

## Jesus' Final Meal with His Disciples (Mark 14:12-25)

<sup>12</sup> 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?" <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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?"'" <sup>15</sup> Then he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." <sup>16</sup> The disciples then went off, entered the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. <sup>17</sup> When it was evening, he came with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> And as they reclined at table and were eating, Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." <sup>19</sup> They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one, "Surely it is not I?" <sup>20</sup> He said to them, "One of the Twelve, the one who dips with me into the dish. <sup>21</sup> For the Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born." <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> Then, after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### The Solemnity

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ – is more popularly known as *Corpus Christi*, Latin for the "Body of Christ." From one perspective, every Sunday is a feast of the Eucharist, because by participating in the Mass, and in receiving Communion, we are honoring and celebrating the Eucharist. Still, the celebration of Corpus Christi has its own history.

In the Catholic Church in the West, *Corpus Christi* is celebrated as a solemnity on the Sunday following the Most Holy Trinity Sunday (the Sunday following Pentecost) since the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. At its core the solemnity is a celebration of the Tradition and belief in the Eucharist as the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. For millennia, such a theme was part of the celebration of Holy Thursday, but then there are other important themes that are part of that celebration (models of Christian service, priestly ordination, and more). And, all this occurs in the shadow of Good Friday. The multiplicity of themes and the shadow of Good Friday and the Passion do not lend the Eucharistic celebration of Holy Thursday a joyful patina.

Saint Juliana of Liège, O.Praem, (Premonstratensian Order; also known as the Norbertines) was the one who became the spark leading to a joyous celebration of *Corpus Christi*. For her devotion, life, and efforts, she is known as the "Apostle of the Blessed Sacrament." Juliana and her twin sister, Agnes, were born in a village near Liège. They were orphaned at age five and placed in a newly founded hospice at Mont-Cornillon, outside of Liège. The Norbertine canonry oversaw the care and rearing of the two girls, who were initially placed on a small farm next to the canonry. Juliana, after entering the Order at the age of 13, worked for many years in its leprosarium. Agnes seems to have died young.

Liège was already a center for devotion to the Eucharist. So from her early youth, Juliana had great veneration for the Eucharist and longed for a special feast day in its honor. In 1208 at age 16, she began having visions of a full moon having one dark spot. Her vision presented the moon in its full splendor, crossed diametrically by a dark stripe. In time she came to understand that the moon symbolized the life of the Church on earth, the opaque line, on the other hand, represented the absence of a liturgical feast in honor of Christ's Body and Blood. Not having any way to bring about such a feast, she kept her thoughts to herself, except for sharing them with Blessed Eve of Liège, who lived in a cell adjacent to the Basilica of St. Martin, and a few other trusted sisters in her monastery. The vision was repeated for the next 20 years, but she maintained it as a secret. When she eventually relayed it to her confessor, he relayed it to

the Bishop of Liège, Robert de Thorete. Eventually the celebration of *Corpus Christi* became part of the annual celebrations in the diocese.

**Becoming a Universal Celebration.** The archdeacon of the diocese, Jacques Pantaléon of Troyes was also won over to the cause of the Feast of Corpus Christi during his time in the Diocese of Liège. He eventually became Pope Urban IV in 1264. He instituted the Solemnity of Corpus Christi on the Thursday after Pentecost as a feast for the entire Latin Rite, by the papal bull *Transiturus de hoc mundo*. While Juliana prepared prayers and music for the feast, Pope Urban also requested that St. Thomas Aquinas write an office (special prayers) and hymns for the feast. It is from these offices that we have the most well-known Eucharistic songs: *Tantum Ergo*, *Pange Lingua*, and *O Salutaris Hostia*.

## Context

The story of the “Last Supper” is an account quite familiar to Christians. The version in the Gospel according to Mark certainly recounts many of the familiar features. Perhaps so familiar that we are not always attuned to the deeper currents present in the gospel account as well as the readings which accompany the Solemnity.

