

## Body and Blood of Christ, Year B

*Because Holy Thursday is such a busy time during a sorrowful season, the Church decided to celebrate a special feast for the Blessed Sacrament on the Sunday after Trinity Sunday. Before Vatican II it was called "Corpus Christi." This was started at the instigation of St. Juliana and has been celebrated by the whole Church since 1264. More recently, the feast of the Precious Blood was combined with Corpus Christi so that it is now known as "The Body And Blood Of Christ."*<sup>5</sup>

### Exodus 24:3-8

*It was common practice for people at that time to ratify pacts by means of a rite or a meal. This section recounts a rite whereby the Covenant was sealed, for the people had already accepted it in Ex.19:8. This event is very important for salvation history because it prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which brought in the New Covenant. The usual interpretation is that there were two aspects to this ratification: one involving Moses and the elders, that is, the authorities and the other involving the entire people. Both groups formally accepted the divine Covenant and all that it laid down. In Ex. 24:11 we read how they ate and drank with God.*<sup>1</sup>

**3When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances** This refers not only to the ten commandments but also to laws regarding every aspect of the social and religious life of the people.<sup>4</sup> **of the Lord, they all answered with one voice, "We will do everything that the Lord has told us."** Note that the covenant was voluntary.

**4Moses then wrote down all the words of the Lord and rising early the next day, he erected at the foot of the mountain** The ceremony takes place on the slope of Mt. Sinai and Moses alone is the intermediary for he alone writes down the words and he alone erects the altar and the twelve pillars which are symbolic of the 12 tribes.<sup>2</sup> **an altar** The altar represents the unseen God who is present.<sup>1</sup> **and twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.**

**5Then, having sent certain young men of the Israelites** This takes place before the institution of the priesthood so any man could offer sacrifice legitimately.<sup>2</sup> **to offer holocausts and sacrifice young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord,**

**6Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls;** This is the half for man. **the other half he splashed on the altar.** The splashed half is for God. The covenant between Yahweh and Israel was now a reality.<sup>2</sup> This rite has deep significance for the blood stands for life and belongs to God alone and it must only be poured on the altar or used to anoint people who are consecrated to God such as priests. When Moses sprinkled the blood of the offering on to the entire people, he was consecrating them, making them divine property and a kingdom of priests. The Covenant therefore is not only a commitment to obey its precepts but, particularly, the right to belong to the holy nation, which is God's possession. At the Last Supper, when instituting the Eucharist, Jesus uses the very same terms, "blood of the Covenant", thereby indicating the nature of the new people of God who, having been redeemed, is fully "the holy people of God."<sup>1</sup> For the Jews, blood is a sign of life; so this ritual symbolizes the sharing of life between God and the people. When Jesus offers the cup of his blood to his disciples, this also symbolizes the sharing of life.<sup>3</sup>

**7Taking 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."**

**8Then 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."** God chose the Israelite race to be his own people and established a covenant with it. He gradually instructed this people and made it holy unto himself. This was a preparation and figure of the new and perfect covenant,

which was ratified in Christ for a race of Jews and Gentiles, which would be one in the Spirit and would form the new People of God.<sup>1</sup>

### Hebrews 9:11-15

*This was addressed to Christians of Jewish origin who were experiencing persecution. The author is trying to show them that the Old Testament has been fulfilled.*<sup>5</sup>

#### Brothers and sisters:

**11**When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, This includes sanctifying grace and entry into heaven.<sup>5</sup> **passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands**, Christ passed through the heavens into the very presence of the Father and is seated in heaven at his right hand.<sup>5</sup> **that is, not belonging to this creation**, His body could not be described this way until after the Resurrection which made it a spiritualized, heavenly body. (There is also a thought that this refers to the heavenly regions through which Christ passed as he came into the highest heaven, the abode of God.) So, either by passing through the heavens or through his most sacred body, Christ achieved Redemption by offering his own blood.<sup>5</sup> A tabernacle is a dwelling place or receptacle for the Eucharist. After Communion, we become a living tabernacle.

