

The Eucharist By Jim Seghers

For Christ Our Pascal Lamb Has Been Sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7)

In God's request that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, we find the second of two Eucharistic types in the Book of Genesis. The first was the sacrifice of bread and wine offered by the priest king, Melchizedek (Gen 14:18). The following are similarities between Isaac and Christ: the birth of both was supernatural; both are sons of promise; both were called "the only begotten son;" both carried the wood up the same mountain, Moriah; both consented to endure death; both were bound; both were offered by their fathers; both were laid on the wood; both were in the vigor of life, and both lived again after the offering. Jesus and Isaac were dead three days, but in different ways: Christ literally, and Isaac figuratively. Isaac is also a type of Christ in the unique relationship each had with his bride, Isaac with Rebekah and Jesus with the Church.

In the sacrifice of Isaac and the offering of Melchizedek there is a Eucharistic imprint that deserves serious consideration and prayerful meditation. The Eucharist, in fact, finds a reflection and is the key event in salvation history.

However, when one considers the sweep of salvation history it becomes evident that the Eucharist is present in the three distinct stages of that history in three different ways. In the time of the Old Testament the Eucharist is present as a *type*. With the arrival of the Messiah it is present as the event. In the age of the Church the Eucharist is present as a *sacrament*. The purpose of the figure or type was to prepare for the event. The purpose of the sacrament is to continue the event by actualizing it in Jesus' Mystical Body, the Church Cantalamessa, Raniero. *The Eucharist Our Sanctification*. Revised Edition. Translated by Frances Lonergan Villa. Collegetown, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, c. 1993, 1995, p. 6.).

From the marital-covenantal theme that the Holy Spirit inaugurates in the Book of Genesis and develops in the succeeding books of the Bible until its culmination in the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 21:1-22:21), the Eucharist is seen as the sublime consummation of Christ's marital oneness with his bride. This union is anticipated in the progressive covenants God established with the human race through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Esra and Nehemiah all of which lead up to their fulfillment in the marital covenant that Jesus Christ establishes between God and his bride, the Church. "This cup which is poured out for you is the *new covenant in my blood*" (Lk 22:20).

In a profound sense the "entire Old Testament was a preparation for the Lord's Supper" (Ibid.). In Matthew's Gospel Jesus proclaims the parable of the "king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast" (Mt 22:2-3). Those servants were the Old Testament prophets who invited the guests to come to the Lord's banquet. In addition, the great event of the Lord's Supper was anticipated through types.

The first of these is *Melchizedek*. Paul declares that Jesus is "a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 6:20), who in the offering of bread and wine is a type of Christ (Heb 7:1ff, Ps 110:4; Gen 14:18). We have already seen that Isaac is a type of Christ, particularly in his representation as the lamb of sacrifice. John's Gospel (Jn 6:31) makes the connection between the manna in the desert (Ex 16:4ff) and the Eucharist, but it is Jesus who shows that the manna is a mere foreshadowing of the "true bread from heaven" (Jn 6:32-33).

However, the greatest Old Testament figure of the Eucharist is the Passover (Ex 12:23). On the night of the Passover, when God smote all the first-born of the Egyptians, he spared the first-born of Israel. Why? "The blood shall be a *sign* for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you" (Ex 12:13). But was it the blood of the Passover lamb, alone, into which a hyssop was dipped to sprinkle blood on the doorposts that saved Israel? No! This was a type. What God foresaw that fateful night was the blood of the true Lamb of God, the Eucharist.

When Jesus, like other observant Jews, celebrated the Passover it took place in two phases and in two different places. The first consisted in the slaying of the lamb. This took place in the temple. The second part was the eating of the lamb during the Passover supper, which took place in the home or in some other suitable place outside of the temple. During this family liturgy, the father vested with priestly dignity would explain the meaning of the ritual. This meal was a memorial, not only of the Passover and exodus from Egypt, but of all God's merciful interventions in the history of Israel. In particular the Passover celebrated four great events: the creation of the world, the offering of Isaac, the exodus out of Egypt, and the coming of the Messiah. (Ibid., p. 7)

The memorial of the Passover (Ex 12:14) looked forward as a prefigurement to mankind's exodus from the slavery of sin. We are left with a sense of wonder and awe as we contemplate the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24; Lk 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:8, Jer 31:31; Heb 8:13) holding the unleavened bread in his sacred hands saying: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). The great tragedy was that, after centuries of longing, the Jewish authorities crucified the Messiah during the Passover feast. Their closed minds and hard hearts made them unwilling to recognize that on Calvary (Ibid., p. 9) they immolated the true Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36; Rev 5:6).