Consider the first reading for the Solemnity. We do not see references to Moses and manna, rather we encounter Moses and the enactment of a covenant between God and the people of Israel. In Exodus 24, Moses is preoccupied with binding Israel in fidelity to the rule of God – in other words, the making of covenant. At the outset, the community swears full allegiance: “*When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, “We will do everything that the LORD has told us.”*” (Exodus 24:3) Indeed, this oath seems almost a blank check. Israel swears to obey everything God has said, even that which Moses may yet tell them. The moment of oath taking is the moment of Israel’s constitution as a people unlike any other; they are a people not constituted by lineage, language, or territory but only by its singular hearing of the Word of God. The people’s resolve to “hear” is an acknowledgment that Israel is not self-made, self-invented, or autonomous, but is formed by the power, and for the pleasure, of the Holy One.

Walter Brueggemann notes “Three acts by Moses consummate the relationship in God. An altar was built (Ex 20:24-26) on which burnt offerings and whole offerings are given. Second, there is the ‘book of the covenant,’ apparently a literary deposit of the commands given by God to Moses. Third, in a ritual act, Moses sprinkles blood from the sacrifice upon both the altar (v. 6) and the people (v. 8). The ‘blood of the covenant’ thus creates solidarity between the two parties. This dramatic act is not rationally explicable, but no doubt arises from the recognition that ‘blood’ is the distinctive element that makes life possible. (See the comparable actions of Gen 15:9–11; Jer 34:18–19.) Thus Israel now begins a new life of obedience, signified by sacrifice, the ‘book of the covenant,’ and the ‘blood of the covenant.’”

In the second reading, taken from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, many people read the text with a sense of St. Paul’s fondness for courtroom forensics and judicial language, but modern scholarship does not assign authorship to St. Paul, but rather an unknown writer. This has allowed scholars to reconsider the Letter in the context of the Jerusalem Temple cult. In the second reading (Hebrews 9:11-15) the writer has set the scene in vv. 1–10: The place is the holy of holies, the sole celebrant is the high priest, the central act is the sprinkling of blood on the seat of mercy, and the time is the Day of Atonement. The one essential element is blood; in the language of Hebrews, the effective entrance into God’s presence is “*not without blood*” (v. 7). It is “*For this reason he is mediator of a new covenant*” (v.15)

It is with an understanding of the importance of the shedding/sprinkling of blood with the making of covenant, that we can then turn to our gospel.

Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:8–11) had been preceded by his remarkable prediction that the disciples would find a “*colt on which no one has ever sat*” (11:2–7). A similarly remarkable prediction precedes the Passover supper that Jesus will celebrate with his disciples (see 14:12–16). Such

amazing circumstances prepare Mark's readers for a very special part of the Jesus story.

The Passover meal of the Hebrews celebrated their deliverance from Egypt. (*"The Lord will go by, striking down the Egyptians. Seeing the blood ... on the doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and not let the destroyer come into your houses to strike you down,"* Exodus 12:23). As Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples begins, an unnamed (for now) and pitiable disciple is symbolically singled out as the one who will bring about Jesus' betrayal and, ironically, the new deliverance of God's people (vv. 17–21).

Such dramatic preparation leads to Mark's account of the first Eucharistic meal (vv. 22–25), which was as central to his Christian community's life then as it is today. Certainly Mark was faithful in passing on the early church's tradition that the Christian Eucharist is the *new Passover*. Jesus' saving death and resurrection was God's new and perfect way of delivering all people. Mark's Christians shared in the new covenant of Christ's body and blood when they shared the Eucharistic bread and cup! At the same time, Mark uses the occasion of the first Eucharist to round off a special theme he has been developing in regard to the disciples' blindness. (*Bread* has not been mentioned since chapters 6–8, where the disciples did not see the deeper meaning of Jesus' miracles, especially with "the breads"; *the cup* has not been mentioned since 10:35–45, when Jesus made clear its intimate connection with his death.) Consequently, Mark is telling his readers that those who wish to share in Jesus' Eucharistic cup (now and at the heavenly banquet, v. 25) must first choose to share fully in Jesus' way of suffering service (10:45a: *"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve"*). They must participate actively in Jesus' mission on earth, which involves pouring out their lives "for many" (v. 24), always in imitation of him (10:45b: *"The Son of Man has come ... to give his life as ransom for many"*).

