

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Holy Thursday, one of the great festivals of the church year! But what are we actually commemorating? Let's look at a little background. In the beginning of the Gospel lesson, the disciples ask Jesus, "Where do you desire that we go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He directs them to follow a man who will meet them and lead them to the proper place. There, they are to say to the master of the house, **THE TEACHER SAYS, WHERE IS MY GUESTROOM, WHERE I SHALL EAT THE PASSOVER WITH MY DISCIPLES?** And the disciples make preparation.

Just what did the disciples prepare? At Jesus's time, the Passover meal celebration looked something like this:¹

1. It began with a cup of wine blessed by the Father of the household, followed by an initial serving of food consisting of green herbs, bitter herbs, and a sauce of fruit purée. This introductory course was concluded by the recitation of Psalm 113 in Hebrew.

2. After this, a narrative ceremony took place, called the Passover Haggadah or the Passover Narrative. The eldest son would ask the father, "Why is this night different than all other nights?" And the Father would give a detailed explanation

¹ James W. Voelz, *Mark 8:27-16:8*, St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1019-20

and account in Aramaic. At the end of this question and answer session, a second cup of wine was blessed and shared by the participants.

3. Then followed the main meal itself, beginning with the Father blessing Unleavened Bread as a prelude to the eating of a roast lamb prepared for this occasion, which meat was accompanied by the Unleavened Bread and bitter herbs. This main meal was also concluded with a cup of blessed wine, wine cup #3.

4. Finally, the entire proceeding concluded with the recitation of Psalms 114-118, followed by the fourth cup of wine, over which praise of God was spoken.

Now, why was all of this happening? What was it celebrating? It goes back to what was talked about in the Passover Haggadah or Passover Narrative spoken by the Father in response to the question of his son. The Passover celebration commemorated the greatest event in Israel's history, the Exodus from Egypt, after 400 years of slavery in that land. God told his people through Moses to prepare for their "exodus" from bondage on one particular night, right when He, the Lord God, would ravage the land of Egypt by destroying the first-born of every human being and beast within it, but would not destroy anything within houses whose doorposts were painted with the blood of an unblemished lamb slain in the stead of the people for this purpose—a lamb whose roasted flesh was to be consumed that night, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, by the inhabitants of the

house, who would be arrayed with clothing and equipment appropriate for embarking on a journey. They would have sandals on their feet and a staff in the hand. In the words of God himself (Ex. 12:13):

THE BLOOD SHALL BE A SIGN FOR YOU, ON THE HOUSES WHERE YOU ARE. AND WHEN I SEE THE BLOOD, I WILL PASS OVER YOU, AND NO PLAGUE WILL BEFALL YOU TO DESTROY YOU, WHEN I STRIKE THE LAND OF EGYPT.

What happened on that Passover evening so many years ago in Egypt is the basis for the main elements of the Passover celebration as Jesus's time, especially the Narrative (the Haggadah) of the events and the consuming of the lamb slain for the occasion.

But a funny thing happened at Jesus's Passover celebration—and I don't mean the odd meeting of the disciples by an unknown man with a water jar, or Jesus's prediction that someone would betray him. The funny thing is that **the whole thing goes off the rails, as it were.** *Where is the lamb* in Mark's account of Jesus's Passover celebration?? The lamb is one centerpiece of the elements of that celebration. And *where is the Passover Haggadah*, the Passover Narrative of what happened to produce salvation on that glorious, fateful night? Neither of these two key features is mentioned in Mark's account—indeed, neither

of them is mentioned in the other Gospel accounts—a fact that is extremely odd. And there can only be one explanation. Which is, that **these elements did not occur** in Jesus’s Passover celebration.

Here is what probably did occur. Jesus’s Passover celebration **short-circuited** when our Lord took the bread “**while they were eating,**” as Mark says, in verse 22 of chapter 14. At no point in the first century Passover celebration as we understand it was bread taken, blessed, broken, and distributed, while eating was taking place. In the first century ceremony, such an introduction of bread occurred *after* the Passover Haggadah, the Narrative account, during which no eating was taking place, and *before* the eating of roasted lamb, when eating would, in fact, be taking place. Best, then, is to see the taking, blessing, breaking, and distribution of the bread as occurring hard on/immediately **at the end of the preliminary** course of the Passover Celebration—the eating of green herbs, bitter herbs, and a sauce of fruit purée, which occurred before the Passover Haggadah, the Passover Narrative, and, therefore, before the eating of the roasted lamb even had a chance to occur.

And why was that? Because **Jesus, our Lord himself, was the Passover Lamb**, so that from this point forward, the Passover Lamb would be replaced by the **real presence** of Jesus Christ in the New Passover celebration. **The body of Jesus is the new lamb**, and it, like the lamb of the old Passover celebration, is a

sacrifice, even as St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 5:7: CHRIST OUR PASSOVER HAS BEEN SACRIFICED FOR US. **Just as at the first Passover the lamb gave its life as a stand-in—an atonement—for the life of the firstborn of the household, just so our Lord Jesus Christ would give his life on the cross as stand in—an atonement—for multitudes.** As Jesus himself puts it, just before his entrance into Jerusalem: THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS AN ATONEMENT—a *stand-in*—FOR MANY. Furthermore, **just as the blood of the lambs slain at the very first Passover turned away divine judgment, as God passed over the houses graced with that blood, so now Jesus’ blood, to be shed by his body upon the cross, would and must be seen to turn away God’s horrific judgment, for his people’s full salvation.** And that blood, shed on behalf of multitudes, is already present at our Lord’s Passover celebration in the wine of the cup that the disciples share. And still further, this new Passover meal now has a **new Narrative**—a new Haggadah; it is the story of Jesus and of God’s salvation in him—in his death and resurrection. In the words of our Lord, as recorded by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 11:25, DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME! Thanks be to God for this truly incredible celebration gift!

Finally, a brief word about the covenant in his blood that Jesus speaks about at the Last Supper. This phraseology—note, not the “new” covenant in his

blood—evokes Exodus 24. In Exodus 24:6 Moses, at Sinai, after giving the people God’s Torah—his Teachings, his Law—divides the blood of animal sacrifices into two portions, pouring out half into bowls and pouring out the other half onto the altar. After the people affirm their covenant with God and promise to obey him, he sprinkles the people with the blood from the bowls, saying: BEHOLD, THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT THAT THE LORD HAS MADE WITH YOU IN ACCORDANCE WITH ALL OF THESE WORDS (Ex. 24:8).

The division of the blood at this event likely refers to the two partners in the covenant at Mt. Sinai—God and his people—and what is done with the blood is intended to bring the two partners into one unity.

How different is the covenant with Jesus and his blood!

Now there is no offering of animal life.

Now there is no division of the blood representing two parties of the covenant.

With Jesus and his blood, there is no animal substitute for human beings. Here, the Son of God himself is the substitute. **With Jesus and his blood**, this covenant does not have two parties—at least not two active parties. Now, everything is one-side. **Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and Son of God, does it**

all. In this covenant, all actions—all salvation—occur in him alone. A better covenant, indeed!

So, rejoice, brothers and sisters of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Rejoice this night in Jesus Christ, the **true Passover Lamb**, who has been sacrificed for us. Rejoice in the **covenant in Jesus's blood**—not in animal blood—which atones for our sins and unites us with our Savior/God. There is no greater ceremony in the world than the Supper of our Lord. Come, take within yourselves his true body and blood, the very means of your salvation.

Amen!

Holy Thursday, March 28, 2024, Zion L.C. Fort Wayne, IN