

# THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

## LECTIONARY #168

### READING I Exodus 24:3-8

#### A reading from the Book of Exodus

When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the LORD has told us."

Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early the next day,

he erected at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls

as peace offerings to the LORD, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar.

Taking the book of the covenant, he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will heed and do." Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

Exodus = Ek-suh-duhs

Set the scene with a narrator voice and then change your energy to reflect the crowd's eagerness to do everything the Lord asks of them.

In the second part of the narrative, Moses puts into action the ritual that confirms the covenant the people have agreed to. Describe the preparation with a steady, even tone.

Again, use energy to reflect the crowd's response.

Read "blood of the covenant" distinctly. It will be echoed in the gospel and in the Eucharistic prayer.

### READING I

The solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, popularly known as Corpus Christi, evokes images of processions and a consecrated host in a tabernacle. However, today's readings root this celebration in Israel's salvation history, especially the Passover and the covenant ratified at Sinai through blood sacrifice. These memories and ceremonies help us understand Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and its effects. Exodus locates the Hebrews at Mount Sinai, after having been rescued from Egypt by the bloody Passover sacrifice of the

lambs and God's powerful hand. Moses has received the "words" (concise commands determined by one's individual conscience) and "ordinances" (rules decided by law courts), and he now presents them to the people who unanimously accept them. After Moses is sprinkled on the altar and the people, blood was believed to contain the life force that belonged to God alone, sprinkling both the altar and the people forges a bond between them. The Hebrews are now bonded to God in a new, covenantal way. Having twice heard the words of the covenant (Exodus 24:3, 7; see also Exodus 19:8) pillars represent the tribes entering into the

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18 (13)

R. I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

OR  
R. Alleluia.

How shall I make a return to the Lord

for all the good he has done for me?

The cup of salvation I will take up,

and I will call upon the name of the Lord.

I am your servant, the son of your

handmaid;

you have loosed my bonds.

To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,

and I will call upon the name of the Lord.

My vows to the Lord I will pay

in the presence of all his people.

READING II Hebrews 9:11-15

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters:

When Christ came as high priest

of the good things that have come to be,

passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,

not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation,

he entered once for all into the sanctuary,

not with the blood of goats and calves

but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

For if the blood of goats and bulls

and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes

can sanctify those who are defiled

so that their flesh is cleansed,

how much more will the blood of Christ,

who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished

to God,

cleanse our consciences from dead works

to worship the living God.

For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant:

since a death has taken place for deliverance

from transgressions under the first covenant,

those who are called may receive the promised

eternal inheritance.

Christians). Despite the diverse proposals  
for understanding the overall work, it is  
agreed that Hebrews provides profound  
insights into Christ's priesthood and sacri-  
fice, particularly the ways in which they  
relate to worship and ministry. Hebrews  
never mentions the Jerusalem temple  
but does refer to Israel's sanctuary and  
Levitical priesthood as described in the  
Pentateuch, especially Exodus. Through  
a series of reflections on the unique priest-  
hood of Melchizedek, and contrasting it  
with Israel's Levitical priesthood, Hebrews  
aligns Jesus with Melchizedek.  
Hebrews states that Jesus did not  
grasp his high priesthood, but rather he  
was chosen by the Father. We also read  
that he embraced human weakness by  
learning obedience through suffering.  
Today's account begins with Jesus' arrival  
in his heavenly destination, "the greater  
and more perfect tabernacle," in this sanc-  
tuary, he will serve forever as priest, and  
the effects of his priesthood will be dis-  
cerned by faith. In today's reading, we see  
contrasts between the Levitical priesthood  
and Christ's high priesthood. The Levitical  
sacrifices (animals) sanctified the people in

Paul's letter has long run-on sentences.  
Practice pausing.

Make clear the incompleteness of animal  
sacrifice versus the definitive sacrifice of  
the blood of Christ.

The concluding paragraph should be read  
with joy. We are the beneficiaries of the  
new covenant.

and having been sprinkled by the blood,  
they are charged to obey and live out all  
the words of the Lord. This reading focuses  
our attention on the sacrificial and cove-  
nantal nature of today's celebration, as well  
as its connection with the words of God  
that are central to the Christian life.  
Few New Testament writ-  
ings are as enigmatic as  
the Letter to the Hebrews. Its author is  
unknown, it is more a homily than a letter,  
and it was directed to a mixed group of  
Christians, rather than to Hebrews (Jewish-

READING II

SEQUENCE Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem

Blood is poured and flesh is broken,  
 Yet in either wondrous token  
 Christ entire we know to be.

Whoso of this food partakes,  
 Does not rend the Lord nor break;

Christ is whole to all that taste;

Thousands are, as one, receivers,  
 One, as thousands of believers,

Eats of him who cannot waste.

Bad and good the feast are sharing,  
 Of what divers dooms preparing,

Endless death, or endless life.

Life to these, to those damnation,  
 See how like participation

Is with unlike issues rife.

When the sacrament is broken,  
 Doubt not, but believe 'tis spoken,

That each sever'd outward token  
 Doth the very whole contain.

Nought the precious gift divides,  
 Breaking but the sign betides,

Jesus still the same abides,  
 still unbroken does remain.

[Shorter form begins here.]

Lo! the angel's food is given  
 To the pilgrim who has striven;

See the children's bread from heaven,  
 which on dogs may not be spent.