### **A Wrinkle in Time**

One of the reasons to "study" Scripture is to realize the gospels are not newspaper reports, historic documentation (although it sometimes does just that), or even eye-witness accounts. Most often the gospels are the writing down, under divine inspiration, the oral accounts of the early Christian community about Jesus the Christ. This is worth noting because, when asked about the Last Supper, most Christians will reply that it was the traditional Passover meal, referencing the opening verse of our gospel: *"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?'"* (Mark 14:12) Yet this verse gives us a somewhat ambiguous "time stamp." William L. Lane, William (*The Gospel of Mark*) offers an interesting analysis of this ambiguity which is included in what follows.

The phrase *first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread* ordinarily denotes the 15th of Nisan that comes after the celebration of the Passover the previous evening. Yet, there is some evidence in the rabbinical literature, however, that the day on which the paschal lambs were sacrificed (the 14th of Nisan) was sometimes loosely designated "the first day of Unleavened Bread." This gospel was written some 40 years after the death of Jesus and so, despite the ambiguity, the important "time stamp" is the reference to the slaughter of the passover lambs on the afternoon of Nisan 14, clearly implying that the meal which Jesus celebrated with his disciples was the Passover and that the day of his arrest, condemnation and crucifixion was the 15th of Nisan.

Why mention this? In the world of gospel scholarship it has been noted that the Gospel according to John seems to situate Jesus' death in the framework of the preparation for the Passover on the 14th of Nisan (John 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42), which would mean that the meal could not have been the Passover. That being said, the Gospel of John is dated some 20-30 years after the Gospel of Mark.

There are a number of positive elements in the Marcan narrative which substantiate that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. The return to Jerusalem in the evening for the meal (Ch. 14:17) is significant, for the paschal meal had to be eaten within the city walls (Mishnah *Pesachim* VII. 9). An ordinary meal was taken in the late afternoon, but a meal which begins in the evening and continues into the night reflects Passover practice (Exod. 12:8; Jubilees 49:12). The reference to reclining (Ch. 14:18) satisfies a

requirement of the Passover feast in the first century when custom demanded that even the poorest man recline for the festive meal (Mishnah *Pesachim* X. 1). While a normal meal began with the breaking of bread, on this occasion Jesus broke the bread during the meal and followed the serving of a dish (Ch. 14:18–20, 22). The Passover meal was the one occasion when the serving of a dish preceded the breaking of bread. The use of wine was generally reserved for festive occasions and was characteristic of the Passover (Mishnah *Pesachim* X. 1). Finally, the interpretation of the elements of the meal conforms to Passover custom where the haggadah (or interpretation) is an integral part of the meal. The cumulative evidence supports the claim made in verses 12, 14 and 16 that the disciples prepared a Passover meal and that the external forms of the Passover were observed at the meal itself.

There are indications that the Fourth Evangelist also regarded the meal which Jesus shared with his disciples as a Passover. The feast takes place within Jerusalem even though the city was thronged with pilgrims (John 12:12, 18, 20; 13:2; 18:1; cf. Mark 14:17). The supper is held in the evening and lasts into the night (John 13:30; cf. Mark 14:17). The meal was ceremonial in character and the participants reclined at table (John 13:12, 23, 25, 28; cf. Mark 14:18). Finally, the walk to Gethsemane followed by the betrayal conforms to the Marcan sequence of events (John 18:1ff.; Mark 14:26ff.). In this light it seems that the concern of the priests expressed in John 18:28, that they should not become defiled and so be prohibited from eating “the *pesach*,” has reference not to the paschal lamb (which would have been eaten the evening before) but to the *chagigah*, the paschal sacrifices (lambs, kids, bulls) which were offered throughout the festival week. These paschal sacrifices are designated by the term *pesach* in Deut. 16:2 and 2 Chron. 35:7. If this understanding informed the tradition John has transmitted, the apparent contradiction with the evidence of Mark is removed.

## **Commentary**

### **Preparing the Passover Meal**

The episode of the preparation of the paschal meal is parallel in structure with Ch. 11:1–7 – in fact the first eleven words in Greek are identical. The commissioning of two disciples for the performance of a task, the precise knowledge of what they would encounter, and the exact response to be given to the responsible party are features familiar from the earlier account. The two incidents are entirely independent but they have been described according to a common scheme.

Both incidents are often thought of as examples of Jesus’ divine foresight. In other words, Jesus knew what would happen and simply informed the disciples sent ahead to take care of the final arrangements and details. One Marcan scholar, William Lane, takes a different view to the usual understanding of vv.12b-15 (and several other noted scholars also speculate along the same lines.). What follows is offered simply as a good example of how to consider alternative understandings of the stories with which we are all too familiar.