**12**he entered once for all into the sanctuary, This is in marked contrast to the “once a year” entrance of the high priests of Israel.<sup>18</sup> **not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood**, Just as the high priest had the right to enter the Holy of Holies because he bore the blood of the sacrificial animals, so Jesus’ life, offered in sacrifice, gives him right to enter the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> **thus obtaining eternal redemption**. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, which was in the innermost room of the Temple. This small room housed the Ark of the Covenant, which was a chest that contained the original stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. The high priest was the only one who could enter into this sacred spot. The peoples’ only access to God was through the high priest, who offered a sacrifice and used its blood to atone first for his own sins and then for the peoples’ sins.<sup>7</sup>

**13**For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer’s ashes Heifer’s ashes were mixed with water to anoint those defiled by contact with dead bodies, human bones or graves.<sup>2</sup> **can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed**, This was an external rite of purification.<sup>2</sup>

**14**how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself Jesus is both priest and sacrificial victim.<sup>18</sup> **unblemished to God**, The sacrificial animal had to be physically unblemished while Jesus was morally unblemished.<sup>2</sup> What used to be a yearly ritual, required again and again for forgiveness, has been rendered unnecessary by the perfect atonement achieved by Jesus. The words in each Eucharistic prayer, “This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant,” remind us each time of the sacrifices that preceded Jesus’ own, and of the perfection of his one eternal sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> **cleanse our consciences from dead works** The blood-sprinkling produced only ritual cleanness but the purifying power of Jesus’ sacrifice purifies from “dead works”, that is, the sins that cause spiritual death.<sup>2</sup> **to worship the living God**.

**15**For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant: Jesus, being both God and man, became the mediator between man and God, the representative of both sides. He restored peace between them and obtained divine grace for man. He also gave himself as an offering to pay man’s debt with his blood and his death.<sup>5</sup> **since a death has taken place for deliverance from transgressions under the first covenant**, Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has brought deliverance from the sins

committed under the Old Covenant, sins that were not taken away by OT sacrifices. As long as they remained, men could not possess the inheritance promised by God.<sup>5</sup> **those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.** The work of our Redemption has been accomplished. We are now children of God because Jesus, the most valuable of all treasures, has died for us and his death has ransomed us. We have been bought at a great price!<sup>5</sup> The “promised eternal inheritance” is the heavenly blessings pledged to the world through Abraham.<sup>18</sup>

### **Mark 14:12-16, 22-26**

*Mark was born in Jerusalem, was possibly the young man who ran off naked in the Garden the night that Jesus was arrested, and his mother's home was a gathering place for the apostles and early Christians. We do know that he traveled with Paul and Barnabas (his cousin), whom he left for reasons unknown, and then became a secretary and a son of sorts to Peter and his wife. He wrote what he heard Peter preach.<sup>12</sup> Later, he went to Alexandria, Egypt, where he was martyred in the year 68 when Easter fell on the same day as the festival of Serapis, one of the most popular of the old Egyptian gods, and a mob of hostile Serapis-worshippers dragged Mark, bound with cords, along the rough stones of Alexandria's streets until he died.<sup>16</sup> Then in 829 his remains were purchased by some merchants from Venice and they are now enshrined under the high altar of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice which has so many splendid mosaics, art and sculptures that it is called the Golden Church. St. Mark's symbol is a winged lion.<sup>15</sup>*

**12**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?” Jesus probably wanted to avoid having Judas know in advance where the supper would be held so that he could notify the Sanhedrin. God's plans for that memorable night of Holy Thursday had to be fulfilled and this way Judas was unable to advise the Sanhedrin where they could find Jesus<sup>9</sup> amid the estimated quarter of a million pilgrims that jammed Jerusalem for the festival, until after the celebration of the Passover meal.<sup>10</sup>

**13**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.** This was an unusual sight in the context of Jewish culture, since women customarily assumed the task of drawing and carrying water and if it were a man, he would normally have carried it in a skin.<sup>2</sup> This man would have stood out in a city crowded with pilgrims.<sup>20</sup> **Follow him.**

**14**Wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, “**The Teacher**” Jesus was a teacher: this title is given him more frequently than any other. He was regarded as a teacher of the Law and of the Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> **says, “Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”**

**15**Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. **Make the preparations for us there.**” There is an ancient Christian tradition that the house of the Cenacle was owned by Mary, the mother of St. Mark, the author of this gospel.<sup>9</sup>

**16**The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. There are several similarities between this story and the earlier feeding of the multitudes. In both cases the disciples ask Jesus how to provide food and in both cases they share in the preparations for the meal.<sup>10</sup> The fact that no amazement is expressed by the disciples causes some commentators to believe that everything had been prearranged (like dialing ahead for reservations at 1-800-PASSOVER). It is more likely that divine intervention is involved.<sup>20</sup>

