

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26; Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 6th, 2021

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. We are given this celebration as an opportunity to reflect upon what the Second Vatican Council called the Source and Summit of our Faith. The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ is the source of our Faith because from it all our faith flows, and it is the summit of our Faith because it is the pinnacle to which our Faith points. There are many different aspects of this Blessed Sacrament and today's readings point us toward the idea of "covenant". In our First reading we heard of the story of the institution or solemnization of the covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai, what is known as the Mosaic Covenant. And in our Gospel reading we heard Saint Mark's version of the "institution narrative", where Jesus institutes a "New Covenant" in His Body and Blood.

To our modern ears the word "covenant" can simply mean an agreement that usually has something to do with a property, a lease, a deed, or some other kind of legal contract. But with our First reading's description of the nation of Israel, after having been delivered from slavery in Egypt, gathered at the base of Mount Sinai, with Moses reading the people the law he has received from God, the building of an altar, the slaughtering of oxen, and the throwing around of lots of blood there is clearly something more going on here than some ordinary real estate transaction! Biblical scholar Dr. Scott Hahn has written extensively on the idea of covenant in the Bible and from his "Catholic Bible Dictionary" we hear a Covenant defined as, *"A kinship bond between two parties, with conditions or obligations, established by an oath or its equivalent. Covenant is also the master-theme of the Bible, which records the various ways throughout history that God has drawn humanity into a familial relationship with himself"*

through divine oaths.” Dr. Hahn goes on to say, “In almost every case the central act of covenant-making was the swearing of an oath by one or both of the parties to the covenant...The oath generally took the form of a self-curse...Often the covenant-making parties shared a common meal to confirm their new familial relationship.”

We see all these aspects of “covenant making” on display at Mount Sinai. Moses tells all the people of Israel the words and ordinances of the LORD, which included the Ten Commandments, along with other laws about living together in a community. The blessing and condition of this covenant is given in Exodus 19:5-6, which says, “⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This is God inviting Israel into a special, familial, relationship with Him; He tells them they would be His treasured possession and a holy nation. The people’s end of the covenant is that they will obey His voice and keep His commandments. We then hear the people give their consent saying, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Moses then directs the young men of Israel to make offerings and sacrifices to the LORD and to collect the blood of the sacrifices. He then pours half of the blood on the altar, which represents God, and the other half he throws on the people. The blood of the sacrifice has a dual meaning. First is the blessing, which means that the two parties, God and Israel, are now of the same blood, the same family, and from now on will share in the same life. Second is the curse, which means that if either party breaks their commitment to the covenant, their blood should be shed just like the blood of these animals has been shed. Although we don’t hear about in our reading today, if we were to continue reading in Exodus we would hear about Moses and the leaders of Israel going up to the top of the mountain and sharing in a sacred banquet with the LORD (Ex 24:9-11).

Why is all this talk about covenant important? We heard Dr. Hahn's description of covenant as being the master theme of the Bible and what he means by that is that all of the Old Testament, all of salvation history, can be understood through the lens of covenant. In the pages of the Old Testament one can see covenant relationships being established between God and Adam, God and Noah, God and Abraham, God and Moses, and God and David. What we see in these covenants is God continually reaching out to Israel in order to bring them into communion with Him, to bring them into His family. The problem with all these covenants is that they hinge on the people of Israel being faithful to their end of the covenant, which means they need to be obedient to God's voice and His laws. Despite their best intentions, Israel is never able to live up to their side of the covenant. The covenant with Moses gives us a great example of our fallen nature, when right away, after the events of today's reading, God calls Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to give him instruction on how the people should properly worship Him. Unfortunately, this instruction takes forty days and forty nights, and the people's patience runs out, and they fashioned a Golden Calf to worship instead of the Living God, and as soon as they broke the First Commandment, they proceeded to break a bunch of other ones as well. It shouldn't be hard to see ourselves in the people of Israel.

This brings us to today's Gospel where we hear Jesus at the Last Supper taking bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it to His disciples saying, "Take; this is my body." And then He takes a chalice, and gives thanks, and gives the chalice to His disciples, and they all drink of it. He tells them, "This is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." We understand these events as the institution of the Eucharist, where Jesus is connecting this sacred meal, a meal to be offered in remembrance of Him, to the sacrifice He will make the next day on Calvary, where He will offer up His Body and Blood for the salvation of the world. In terms of covenant, we see the Eucharist as the sacred meal of the New Covenant and Jesus' crucifixion on

Mount Calvary as the great sacrifice of the New Covenant, the sinless one who takes on the curses of all the broken covenants along with all of our sin. What will make this covenant different from all the previous ones? It is who Jesus is that makes all the difference. He is the Son of the living God, the unblemished lamb of God. He is also the Son of Mary. He is fully man and fully God. Jesus stands in our place as the only one who can truly say, "All that the LORD has spoken I will do, and I will be obedient." It is the life of Jesus that makes this New Covenant everlasting, and it is His life that He wants to share with us in the Eucharist. He brings about this intimate communion through the power of His word and by the Holy Spirit. We believe that God's Word is effective and powerful. What God speaks, is. God spoke all of creation into existence out of nothing; when He said, "Let there be light"; there was light. Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God, and His word is effective and powerful. When there was a storm on the Sea of Galilee and the Apostles were terrified they would drown, Jesus said, "Peace! Be still!" and the winds ceased. When Jesus commanded the paralytic to, "Rise take up your pallet and walk," the man rose up and walked. When Lazarus had been dead for four days; Jesus stood in front of his tomb and cried out, "Lazarus, come out", the dead man came out. What Jesus speaks, is. At every celebration of the Mass, when Jesus says, though the words are spoken by the priest, the priest is standing in the person of Christ, when he says, "This is my body" and "This is my blood"; and through the Eucharistic prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit the bread now is His Body, and the wine now is His Blood. This is what the Church calls the doctrine of the Real Presence, and this means that in Holy Communion we receive Jesus Christ Himself, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. This is the incredible gift we have been given in the Eucharist.

Throughout the Old Testament we hear the story of God reaching out in fatherly love to Israel, His people, seeking to bring them into a covenant with Him, seeking to bring them into His family, to make of them a people, who by hearing His voice, and being obedient to His Word, would become a holy people, a people set apart from the world, not for the purpose of being taken out of the world, but for the purpose of bringing God's light into world. A light that would show the world the way to live in the promise of God's blessing. Jesus established a New Covenant at the Last Supper and the next day fulfilled the Old Covenant on the Cross. He established the New Israel, the Church, when he gave Himself in the Eucharist to His twelve apostles in the Upper Room and told them to, "Do this in memory of Me." And for all of our ups and downs, His Church has been faithful to that promise for 2000 years. Today, we will once again renew that New Covenant promise, as we come forward to receive Our Lord, who both heals us and strengthens us with His life and His presence in the Eucharist, and then sends us out to continue that mission of Israel, that same mission of bringing God's light and blessing and life and presence into a world that desperately needs Him.