#### *Making Advanced Arrangements....*

While in v.12 the disciples took the initiative to ask where they should prepare the meal, it is evident that Jesus had made careful advance arrangements. The reference to a man carrying a jar of water who was to be followed to a house suggests a prearranged signal, for ordinarily only women carried water in jars. It would be normal to find a man carrying a wineskin. A sufficient reason for resorting to a means of recognition which would require no exchange of words in the street may be found in the determined search for Jesus and the issuance of a warrant for his arrest implied in John 11:57. Jesus, therefore, commissioned two of the disciples to make the necessary preparations, having engaged an upstairs room where he could celebrate the Passover with his disciples undisturbed.

It may be assumed that the owner of the house was a man of courage who had determined to shelter the “heretic” Galilean and his outlawed company of followers. He may have been the one who arranged for

the lamb to be sacrificed and who secured the other requirements for the meal. The upstairs rooms would probably be furnished with carpets or couches for the guests to recline on as they ate the meal.

When the disciples entered the city they found that Jesus' instructions were precise, and they prepared the meal. This would include the setting out of the unleavened bread and the wine, the preparation of the bitter herbs and sauce consisting of dried fruit, spices and wine, and presumably the roasting of the passover lamb.

### **The Passover Meal**

Since the Jewish day was reckoned from sunset to sunset, the evening marked the beginning of the 15th of Nisan. The Passover meal, which in distinction from ordinary meals began only after sunset and could last until midnight, had to be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Jesus therefore returned to the city after sundown to share the paschal feast commemorating God's deliverance of his people from bondage with the Twelve. The celebration of the Passover was always marked by excitement and the high hope that it would be fulfilled by God's intervention once more. It was observed as "*a night of vigil for the Lord*" (Exod. 12:42) in the conviction that they would be redeemed in the future. Jesus came to the city fully aware that he was to accomplish the Passover in his own person.

Again, citing William Lane: The meal was framed within a liturgy whose core was the Passover prayer of the family head and the recitation of the Hallel psalms (Ps. 113–118). When those participating had taken their places, the head of the house began the celebration by pronouncing a blessing, first of the festival and then of the wine (Mishna *Pesachim* X.2). Then the paschal participants drank the first cup of wine. After this the food was brought in, consisting of unleavened bread, bitter herbs, greens, stewed fruit and roast lamb (Mishna *Pesachim* X. 3). The son then asked why this night, with its special customs and food, was distinguished from all other nights (Mishna *Pesachim* X. 4). The family head responded by recalling the biblical account of the redemption from Egypt. This instruction led naturally into the praise of God for the salvation he had provided and the anticipation of future redemption: "So may the Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, cause us to enjoy the feasts that come in peace, glad of heart at the upbuilding of your city and rejoicing in your service ... and we shall thank you with a new song for our redemption" (Mishna *Pesachim* X. 4–6). The new song was the first part of the ancient Hallel (Ps. 113–115), after which a second cup of wine was drunk. Then the head of the house took bread and pronounced over it the blessing of "the Lord our God, Sovereign of the world, who has caused bread to come forth out of the earth" (Mishna *Berachoth* VI. 1). He then broke the bread in pieces and handed it to those who were at the table, who ate it with the bitter herbs and stewed fruit. Only then did the meal really begin with the eating of the roasted lamb, and this was not to extend beyond midnight (Mishna *Pesachim* X. 9). When the meal had been completed, the head of the family blessed the third cup with a prayer of thanksgiving. There followed the singing of the second part of the Hallel (Ps. 116–118) and the drinking of the fourth cup, which concluded the Passover (Mishna *Pesachim* X. 7).

### **The Last Supper**

In the verses which follow v.17, Mark concentrates all of his attention upon two incidents which marked the meal: the moment of the dipping of the bread and the bitter herbs in the bowl of stewed fruit when Jesus spoke of his betrayal (verses 18–21), and the interpretation of the bread and the third cup of wine following the meal itself (verses 22–25).

