

THIS IS MY BODY.... THIS IS MY BLOOD

Biblica Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Mark 14,12-16.22-26

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover? And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and 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?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

In the narrative of Jesus' supper, the evangelist Mark refers to two themes: the first is that of the first alliance when Moses took the book of the law, he read it to the people and then, as a sign of excitement, he sprinkled the people with the blood of the calves. The second is that of the division of the bread and fishes. The first in the land of the Jews, the second in the land of the gentiles. Let's read what the evangelist writes for us. In the main verses presented by Mark he had underlined that it was the day of the Unleavened bread, when this bread without yeast was eaten as a sacrifice for the Passover. In this supper there is no reference to the Jewish Passover. There is no lamb because Jesus is the true Easter lamb the meat of which served to face the exodus, the liberation and whose blood will free from death.

The evangelist writes "*..as they were eating..*" this is a repeat because the evangelist had already said that they were at supper and eating, but in the first warning that they were at supper and eating Jesus had stated that one of the disciples, Judas would have betrayed him. So the repeating of this verb 'to eat' means that this is Jesus' reply to the betrayal of the disciple, to hatred he answers with love. "*..he took bread,*" not Matzo bread, but ordinary bread. It is the typical Palestinian bread, a round flat bread and this is important, there is no meat. In an animal there are some good parts that were reserved for notable persons. In the Book of Law, for example, it is written that the breast and leg were reserved for the high priests. Bread no, it is the typical round Palestinian bread that is good in all parts. Participation in the Eucharist eliminates hierarchies and creates unity. "*.. and after blessing it..*" Here the evangelist refers to the first division of the bread and fishes when Jesus blessed them. "*..broke it and gave it to them,*" therefore this bread is for his disciples "*Take; this is my body.*" Jesus identifies himself with the bread. He invites the disciples to eat, to take this bread to give adhesion to his person. There is no longer a scroll from the Law, the book of the covenant, but there is a person to whom to give full support.

. "*And he took a cup,..*" and here there is a change of verb. Here there is no blessing, but "*..he had given thanks*" in the second division of the bread and fishes, in the land of the gentiles Jesus gives

thanks because to thank was a verb known in all cultures. So in the Eucharist the evangelist unites the typical Jewish blessing and the typical thanks of the gentiles. The Eucharist does not divide, but unites their completely different realities.

“..he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.” The evangelist does not underline that the bread was eaten, but says they all drank from the cup of wine. It is not enough to welcome the figure of Jesus, there is need also to accept what the cup brings, that is his end. The meaning of what is in this cup Jesus tells us, *“And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, ...”* The covenant is not more enough on observing the law, but on the welcoming of his love. While the blood of the bulls that had been sprinkled on the people was blood that externally descended on people, this blood which is the life itself of Jesus, the blood in the Jewish world is life, it merges, and penetrates the person's intimate and blends with it. The evangelist realizes what he has announced of the work of Jesus. Jesus would have baptised, that is immersed and impregnated people with the Holy Spirit, in the same force of the divine life. Here in the Eucharist is where this effusion takes place.

The verb to pour is part of psalm 79, . that we read the night of Easter where it was said that the wrath of God was poured on the peoples. Here with Jesus there is not the wrath of God, but his blood, a symbol of his outpouring of the life, that will be for all. And Jesus concludes by announcing that he will no longer drink the fruit of the vine until the day when he will drink it again in the kingdom of God. That is a new quality of love that is not yet available to the disciples because they have not yet understood what the love is that drives him to give his life for them.

The conclusion is strange. It says, writes the evangelist, *“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out..”* why do they leave? In the book of the Exodus it was forbidden to go out on the night of Easter. Here the community of disciples with the participation in the Eucharist is no longer bound by the law, by obedience to the law of God, but is animated by the Spirit and the Spirit makes them free. This is the fruit of the Eucharist.