

EVENING MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (HOLY THURSDAY)

LECTIONARY #39

READING I Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14

A reading from the Book of Exodus

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall stand at the head of your calendar; you shall reckon it the first month of the year. Tell the whole community of Israel: On the tenth of this month every one of your families must procure for itself a lamb, one apiece for each household.

If a family is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join the nearest household in procuring one and shall share in the lamb in proportion to the number of persons who partake of it. The lamb must be a year-old male and without blemish. You may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house in which they partake of the lamb. That same night they shall eat its roasted flesh with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. »

The prescriptions of the Passover are dictated by God. This is the original event, not the holiday that commemorates it.

This is to be a communal act. No one is to be left out nor anything wasted.

The blood on the doorposts and lintels: a visceral sign of those who keep God's command.

READING I

Exodus describes regulations for the first Passover

—such a fundamental event in the lives of God's people that its significance is difficult to exaggerate.

Leading up to the first Passover, God

hears Israel's cries under the burden of servitude in Egypt (Exodus 2:23-25) and inaugurates Israel's exodus from Egypt by calling Moses (and his helpful brother Aaron) to lead the Israelites to freedom (see Exodus 3-4). They are instructed by God to go to Pharaoh and ask for the people's release; Pharaoh refuses Moses'

request and makes their plight worse (Exodus 5). Moses and Aaron then "pre-over them. Israel will survive through a God-given ritual that ultimately distinguishes and (re)defines them as a people. The Passover, first and foremost, results in Israel reckoning time differently. The month of Passover becomes the first on Israel's calendar. Ritual prescriptions follow. A small flock animal (sheep or goat) is to be procured for sacrifice. It should be a single, unblemished year-old male lamb. Each household shall have one, or smaller households can combine their resources and partake in the ritual together. On the

event, God provides regulations that, when followed, ensure that the plague will pass over them. Israel will survive through a God-given ritual that ultimately distinguishes and (re)defines them as a people. The Passover, first and foremost, results in Israel reckoning time differently. The month of Passover becomes the first on Israel's calendar. Ritual prescriptions follow. A small flock animal (sheep or goat) is to be procured for sacrifice. It should be a single, unblemished year-old male lamb. Each household shall have one, or smaller households can combine their resources and partake in the ritual together. On the

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"This is how you are to eat it:

with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff

in hand,

you shall eat like those who are in flight.

It is the Passover of the LORD.

For on this same night I will go through Egypt,

striking down every firstborn of the land, both man and beast,

and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt—I, the LORD!

But the blood will mark the houses where you are.

Seeing the blood, I will pass over you;

thus, when I strike the land of Egypt,

no destructive blow will come upon you.

"This day shall be a memorial feast for you,

which all your generations shall celebrate

with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18
(1 Corinthians 10:16)

R. Our blessing-cup is a communion with the Blood of Christ.

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.

Precious in the eyes of the LORD

is the death of his faithful ones.

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.

For meditation and context:

The feast celebrates God's intervention in Israel's history. Passover is still celebrated today.

Do not run "pass" and "over" together.

girt = gert = belted

chosen day (mid-month), at the chosen time (twilight), the animal is to be slaughtered and its blood used to mark exterior door frames of Israelite houses, thereby signaling that the occupants are protected from the lethal plague. Thus, only the lives of first-born Egyptians would be lost. The animal is then roasted and entirely consumed with unleavened bread and bitter herbs while the members of the household(s) remain standing and dressed for travel. The ritual, therefore, not only protects Israel, it also prepares them for their exodus from Egypt.

The Passover liberated Israel from servitude and protected them from a divinely wrought death-dealing plague. Its accompanying ritual provided a natural means of annually celebrating God's work in the Exodus. It also became the means of commemoration and appropriating the meaning of that work in each new generation. Modern Passover ritual texts instruct each person to view himself or herself as one who was liberated from Egypt. This sentiment also characterizes the Passover celebration and transformed by Jesus during the Last Supper. On the night before he died,

he offered the bread and wine of the Passover meal as himself, thus instituting the Eucharist. That meal, which commemorates his passion, death, and resurrection as often as we celebrate it for our generation, invites us into Christ's paschal mystery. Thus, as we commemorate this Mass of the Lord's Supper, each of us must now view ourselves as recipients of the grace of Christ's redeeming Passover and participate in his suffering and death, that we might enjoy the hope of his resurrection.