The festivity of the meal was shattered when Jesus, with a solemn "*Amen*," announced that one of those sharing the intimacy of the table-fellowship would betray him. The explanatory words "*one who is eating with me*" set the pronouncement in the context of Ps. 41:9, where the poor but righteous sufferer laments that his intimate friend whom he trusted and who ate his bread had "*lifted his heel*" against him. The repeated reference to the inner circle ("*one of you*," v.18 and "*one of the Twelve*," v.20) and the question "*Surely it is not I?*" expressed by each in turn (v.19) serve only to intensify the importance of the

explanatory clause “*one who is eating with me.*” This is especially apparent in the climactic character of v.20, which is parallel in form to the pronouncement in v.18:

*Verse 18*

One of you will betray me,  
one who is eating with me.

*Verse 20*

One of the Twelve,  
one who is dipping with me in the same  
bowl.

The explicit reference to the dipping of the bread in the bowl of stewed fruit in v.20 serves to reinforce the allusion to Ps. 41:9. In the timing of Jesus’ pronouncement the incongruity of Judas’ intention with the intimacy of the paschal fellowship would be apparent to all who were present. Jesus’ generosity in sharing this sacred meal with his intimate friends thus stands in contrast to the hypocrisy of the traitor sketched in vv.10–11 and serves to recall the mistreatment of the poor sufferer in Ps. 41.

One of the major themes of Ps. 41 is the assurance of ultimate triumph over his enemies’ intentions that is given to the righteous sufferer (Ps. 41:10–12). The woe pronounced upon Judas is in line with this expectation, and expresses profound sorrow and pity. In contrast to the blessing of the woman who wins a lasting memorial in accordance with the promise of Ps. 41:2 (Mk 14:9), Judas is assured of a contrary remembrance. There is no vindictiveness in the pronouncement, for the recognition that the approaching death of the Son of Man is in harmony with Scripture serves to set the result of Judas’ treachery within the context of God’s design. The heinousness of Judas’ action, however, is not excused. While the Son of Man goes to his death in accordance with the divine plan, on the other hand it was better for his betrayer had he never been born. The purpose of Jesus’ poignant warning is not primarily to affirm the fate of Judas but to underscore his own assurance of vindication. Nevertheless, the betrayer is morally responsible for his action and for the horrible character of its consequences, both for Jesus and for himself.

It is remarkable that Judas is not mentioned by name in the account. He is not introduced as one who asked “is it I?” nor is he identified as the betrayer by Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:25), and there is no reference to the fact that he left the room before the interpretation of the significance of the meal (cf. John 13:26–30). In Mark the stress falls rather upon the violation of the paschal fellowship by the presence of a traitor who must bear the onus of responsibility for his act, and upon Jesus’ knowledge that he will be betrayed by one of the Twelve and that his death is certain. This latter emphasis is set in the perspective of God’s redemptive action by the words of institution and the solemn oath which follow in verses 22–25.

### **The Institution of the Eucharist**

The interpretation of detailed elements in the meal was a fixed part of the Passover liturgy conducted by the head of the household. This occurred after the meal had been served but before it was eaten. When Jesus lifted the platter of unleavened bread he may be presumed to have spoken the Aramaic formula prescribed in the liturgy: “This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat; let everyone who is needy come and eat the Passover meal.” Each of the other elements was also introduced in the context of Israel’s experience in bondage. The bitter herbs served to recall the bitterness of slavery, the stewed fruit, which possessed the consistency and color of clay, evoked the making of bricks as slaves, while the paschal lamb provided a reminder of God’s gracious “passing over” of Israel in the plague of death that came to Egypt. While the wording of Jesus’ paschal devotions has not been preserved, it is evident that the disciples were prepared for understanding the significance of the words of institution preserved in verses 22–24 by the manner in which Jesus interpreted the components of the meal.

The blessing of God for the gift of bread immediately preceded the meal itself. The head of the family sat up from his reclining position, took a cake of unleavened bread, and recited the blessing over it in the name of all: “Praised be Thou, O Lord, Sovereign of the world, who causes bread to come forth from the earth” (Mishnah *Berachoth* VI. 1). Those present identified themselves with the blessing by saying

“Amen.” The family-head then broke for each person present a piece and gave it to him, the bread passing from hand to hand until it reached all the guests. The distribution normally took place in silence, for the explanation of the elements belonged to the Passover devotions, not to the grace before the meal. Contrary to paschal custom, Jesus broke the silence by interpreting the significance of the bread in terms of his own person. *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.”* (Mark 14:22)

Interpreting the significance of the bread and wine varies by denomination. What is clear is that in the Catholic tradition. As described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church §1323: “At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’” (original in *Lumen Gentium* 11). This is the language of covenant.

