

THIS IS MY BODY, THIS IS MY BLOOD – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mk 14.12-16.22-26

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

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. Follow him. 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?"' Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there."

The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. 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." Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives

Mark structures his narrative of Last Supper on the basis of what we read in the Book of Exodus at the end of Alliance. In Chapt. 24 Moses took the Book of Alliance and read it before the people, “*then took some blood and sprinkled in on the people, and said Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words*”.

This criteria has to be taken into consideration in order to better understand what the evangelist is saying. Let's see, then.

Mark writes “*While they were eating, he took*” – we don't find any definite article, as per indicating a particular kind of bread, the one they used to eat during paschal supper, the evangelist accurately avoids any reference to it. Jesus is not repeating an ancient rite, he is performing something completely new. Mark avoids then any possible resemblance to paschal supper.

So *“He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said ‘Take it; this is my body’.”* There’s already a first difference with the Ancient Covenant. For Ancient Covenant Moses presented a book, containing the Law, God’s will; well, Jesus starts a new age of relationship with God. With Jesus a believer is not the one who shall obey Laws of the Lord, like in the Ancient Covenant; a believer is the one who welcomes the love of his Lord. Law was an external code that man had to observe – and many couldn’t. The New Covenant is not based on something external to the individual – as a book – but on an inner effusion of a same divine life.

God doesn’t rule by promulgating Laws that men have to obey; he just conveys his same loving ability, his Spirit, his loving energy. There is no Code, no Law, just a man – Jesus – who conveys his life.

Then Jesus *“took a cup”*, and here, if he used the verb ‘to bless’ for bread – a term used in the Hebraic world – for the cup he uses the verb ‘eukaristeo’ from which the word “Eucharist” derives, meaning ‘to thank’. Why did he choose two different verbs and not the same ‘to bless’? The evangelist recalls the two multiplications of loaves and fishes. The first happened in a Jew territory where Jesus blessed the bread; the second happened in pagan territory where Jesus thanked.

The evangelist intends to put together those two elements in the Eucharist, then. **Eucharist is not only for Israel people, but for the entire mankind.**

So Jesus *“gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it”*. While the evangelist didn’t specify that the bread was eaten, he says that they all drank the wine from the cup. Welcoming Jesus as a model of behavior is not enough – one has to drink from the cup – the cup represents death, devoting oneself. Therefore Eucharist is completely fulfilled when there’s an acceptance of life commitment.

Well, this blood is not the one of a bull, externally sprinkled on people, but Jesus says *“this is my blood of the covenant”*. All evangelists define Jesus’ action as the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, but, strangely, none of them tells ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ Jesus does. This one is the very moment in which a believer receives the Holy Spirit, a baptism with the Holy Spirit. It’s not a matter of a bull blood externally sprinkled on people, it’s an inner communication of divine life. This is what is able to convey an extraordinary loving ability.

And Jesus specifies that *“this blood is shed for many”*. During paschal supper a Psalm was read; it was Psalm 79 where the author wrote that *“God’s anger rose against the nations”*. Well, Jesus completely changed the relationship with God; God doesn’t shed his anger, but his blood, a love that welcomes everybody.

This is the real new brought by Jesus. No more obedience to external Laws, but a continuous and increasing conveyance and resemblance to his same loving ability.