."* (1 Cor 11:29) Not only does a person share in the life of Christ, but one also shares in the life of the other members of the Body of Christ. This is expressed in the sharing of the common cup rather than individual cups.

In the Letter to the Galatians, Paul stresses the change that takes place in Christ: *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Gal 3: 27 – 28) All divisions between persons have been dissolved, and there is only one life in us, the life of Jesus.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is compared to the High Priest in Israel on the Day of Atonement. It was only on the Day of the Atonement that the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, which was considered God's throne room. After offering a sacrifice for himself and then for the people, he would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle some of the blood from the animals onto the Ark of the Covenant to make atonement for the nation's sins.

Jesus, in his death, gives his own blood to cleanse people of their sins. His blood has cleansed us and delivered us so that we may share in eternal life. We celebrate this as we drink the blood of Christ and allow Christ's life to flow within us. Christians do not need to wait for one day a year to reconnect with God. Every day offers the opportunity to be made new in Christ. Jesus is our constant mediator who works to keep us in relationship with God.

Themes:

Covenant

Eucharist as sacrifice

Passover meal

Christ's presence in the Eucharist

Reflection Questions:

What does blood symbolize to you? Have you needed blood or given blood?

What does covenant mean to you?

What does being in a relationship with God demand of you?

What new appreciation or insight have you gained about the Eucharist?

What are some of the different ways that is present in your life?

Suggestions for Prayer:

For the Church, many members yet one body: that we may grow in unity and love as we manifest Christ's saving love in the world

For courage to lay down our lives like Christ: that through our sharing in the Eucharist, we may be strengthened to give ourselves in loving service to all those to whom we are committed and to those who are in need

For grateful hearts: that we may grow in our awareness of all God's blessings and make use of all the opportunities that exist to use them

For strength of spirit: that we may embrace the sufferings and challenges of life with courage and allow God to lead us through them to new life

For a greater sharing in the Christian mission: that sent forth from the Eucharist, we may extend Christ's work and compassion into our families, neighborhoods, and workplaces each day

© Joseph Milner, 2024