Following the main meal (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25) of the Passover, the head of the household rose again from his reclining position and exhorted those present to “Speak praises to our God, to whom belongs what we have eaten,” to which those present replied, “Praised be our God for the food we have eaten.” With his right hand he then took the third cup of red wine mixed with water, and with his eyes on the cup pronounced the prayer of thanksgiving on behalf of all, with the concluding words: “May the All-merciful One make us worthy of the days of the Messiah and of the life of the world to come. He brings the salvation of his king. He shows covenant-faithfulness to his Anointed, to David and to his seed forever. He makes peace in his heavenly places. May he secure peace for us and for all Israel. And say you, Amen.” After the company had affirmed their participation in the blessing with their “Amen,” Jesus passed the common cup from which all were to drink, and spoke the second word of institution. *Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.* <sup>24</sup> *He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.* (Mk 14:23-24)

Jesus’ saying relates the cup with the red wine to the renewal of the covenant between God and his people. The primary reference here is to Jesus’ blood shed in the context of covenant sacrifice. The reference to the covenant established in Jesus’ blood contains an allusion to Exod. 24:6–8, where the old covenant at Sinai was ratified by the sprinkling of sacrificial blood, and serves to set the whole of Jesus’ messianic action in the light of covenant renewal. It also evokes Jer. 31:31–33 where God promises to establish a new covenant with his people in the last days. That promise is now sealed through Jesus’ action and the death it anticipates.

The saying over the cup directs attention to Jesus as the one who fulfills the divine will to enter into covenant fellowship with his people on a new and enduring basis. The latter part of the saying explains the vicarious character of Jesus’ death in terms of Isa. 53:12 and calls to mind the similar formulation of Mk 10:45. The “*many*” are the redeemed community who have experienced the remission of their sins in and through Jesus’ sacrifice and so are enabled to participate in the salvation provided under the new covenant. Jesus’ second gift to his disciples, then, is the assurance that he will be with them as their Savior who establishes the new order through his death. He freely yields his life in order that God’s will to save his people may be affected. By his prophetic action in interpreting these familiar parts of the ancient paschal liturgy Jesus instituted something new in which the bread and wine become the pledge of his real presence throughout time.

### **The Promise**

Jesus’ words of promise were confirmed with a solemn oath that he would not share the cup until the meal was resumed and completed in the consummation: “*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.*” (Mark 14:25) The sober reference “not

.. again” indicates that this is Jesus’ final meal and adds a sense of a farewell. The purpose of his vow of abstinence was to declare that his decision to submit to the will of God in vicarious suffering was irrevocable. Forswearing feasting and wine, Jesus dedicated himself with a resolute will to accept the bitter cup of wrath offered to him by the Father. Yet there is here a clear anticipation of the messianic banquet when the Passover fellowship with his followers will be renewed in the Kingdom of God. Then Jesus will drink the wine “new,” where in this context newness is the mark of the redeemed world and the time of ultimate redemption. The reference to “*the day*” envisions the parousia and the triumph of the Son of Man (Mark 13:24–27, 32; cf. 1 Cor. 11:26). Thus in the context of reflecting upon his violent death on behalf of the many, and just prior to the impending events of the passion, Jesus clearly affirmed his vindication and the establishment of an uninterrupted fellowship between the redeemed community and its Redeemer through the experience of messianic salvation.

The cup from which Jesus abstained was the fourth, which ordinarily concluded the Passover meal. The significance of this can be appreciated from the fact that the four cups of wine were interpreted in terms of the four-fold promise of redemption set forth in Exod. 6:6–7: “I will bring you out ... I will rid you of their bondage ... I will redeem you ... I will take you for my people and I will be your God” (Jerusalem Talmud *Pesachim* X. 37b). Jesus had used the third cup, associated with the promise of redemption, to refer to his atoning death on behalf of the elect community. The cup which he refused was the cup of consummation, associated with the promise that God will take his people to be with him. This is the cup which Jesus will drink with his own in the messianic banquet which inaugurates the saving age to come. The cup of redemption (v.24), strengthened by the vow of abstinence (v.25), constitutes the solemn pledge that the fourth cup will be extended and the unfinished meal completed in the consummation, when Messiah eats with redeemed sinners in the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk. 14:15; Rev. 3:20f.; 19:6–9).