Jesus' use of the words "remembrance" (Lk 22:19) and "new covenant" (Lk 22:20) would remain forever fixed in the Apostles' mind, reminding them that in instituting a new Passover Jesus was perfectly fulfilling the old Passover. The world had arrived at the "fullness of time" (Eph 1:10) in which the type became the reality, "for Christ our Pascal Lamb has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). The four evangelists unfold in a marvelously complimentary way the event that brought the new Passover, the Eucharist, into existence. (Ibid., p. 9)

The beloved disciple, understandably, focused on the sacrifice on the cross which was foreshadowed by the immolation of the lamb in the temple. Throughout his gospel John interweaves the Passover theme (Jn 1:29, 36; 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14). Two of his Passover references are particularly insightful. The first is John 6:4 where the apostle interjects the Passover motif prior to the great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:5-15) which introduces the Bread of Life discourse (Jn 6:26-71) in which Jesus connects the Eucharist with its type, the manna in the desert (Jn 6: 31-35). The second reference is John 12:1 in which John cleverly connects the resurrection theme with that of the Passover by his citation of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

The genius of John's Gospel is also seen in his use of time, the "hour," (Jn 2:4; 4:6, 21, 23, 52, 53; 5:25, 53; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32; 17:1; 19:14; 19:27) which is the "hour" of Jesus' "glorification" (Jn 12:23; 17:1) on the cross. (Ignace De La Potterie's profound work on this subject is highly recommended: *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus According to John*. New York: Alba House, c. 1983, 1984) It is John that confirms that Jesus died on the cross at the precise "hour" that the type, the Passover lambs, were being slain in the temple (Jn 17:14). In the Passover liturgy God instructs the Jews not to break a bone of the sacrificial lamb (Ex 12:46). It is John that makes the connection with that rite and Jesus' death on the cross when he highlights: "For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of him shall be broken' (Jn 19:36)." John is quoting Ex 12:46, Num 9:12, and Ps 34:20. Again, it is John alone who develops the Passover significance of the hyssop. "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished said, 'I thirst.' A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished'; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:28-30).

In unfolding Jesus' first miracle John profoundly develops the Eucharistic motif that he first introduced from the lips of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29, 36). In one sublime verse he shows how Jesus identifies his mother, "woman," with the "woman" of Genesis 3:15 whose "seed" will crush Satan's head, and the event of that crushing, "My hour" (Jn 2:4). This prepares the reader to understand the Eucharistic symbolism of the miracle. The same Jesus, who by a miracle changes water into wine, will by a greater miracle change wine into his blood. "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2:11).

Matthew, Mark and Luke (called the synoptic Gospels because they take a common view regarding the events of Jesus' life) focus on the other part of the Passover ritual, the Passover supper. They portray the Eucharist as the transformation of the old Passover to the new. (Ibid., p. 10) They understand that the Eucharistic consecration already contains the event of Christ's immolation on the cross, just as future Eucharistic celebrations are inseparably linked to that same event. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... all things were made through him" (Jn 1:1-3). Jesus' words and actions are creative. They produce what they signify.

Thus in the consecration at the Last Supper and in the breaking of the bread, which became a synonym of the consecration of the Eucharist (Lk 24:35), we have the supreme symbolic and prophetic action of all history which restores mankind in a new covenant (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:8, 13; 12:24). In the symbolism of breaking the bread, Jesus breaks his body on the cross. The words of consecration constitute the moment of the mystical immolation of Christ which compliments and is essentially connected with Jesus' real immolation on the cross.

Jesus informs us: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father" (Jn 10:17-18). The great event of all history is the moment that Jesus "allowed" his death on the cross. That event happened once, and it can never be repeated (Rom 6:10). "Nor was it [Christ's entrance into heaven] to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:25-26). Jesus' death and resurrection is the event that institutes the Eucharist.

This ushers in the final stage of salvation history, the Church. It is the time in which we live. The Eucharist is present to us sacramentally. As a sacrament it is in the signs of bread and wine which were instituted by Christ at the Passover supper with the words: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. . . This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25). Jesus tells us that this is the food of life: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn 6:53-54). The difference between Christ's death on the cross, the event, and the Eucharist, the sacrament, is the difference between history and liturgy. (David Chilton's excellent commentary on the Book of Revelation shows the connection between the heavenly liturgy and that on earth. His comments on pp. 475 #9 to 478 #10 are very insightful. The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation. Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, c. 1987)

The event that history attests happened once, and it will never again be repeated. The liturgy, the sacrament, not only keeps the past from being forgotten, but it renews the event of history by celebrating it. But this celebration is more than a mere recalling of a past event. In the mystery of this sacrament the Eucharist of history, Jesus' passion and death, is made present again. The event occurred once. The sacrament takes place many times. Thus the sacrament mystically brings us to the foot of the cross where we are invited to witness with Mary, John and the holy women. The old spiritual asks the question: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Through our participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist we can answer: "I was there at the foot of the cross!"

The work of our redemption is the work of the Trinity. The Father is no mere passive spectator, but an active participant. The act of Abraham offering Isaac on Moriah is a type of God the Father offering his Son on that same mountain. Paul instructs us that the Father "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom 8:32). How did Jesus make the sacrifice of himself to the Father "for us?" Jesus gave himself to the Father in Love, that is, through the active participation of the Holy Spirit (Heb 9:14).

Shortly before his passion, Jesus fortified his Apostles with the promise: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever" (Jn 14:16) "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn

14:26). "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (Jn 15:26).

The event of Jesus redemptive act ended on the cross, but the life giving power of that self-donation secured our "eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12) by the transforming power of the "eternal Spirit" (Heb 9:14). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is concluded as an event, but it nevertheless continues for all eternity in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, who is the very life and soul of the Church, that makes the sacraments instruments conveying life. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the event of the cross is never ended, but continues in time sacramentally and in eternity mystically. This insight provides the key to understanding John's heavenly vision of the resurrected Jesus who appeared as "a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered" (Rev 5:6). While the act of death ended and will never be repeated, the act of Jesus' total self-giving to the Father "for us" (Rom 8:32) continues eternally in Love, that is, the Holy Spirit.

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