

The Eucharist: *What is the connection to the 'Passover'?*

When we speak about the Eucharist, a word that often appears is 'Passover'. And so the question naturally arises in our minds and hearts: what is the connection between the Passover and the Eucharist?

In the Book of Exodus, the people of Israel commemorated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land by means of a celebration, a meal called the Passover. "Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every family must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household. You will keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole community of Israel assembled, it will be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They will take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ...But for you the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thereby, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you."

The Passover celebration, the meal, commemorates the astounding works of God for the people of Israel. In celebrating the Passover, they give thanks to God for leading them out of slavery and into freedom, and for establishing their identity as God's holy people. As for the Jewish people there is a week-long celebration which includes a number of rituals, but culminates in the Passover meal, the Seder meal. It is normally celebrated in the spring, and the date changes from year to year because it is not based on the Gregorian calendar but on the lunar calendar.

The commemoration of the Passover is then brought to a new level with Jesus. Jesus is the new and eternal covenant (as we saw last week), and is the very presence of God in the midst of the people. With the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, the living God in the flesh pours out His own blood for our salvation. It is no longer the blood of an animal on the doorpost of a house, but the blood of Jesus poured out on the wood of the cross that brings to each of us the gift of salvation.

And so **Jesus Himself becomes the new and eternal Passover**, the one who saves and rescues us from sin and death. In the Gospel of

Matthew we read: “Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.” (Matt. 16: 21).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that: “The Paschal mystery of Christ’s cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good news that the apostles, and the church following them are to proclaim to the world. God’s saving plan was accomplished ‘once for all’ by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ. (CCC 571)

“When the Church celebrates the mystery of Christ, there is a word that marks her prayer: “Today” - a word echoing the prayer her Lord taught her and the call of the Holy Spirit. This ‘today’ of the living God which man is called to enter is ‘the hour’ of Jesus’ Passover, which reaches across and underlies all history” (CCC 1165)

And so, when we gather for Mass, and especially on Sunday, we can appreciate even more deeply that through the saving action of Jesus, he becomes for us the new passover and we are blessed to be able to enter that mystery, by his invitation, and be renewed by his body and blood, which brings to each of us the gift of new life.

Reflection Questions

- 1 Even though we are no longer slaves in Egypt, what are some of the ways we still struggle to live freely as the people of God?
- 2 How does Jesus save and rescue still?
- 3 How has Jesus made his presence known in your own life?

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 10 he writes:

10. This leads us to reflect on the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. It took place within a ritual meal commemorating the foundational event of the people of Israel: their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This ritual meal, which called for the sacrifice of lambs (cf. Ex 12:1-28, 43-51), was a remembrance of the past, but at the same time a prophetic

remembrance, the proclamation of a deliverance yet to come. The people had come to realize that their earlier liberation was not definitive, for their history continued to be marked by slavery and sin. The remembrance of their ancient liberation thus expanded to the invocation and expectation of a yet more profound, radical, universal and definitive salvation. This is the context in which Jesus introduces the newness of his gift. In the prayer of praise, the Berakah, he does not simply thank the Father for the great events of past history, but also for his own "exaltation." In instituting the sacrament of the Eucharist, Jesus anticipates and makes present the sacrifice of the Cross and the victory of the resurrection. At the same time, he reveals that he himself is the true sacrificial lamb, destined in the Father's plan from the foundation of the world, as we read in The First Letter of Peter (cf. 1:18-20). By placing his gift in this context, Jesus shows the salvific meaning of his death and resurrection, a mystery which renews history and the whole cosmos. The institution of the Eucharist demonstrates how Jesus' death, for all its violence and absurdity, became in him a supreme act of love and mankind's definitive deliverance from evil.