**Note:** Dr. Scott Hahn, a Catholic exegete, integrating this insight to all the gospel texts as a fuller story and citing the account from John where Jesus takes the bitter wine on the cross, concludes that the “cup of consummation” (4<sup>th</sup> cup) was taken from the cross. There the fulfillment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cup was enacted upon the cross when “blood was spilled” enacting the Covenant with God that again “we” are his people and He is our God.

### **A Transition into the Night**

Among devout Jews it was common to remain together at the table for several hours after the conclusion of the meal, deep in conversation about God’s past and future acts of redemption (Tosephta *Kethubim* V. 5). The table-fellowship was concluded by the recitation of the second half of the Hallel Psalms. It was customary to sing the Hallel antiphonally, one member of the table company chanting the text, and the others responding to each half verse with the shout of praise, “Hallelujah.” Jesus took the words of these psalms as his own prayer of thanksgiving and praise. He pledged to keep his vows in the presence of all the people (Ps. 116:12–19); he called upon the Gentiles to join in the praise of God (Ps. 117); and he concluded with a song of jubilation reflecting his steadfast confidence in his ultimate triumph: “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (Ps. 118:17). In the assurance that the rejected stone had been made the keystone by God’s action Jesus found a prophecy of his own death and exaltation (see above on Ch. 8:31; 12:10f.). When Jesus arose to go to Gethsemane, Ps. 118 was upon his lips. It provided an appropriate description of how God would guide his Messiah through distress and suffering to glory.

Late in the night Jesus and the disciples left the city, perhaps in discrete groups so as not to be conspicuous. They crossed the Kidron valley and began the ascent to the Mount of Olives where the affirmations of the Passover would be tested for their integrity.

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## **NOTES**



**Mark 14:12** *Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?* Mark notes that this conversation took place on the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This description reflects the fact that Passover and Unleavened Bread (which followed it immediately) were treated as one holiday season (Josephus *War* 5.99). So the day is Passover night-day, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. For the details of a Passover meal, see *m. Pesahim* 10:1–7; other elements of procuring the sacrifice are in *m. Pesahim* 1:1–3.

**Mark 14:17** *it was evening.* Mark makes it clear that this was an evening meal like a Passover meal (Exod 12:8). Normal meals started earlier. If this was a Passover meal, it would have four courses/cups and last until almost midnight (see *m. Pesahim* 10:1–6, 9). The four cups occur (1) with the preliminary course to bless the Passover day, (2) after an explanation of Passover and the singing of some of the Hallel psalms [Pss 113–118], (3) following the meal of lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs, and (4) following the concluding portion of the Hallel. It is not clear which cup exactly is meant given that only one cup is mentioned in Matthew and Mark (while Luke mentions two).

**Mark 14:12-16 general comment:** An alternative thesis, involving a three-day passion chronology, has been proposed by Jaubert. She holds that Jesus was arrested on the Tuesday night preceding the Friday of the crucifixion. The Last upper, therefore, took place on Tuesday evening in conformity with the prescriptions of the ancient liturgical calendar (based on solar reckoning) attested in the book of Jubilees and at Qumran. This understanding is reflected in the Synoptic Gospels, she contends, while the references in the Fourth Gospel are to the official (lunar) calendar. This proposal has attractive features and has won wide support, but serious objections remain to its acceptance. Chief among these are the following: (i) there is no evidence that Jesus ever followed the ancient sectarian calendar on other festival occasions. (ii) The priests were the masters of the Temple and exercised control over all that had to do with the sacrificing of the paschal victims. Even if a company wished to celebrate the feast on a day other than that fixed officially by the Sanhedrin, they would scarcely have had the opportunity to follow their convictions. All were obliged to celebrate the Passover at the official time or to abstain from observing it altogether. (iii) The four evangelists are unanimous that the Last Supper and the arrest took place on the eve of the crucifixion. (iv) The evidence furnished by the Didascalia for the Tuesday date of the meal is late and confused, belonging at the earliest to the third century A.D. In fact, of the texts favoring the Tuesday date for the Supper only four expressly speak of Wednesday in connection with the passion, and these originate in a liturgical source intent on justifying a practice of fasting on Wednesday.

