

In our lessons this evening, we hear about two different meals. Our OT lesson speaks of the first Passover, and both our Epistle and Gospel lessons refer to the Last Supper. John doesn't talk about the meal itself. But Paul uses words that are familiar to us to describe what happened at the Last Supper. They are words we have firmly placed in our liturgy. Whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we remember and recite these words.

Paul account of the Last Supper was written down decades earlier than any of the accounts in the Gospels. Paul tells us that, "I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" Very similar words appear in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Then Paul adds, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

This last sentence is a reminder that the Last Supper does not take place in a vacuum. The events of Thursday night are intimately tied to the events of Friday morning and afternoon, and also to Sunday morning. The Last Supper finds its meaning and fulfillment in the context of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Maundy Thursday is Act 1 of God's 3 Act play. The bread broken and shared is Christ's broken body; the wine that is shared is Christ's blood poured out for us. The reason we can share in these sacred mysteries today is precisely because Jesus passed over from death to life. The Last Supper finds its meaning in both the cross and the empty tomb.

The Last Supper also finds its meaning in the context of the Passover. In our OT lesson, we read in Exodus of the instructions for the Passover meal in Egypt.

The Passover meal is the most important meal of the Jewish year. The Passover is the yearly reminder that God acting on Israel's behalf, and brought them out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand. During the first Passover in Egypt, it was by eating the flesh of a lamb and by spreading its blood on the doorposts that the Children of Israel were saved.

For Christians, Communion is our Passover meal. Jesus puts the Last Supper into this context with his words to his disciples, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." But the Last Supper is no ordinary Passover dinner. Jesus adds new significance to the meal. "This (bread) is my body. This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

The flesh and blood of the unblemished lamb brought salvation to the children of Israel. For Christians, salvation also comes through eating the flesh of a lamb and through the lamb's blood. In this case, however, it is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who brings us salvation. This is one of John's central themes throughout his Gospel. Jesus, as the new Paschal Lamb, provides spiritual nourishment and sustenance for his people through his body and blood.

Yet, all this talk of salvation, all this talk of unblemished Passover lambs, all this talk about the mystery of Christ's body and blood can sound rather theoretical and theological. It can sound rather removed from reality. It is in this context, that Maundy Thursday reminds us that Christianity is not just a set of beliefs. Christianity is not just about theology. Christianity is instead about relationship.

We are called to intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior. Yet, this relationship is not expressed in the abstract. This relationship is cemented in the concrete. The incalculable gift given to us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ comes to us in concrete ways: in a piece of broken bread, in a cup of poured wine.

We come to Jesus' table and we are fed. We are not fed in some abstract way. Instead, we share concrete and tangible signs of our Lord's presence with us. My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed, says the Lord.

The full spiritual meaning is too immense for us to grasp theologically. It's beyond our comprehension. Yet, through the gift of sacrament, this spiritual grace is given an outward and physical sign, signs that we can grasp physically: bread we can touch with our hands; wine we can taste with our lips.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.
Blessed are those who are called to the Supper of the Lamb.