**22**While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, “**Take it; this is my body.**” Jesus identifies the unleavened bread of the Passover feast with his own flesh. It is really his flesh and blood but it looks like bread and wine! This gift of his humanity in the

sacrament is inseparable from his self-offering on the Cross since together they make a single sacrifice in which Jesus is both the priest and the sacrificial victim of the New Covenant. St. Bede comments, that “in breaking the bread, Christ pre-enacts the breaking of his body on the Cross. Likewise as Jesus gives himself voluntarily in the Last Supper, so his Crucifixion will be a death he freely accepts, not the end result of hostile forces beyond his control.”<sup>8</sup> “Cannibalism” and “human sacrifice” were charges often whispered against the first generations of Christians.<sup>11</sup> John 6:55-56 says “For my flesh is real food and my blood real drink. The man who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” This is the one and only place in the New Testament where people abandoned Christ because of his teaching. It is interesting that in 107 A.D., St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch wrote a letter to the Church of Smyrna and lashed out against the heretics who denied the true doctrine “that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>11</sup> This is not just a gift from the Lord, along with many others, the Eucharist is THE GIFT PAR EXCELLENCE! The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are ONE SINGLE SACRIFICE. It is interesting that the Didache, which claims to be the collected “Teaching of the Apostles”, compiled in Antioch between 50-110 A.D., uses the word “sacrifice” FOUR times to describe the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup>

**23** Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. This was the third cup traditionally drunk at the Passover meal.<sup>10</sup>

**24** He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. As the Old Covenant between Yahweh and Israel was sealed through sacrificial blood on Mt. Sinai, the New Covenant between Christ and the Church is sealed through his own blood poured out in upper room at the Last Supper. This new and perfect sacrifice enables us to enter a covenant of communion with the Father through the forgiveness of our sins. The blood of Jesus is forever a sacrament of his Divine Life for those who receive him in the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup> It is important to understand that to the Jewish people, LIFE WAS IN THE BLOOD.<sup>11</sup> The encyclical on the Eucharist reminds us that “no Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist.”<sup>15</sup>

**25** 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.” This is the place in the Passover Meal where they would normally have had the fourth cup of wine, which celebrated the consummation of the covenant, but Jesus says that he will not drink it until “I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup> There is an element of hope here as Jesus speaks of the coming Messianic Banquet in heaven.

**26** Then, after singing a hymn, This was probably the Hallel Psalms which together with the fourth cup are the normal high point of the ceremony.<sup>8</sup> This is the only time where it was recorded that Jesus sang. **they went out to the Mount of Olives.** The significance of Jesus drinking the wine from the sponge when he was on the cross is that it was the “fourth cup” which ended the Old Covenant. John 19:28-30 says: “After that, Jesus realizing that everything was now finished, said to fulfill the Scripture, ‘I am thirsty.’ There was a jar there, full of common wine. They stuck a sponge soaked in this wine on some hyssop and raised it to his lips. When Jesus took the wine, he said, ‘Now it is finished.’”<sup>17</sup>

*Note: In his encyclical letter on the Eucharist, Pope John Paul II says, “Of all devotions, that of adoring Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the greatest after the sacraments, the one dearest to God and the one most helpful to us...in the course of the day, the faithful should not omit visiting the Blessed Sacrament.” We are also reminded that Catholics may not receive communion in churches of other denominations.<sup>15</sup>*

*When you miss one Holy Communion: 1.) You miss a personal visit with Jesus. 2.) You lose a special increase of sanctifying grace, which makes your soul more pleasing to God. 3.) You lose sacramental grace, which entitles you to special help in times of temptation and in the discharge of your duties. 4.) You miss the opportunity of having remitted a part, or all, of the temporal punishments due to your sins. 5.) You lose the spiritual joy, the sweetness and particular comfort that comes from a fervent Holy Communion. 6.) You lose a part of the glory that your body might enjoy at its resurrection on the Last Day. 7.) You lose the greater degree of glory you would possess in Heaven for all eternity. 8.) You may lose: complete victory over some fault or passion, the conversion or salvation of some soul, deliverance of a relative or friend from Purgatory and many graces for others, both the living and the dead.<sup>14</sup>*

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from (1) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (2) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers:1991" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (5) "The Navarre Bible: Hebrews," (6) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (7) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (8) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark," (9) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark," (10) "Mark: Good News for Hard Times," by George T. Montague, S.M., (11) "The Lamb's Supper" by Scott Hahn, (12) "The Twelve: The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary" by C. Bernard Ruffin, (13) "Relics" by Joan Carroll Cruz, (14) "When You Miss One Holy Communion" by Catholic Fraternity for Restoration, (15) the Encyclical Letter, "Ecclesia De Eucharistia" by John Paul II, (16) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (17) "The Fourth Cup" by Scott Hahn, (18) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter to the Hebrews" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (19) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., and (20) St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*