**Mark 14:18** *one of you will betray me* contrasts the intimacy of table fellowship at the Passover meal with the treachery of the traitor; cf Psalm 41:10.

**Mark 14:19** *They began to be distressed and to say to him, one by one, “Surely it is not I?”* The question is asked in Gr. (μήτι ἐγώ) with an interrogative that expects a negative reply. Each of them was seeking assurance that he was not the one.

**Mark 14:20** *the one who dips with me into the dish.* The Passover meal had a common bowl, probably the one in which the sauce for the bitter herbs was placed.

**Mark 14:21** *The Son of Man indeed goes as it is written of him.* The mention of Scripture in connection with Jesus’ inevitable death echoes texts like Luke 24:43–47 and 1 Cor 15:1–3. “As it is written of him”: a reference to Psalm 41:10 cited by Jesus concerning Judas at the Last Supper; cf John 13:18–19.

**Mark 14:22** Some scholars, replying on a Passover text after Jesus’ time, also note how the breaking of the bread could suggest the hope of the Messiah; a portion of the unleavened bread eaten at Passover was known as the *afikomen* in reference to “the one who comes”.

Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (k), which provides a witness to the earliest Latin VS as used by Cyprian, reads: “... he took bread and pronounced the blessing and broke (it) and gave (it) to them, and they all ate of it; and he said to them ‘This is my body.’ And he took a cup and pronounced the blessing and gave (it) to them, and

they all drank of it; and he said to them, ‘This is my blood’ ...” The parallelism in the clause that “they all ate” and “they all drank” is a strong argument in favor of the primitiveness of this text. In Mt. 26:26, 28 these statements have been replaced by the liturgical direction

The actions and words of Jesus [22–24] express within the framework of the Passover meal and the transition to a new covenant the sacrifice of himself through the offering of his body and blood in anticipation of his passion and death. His blood of the covenant both alludes to the ancient rite of Exodus 24:4–8 and indicates the new community that the sacrifice of Jesus will bring into being (Matthew 26:26–28; Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25).

**Mark 14:23 *he took a cup...*** It is not clear which cup of the meal this was, but the purpose of the third cup was to praise God for bringing salvation to his people, so it is a possible candidate. Others argue that it was an earlier cup, assuming that the bread was a part of the meal after the second cup. Both views assume that a Passover meal was being celebrated. It is hard to know which cup is meant. Luke indicates that Jesus had multiple cups but refused to drink after this cup was taken, leaving his final cup of the meal untouched.

**Mark 14:24 *This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.*** The “many” are those who believe in Jesus as suggested from precedent for such thinking in Judaism from 4 Macc 1:11b; 17:21b-22; 18:3–4; 2 Macc 7:33, 37–38; *Testament of Moses* 9:6b–10:1; *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 18:5; and other Jewish texts.

The influence of related liturgical texts (Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25) accounts for the reference to the “new” covenant in the Byzantine textual tradition. In Ch. 14:24 the reading “covenant,” without qualification, is well attested (ⲁ B C D L W Θ Ψ 565 d k) and should be followed. It has been held that the expression “my blood of the covenant” cannot be primitive because Aramaic does not tolerate a genitive after a noun with a pronominal suffix. This construction, however, is adequately attested in Syriac and examples are found in the Targum to Ps. 68:36; 110:3.]

**for many:** the Greek preposition *hyper* is a different one from that at Matthew 26:28 but the same as that found at Luke 22:19,20 and 1 Cor 11:24. The sense of both words is vicarious, and it is difficult in Hellenistic Greek to distinguish between them. The liberation brought by Jesus’ death will be for many; cf Isaiah 53:12. Many does not mean that some are excluded, but is a Semitism designating the collectivity who benefit from the service of the one, and is equivalent to “all.” While there are few verbal contacts between this saying and the fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13–53:12), the ideas of that passage are reflected here.

**Mark 14:26 *they sang a hymn.*** The Hallel psalms (Pss 113–118) were sung at the Passover meal. As Jesus and his disciples proceeded to the Mount of Olives, they were singing these praises to God.

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