Truth the ancient types fulfilling,  
 Isaac bound, a victim willing,

Paschal lamb, its lifeblood spilling,  
 manna to the fathers sent:

Very bread, good shepherd, tend us,  
 Jesu, of your love befriend us,

You refresh us, you defend us,  
 Your eternal goodness send us

In the land of life to see.

You who all things can and know,  
 Who on earth such food bestow,

Grant us with your saints, though lowest,  
 Where the heavenly feast you show,

Fellow heirs and guests to be. Amen.

Alleluia.

The Gospel for today's solemnity recalls for us the Last Supper, as described by the Gospel of Mark. Reflecting on this event today, Jesus' final meal with his disciples is read against the backdrop of Passover, the covenant ratification from Exodus, and Hebrews' reflections on Jesus as High Priest. Mark's account of the Last Supper has three parts: preparing for the meal, predictions of Judas' betrayal, and the description of the meal which institutes the Eucharist. Today's reading includes the first and third parts, and eliminates the second.

GOSPEL

Just as his blood proclaims God's grace and mercy.

Finally, echoing Jeremiah 31:31-34,

Hebrews identifies Christ as the "mediator of a new covenant," "in this new covenantal relationship, Christ's death delivers us

"from transgressions under the first covenant" and leads us to the future promise of our eternal inheritance. Identifying Christ's sacrifice with the eternal promises made

to Abraham, Hebrews brings atonement, covenant, and promise together.

matters related to the flesh but were unable to cleanse consciences or effect redemption. In contrast, Christ's blood (not to be understood as a ransom for sin) cleanses the consciences of believers and redeems them from the power of evil. Levitical sacrifices are completed through fire, but Christ's sacrifice is completed "through the eternal Spirit," which fuses his earthly ministry to his death and exaltation. Thus, Christ's blood points not only to his sacrificial death, but also to his proclaimed message. In this way, Christ's teaching evokes faith and cleanses consciences,

Laud, O Zion, your salvation,  
 Laud with hymns of exultation,  
 Christ, your king and shepherd true:  
 Bring him all the praise you know,  
 He is more than you bestow.  
 Never can you reach his due.  
 Special theme for glad thanksgiving  
 Is the quick'ning and the living  
 Bread today before you set:  
 From his hands of old partaken,  
 As we know, by faith unshaken,  
 Where the Twelve at supper met.  
 Full and clear ring out your chanting,  
 Joy nor sweetest grace be wanting,  
 From your heart let praises burst:  
 For today the feast is holden,  
 When the institution olden  
 Of that supper was rehearsed.  
 Here the new law's new oblation,  
 By the new king's revelation,  
 Ends the form of ancient rite:  
 Now the new the old effaces,  
 Truth away the shadow chases,  
 Light dispels the gloom of night.  
 What he did at supper seated,  
 Christ ordained to be repeated,  
 His memorial never to cease:  
 And his rule for guidance taking,  
 Bread and wine we hallow, making  
 Thus our sacrifice of peace.  
 This the truth each Christian learns,  
 Bread into his flesh he turns,  
 To his precious blood the wine:  
 Sight has fail'd, nor thought conceives,  
 But a dauntless faith believes,  
 Resting on a power divine.  
 Here beneath these signs are hidden  
 Priceless things to sense forbidden;  
 Signs, not things are all we see:

TO KEEP IN MIND  
 Sequences originated as extensions  
 of the sung Alleluia before the  
 proclamation of the Gospel, although  
 they precede the Alleluia now. In  
 the thirteenth century, St. Thomas  
 Aquinas composed the hymn that is  
 now the sequence for the Most Holy  
 Body and Blood of Christ.

GOSPEL Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb,

Jesus' disciples said to him,

"Where do you want us to go

and prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

He sent two of his disciples and said to them,

"Go into the city and a man will meet you,

carrying a jar of water.

Follow him.

Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house,

"The Teacher says, 'Where is my guest room

where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'"

Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready.

Make the preparations for us there."

The disciples then went off, entered the city,

and found it just as he had told them,

and they prepared the Passover.

While they were eating,

he took bread, said the blessing,

broke it, gave it to them, and said,

"Take it; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them,

and they all drank from it.

He said to them,

"This is my blood of the covenant,

which will be shed for many.

Amen, I say to you,

I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine

until the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." Then, after singing a hymn,

they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The description of the meal contains

sparse details regarding its Passover ele-

ments, but it emphasizes the bread and

wine which embody Jesus' sacrificial offer-

ing. Significantly, Jesus' words not only rely

on the Passover ritual but also draw on the

blood of the covenant at Sinai. Just as the

first covenant at Sinai was ratified by blood

and created a bond between God and the

people, so too Jesus' shedding of his blood

offers all people a share in the life of the

victim. Thus, the sacrifice of Jesus the High

priest establishes a new covenant that will

reach fulfillment in the kingdom. S.L.

Use a steady, even tone to set the stage for the narrative.

Use a stronger, slower tone when reading dialogue.

Read with some surprise—Jesus' prediction unfolded with precision.

Emphasize all of the verbs.

Use a tone of regret for Jesus' prediction of his passion and death; Mark's account of this begins soon after this passage.

There is an unsolvable conundrum relating to the Last Supper: was it a Passover meal? Mark, Matthew, and Luke all see the supper as a Passover, whereas John states that Jesus was crucified on the day of preparation for the Passover (John 18:28). Despite Mark's confusing opening sentence, it is clear that he believes that Jesus eats a Passover meal with his disciples. Similar to his entry into Jerusalem, when he sent two disciples to retrieve a colt for him to ride (Mark 11:1-6), Jesus now sends two disciples into the city to make preparations for the Passover.