

THIS IS MY BODY....THIS IS MY BLOOD – Biblical 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 narration of Jesus' last supper, the evangelist Mark refers to two themes: the first is that of the first covenant, when Moses took a book, the book of the law, he read it to the people, then, as a sign of acceptance, he sprinkled the people with the blood of a calf; the second theme is that of the sharing of the loaves and fishes, the first in Jewish land, the second in the gentile land. Let's read what the evangelist writes for us. Focusing on the main verses, bearing in mind that Mark had pointed out that it was the first day of unleavened bread, when bread was not eaten leavened to sacrifice Easter. In this supper there is no reference to the Jewish Easter meal, there is no lamb because Jesus is the true Passover lamb, whose flesh will be used to face the exodus, the liberation, and whose blood will free from death.

The evangelist writes “*And as they were eating...*” this is a repetition because the evangelist has already mentioned that they were at supper and eating, but in the first time they were at dinner and were eating, Jesus announced that one of the disciples, Judas, would betray him. Then the repetition of this verb “to eat” indicates that this is Jesus' response to the betrayal of the disciple, he responds to hatred with love.

“*..he took bread,*” .. not “*..the bread..*” indicating the unleavened bread, but a bread. It is the typical round Palestinian bread, and this is important, there is no animal. In an animal there are some better parts, which were reserved for notable people; the book of the law prescribes for example that the chest is reserved for the priests, the bread no, it is the typical Palestinian round bread, which is good in all its parts. Participation in the Eucharist eliminates hierarchies and importance and creates unity.

“..and after blessing it...” here the evangelist refers to the first division of the bread and the fishes, when Jesus gave a blessing. *“..broke it and gave it to them...”* so this bread is for his disciples *“..and said, “Take; this is my body.”* Jesus identifies himself with this bread, Jesus invites the disciples to eat, to take this bread to adhere to his person. There is no longer a roll of the laws, the book of the covenant, but there is a person to whom you can fully adhere.

“And he took a cup...” and here the verb changes, not a blessing but *“..he had given thanks..”* because in the second sharing of the loaves and fishes in the gentile land Jesus thanked and *"to thank"* was a verb known in that culture; then in the Eucharist the evangelist unites blessing, which is typical of Judaism, and thanking, typical of paganism. The Eucharist does not divide, but unites the two completely different realities.

“..and he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.” The evangelist does not underline that the bread was eaten, of this cup he says that *“..all drank of it.”* It is not enough to adhere to the figure of Jesus, we must also accept what the cup entails, that is, his end. The meaning of what this cup means, Jesus tells us *And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, .”* Jesus replaces the covenant; the covenant is no longer based on the observance of the law, but on welcoming his love. While the blood of the bulls, which had been sprinkled on the people, was a blood that descended on the people outwardly, this blood, which is the very life of Jesus, the blood, in the Jewish world, is life, it merges, penetrates into the intimate of the person and blends in and becomes part of them. The evangelist realizes what he announced about the activity of Jesus: Jesus would have baptized, that is, immersed, impregnated people in the Holy Spirit, in the very power of divine life, and here in the Eucharist is where this outpouring takes place. The verb *"to pour"* belongs to a psalm, 79, which was read on Easter night, where it was said that the wrath of God *“Pour out your anger on the nations”*(Psalm 79 ,6) Here with Jesus, not God's anger, but his blood, symbol of his outpouring and life, will be shed on everyone.

Jesus concludes stating that *“ I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”* that is, a new quality of love, which is not yet available to the disciples because they did not understand what will be that love that pushes him to give his life for his disciples.

The conclusion is strange, The evangelist writes *“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out...”* why did they go out? The book of Exodus forbade going out on Easter night. Here, the community of disciples with participation in the Eucharist is no longer linked to the law, to obedience to the law of God, but it is animated by the Spirit and the Spirit makes us free, this is the fruit of the Eucharist.