READING II 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

GOSPEL John 13:1–15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Before the feast of Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end. The devil had already induced Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, to hand him over. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. »

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

The words of this reading are heard at every Mass, prayed by the priest during the Eucharistic Prayer. Tonight, they will also be proclaimed by you in this reading. Practice until you are familiar enough with the phrases to look up and out at the assembly to deliver the most important lines. Give special attention to the verbs. Past, present, and future concerns come together in this one short reading.

Practice pausing in the long first verse. An encouraging line before the evil of the betrayal is revealed. Take your time savoring it. The mood quickly changes. Iscariot = ih-SKAYR-ee-uh

Jesus is not deterred by the betrayal. He has an important lesson to impart to his disciples—and to us. Listening to music can help one enter into the spiritual meaning of a passage. Listen to "The Servant Song" by Richard Gillard to capture the beauty of Jesus' action.

READING II

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul provides one of the earliest accounts of the institution of the Eucharist. Three other such institution narratives appear in the synoptic gospels (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–20). Although each account is unique, there is great correspondence among them. At the time ordained for the Passover meal—nighttime—Jesus gathered with his disciples. When they were assembled, Jesus took the Passover bread. Giving thanks, he blessed it. Then he broke the bread and said, "This is my body."

GOSPEL

Presumably, he then gave the bread to those gathered, as the synoptic accounts indicate; Paul is not explicit about this action. Likewise, Jesus took a cup of wine at this, his last Passover meal. Presumably, he blessed it with the customary blessing for wine. Again, Paul is silent on this point. In any case, Jesus initiates a new covenant when he identifies this cup of wine with his blood. And, as Paul does makes explicit, the eating and drinking of the Eucharistic bread and wine "proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes." That is, the breaking of the bread is his broken body on the cross, typical of John's Gospel; it clearly presents

and his blood poured out in death is the wine. To celebrate this meal, as often as we do, is to celebrate and partake in Christ's supper that emphasize the institution narrative, John focuses on Jesus' symbolic washing of the disciples' feet. The disciples, acknowledging Jesus as "teacher" and "master" (*kurios* in Greek), are confirmed in their address of Jesus by his "I am" (*egmi* in Greek). This language is

Imagine Peter's indignation and Jesus' calm, fatherly response. To help the assembly grasp the dialogue, consider delivering the words of Peter with a slightly faster pace than Jesus' and a steady, even tone for the narrator.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, then not only my feet, but my hands and head as well." Jesus said to him, "Whoever has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; so you are clean, but not all." For he knew who would betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, "Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me 'teacher' and 'master,' and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do."

Use an upward inflection and then pause. Practice so that you can deliver it while looking at the assembly. Jesus is asking his disciples—he is also asking us. Let these final words of Jesus resound. His actions present us with an image of what Church should look like: he gave of himself completely; we should do likewise.

Jesus claiming his status as the incarnate Lord of the chosen people. He is the Lord worshipped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the One revealed to Moses in the burning bush. The One who descended on the mountain in Sinai, instructed the people, and gave the law that would form, in Greek) for the disciples to follow. He has shown them the scope that their service is to have. Jesus asks his disciples to do for others as he has done for them. Of course, this includes us today. To follow Jesus is to care for others to the point of accepting humilia- ating tasks, to do chores that do not garner honor or coherence with elevated social sta- tus. As the noblest of all human beings sets aside his garment to take up a towel and wash dirty feet, so his disciples take up menial tasks that ennoble those served by them. According to John, the memorial of the Last Supper entails accepting a man- date to service, to mission, and to do for others as the Lord has done for us. E.W.