

PART II: THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist: *Why is Our Understanding of 'Covenant' Important?*

In the next five reflections, I want to consider some ways in which we can come to a deeper theological and spiritual understanding of the Eucharist itself. In essence, a brief course on the Eucharist. This is important because I want to recall again the reflection by Pope Benedict XVI on the Fathers of church, specifically Origen of Alexandria when he said: We cannot authentically know something or someone without first falling in love, and we cannot authentically love what we don't know. And so this part of my reflections will help us to know and understand the Eucharist more deeply so that we can love the Lord more personally.

The first reflection, an entry point to consider the gift of the Eucharist, is for us to understand the meaning of 'Covenant'. Why is it important to understand 'Covenant' when we talk about the Eucharist?

The roots of the Eucharist begin with the Covenant that God established with the people of Israel. We live in an age of contracts, which can be agreed upon and dissolved easily. Covenants are not just contracts that can be made and discarded. Covenants establish serious, binding relationships. This has significant historical roots for the people of Israel and for us. Listen to the Book of Exodus. "But the Lord said: 'I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land' (Ex: 3: 7-8). As the Lord leads the people of Israel out of slavery, He establishes a Covenant, a living relationship with the people. He reveals Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And the living God offers to the people a relationship that is lived out through the Ten Commandments, presented by Moses as the mediator between God and the people.

Throughout the history of the people of Israel, their identity (how they understand themselves) is rooted in the Covenant. Their lives, their

worship, and their actions are all connected to the Covenant. They carry the Ten Commandments (the Covenant) with them in the Ark. Why? As a sign of God's presence and the source of their identity. And even though they often sin and stray from their fidelity to the Covenant, the prophets are sent to call them back again. Specifically, the prophet Jeremiah signals that a 'new covenant' would be established when he says: "See, days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke my covenant, though I was their master. But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31: 31-33).

The new covenant that Jeremiah prophesies is then fulfilled in Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5 Jesus says: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." Through the gift and mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus becomes the New Covenant, specifically as he offers his life on the Cross for our salvation. The self-gift of Jesus on the cross is the means through which Jesus lovingly seals the New Covenant for us. His presence signals something new. His presence among us is now the living, breathing relationship that is given to us, and as a result, the relationship we have with **the living God comes directly through Jesus, who is the new and eternal covenant.**

Reflection Questions

- 1 What difference does it make in your life that God says, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
- 2 How can we experience today this reality of "covenant" and live as God's people?
- 3 How do you grow in this covenantal relationship with God?

Resources

For additional reading, please see [Sacramentum Caritatis \(the sacrament of love\)](#) an exhortation written by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 on the Eucharist. In paragraph 9 he writes:

9. The mission for which Jesus came among us was accomplished in

the Paschal Mystery. On the Cross from which he draws all people to himself (cf. Jn 12:32), just before "giving up the Spirit," he utters the words: "it is finished" (Jn 19:30). In the mystery of Christ's obedience unto death, even death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:8), the new and eternal covenant was brought about. In his crucified flesh, God's freedom and our human freedom met definitively in an inviolable, eternally valid pact. Human sin was also redeemed once for all by God's Son (cf. Heb 7:27; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). As I have said elsewhere, "Christ's death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form." (18) In the Paschal Mystery, our deliverance from evil and death has taken place. In instituting the Eucharist, Jesus had spoken of the "new and eternal covenant" in the shedding of his blood (cf. Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). This, the ultimate purpose of his mission, was clear from the very beginning of his public life. Indeed, when, on the banks of the Jordan, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him, he cried out: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). It is significant that these same words are repeated at every celebration of Holy Mass, when the priest invites us to approach the altar: "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those who are called to his supper." Jesus is the true paschal lamb who freely gave himself in sacrifice for us, and thus brought about the new and eternal covenant. The Eucharist contains this radical newness, which is offered to us again at every celebration. (19)