

2018 THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

Three times during the Eucharistic Prayer the priest holds up the Host for all to behold. The third time is just before Holy Communion. As we gaze on the Host, the priest proclaims: “Behold the Lamb of God. Behold He Who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.”

Scripture scholars tell us that the word ‘supper’ could quite rightly- and far more poetically- be translated as ‘Wedding Banquet’.

If Holy Communion is a Wedding Banquet- who has been married?

That is an easy question- Christ and the Church. Christ is the Bridegroom; the Church is the Bride.

And when did the Marriage take place? Again no prizes for the right answer: It happened at the Last Supper when Jesus took a loaf of bread and said: “This is My Body” and at the end of the meal when taking a chalice of wine He said: “This is My Blood, the blood of the new covenant which is to be poured out for many.” The marriage- the new Covenant- was created that night at the Last Supper and sealed next day on Calvary when Jesus died on the Cross.

Marriage is a sacred moment when a person says to their beloved: I give myself to you absolutely, unconditionally and forever. My life is yours.

Jesus said that at the Last Supper and acted on it on the Cross.

John, the Apostle, Mary, Jesus mother, and some devout women were at the foot of the Cross. They gazed on Christ with love and absolute commitment. They assuredly returned Christ’s unconditional love. The moment of Christ’s death was a moment of intense love when the marriage between Christ and the Church was sealed. It was a timeless moment embracing all of time- both before and after the Cross.

Every time we come to Mass this, the defining moment of all history, the Marriage between Christ and the Church, is made present.

What follows a Marriage? Again no prizes: the celebratory Banquet.

And so it is appropriate for the priest to proclaim: “Blessed are we who are called to the Wedding Banquet.” To eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass is to celebrate the marriage between Christ and the Church.

Today’s Readings focus especially upon the symbolism of the Precious Blood. In religious thinking, blood is a symbol of life. The sharing of blood is a symbol of lives being irrevocably bonded.

When, in the First Reading, Moses sprinkled the altar and then the people with the blood of sacrificed bullocks, he was proclaiming and sealing the Sinai covenant- the marriage between God- Yahweh- and the People of Israel. The covenant that bound God to Israel and Israel to God was formally ratified and sealed through blood. The

fact that the Israelites received on their persons the blood that was also poured over the altar- God's space- was ever-so significant.

Our Second Reading from Paul's Letter to the Hebrews refers directly to the Jewish Feast of Yom Kipper, the annual Feast when Israel sought forgiveness for their infidelity to the Covenant they first made on Mt Sinai to Yahweh.

At Yom Kipper, the Jewish High Priest, mystically conferred upon a lamb the sins of the nation. The lamb was killed. The High Priest took the blood of the sacrificed lamb and entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple. He sprinkled some of the lamb's blood on the cover over the Ark of the Covenant- the place where God was manifestly present. He then returned to the assembled people and sprinkled the remaining blood over them. It was a sign of the renewal of the Sinai Covenant in the here and now.

St Paul states that this ceremony was no longer necessary. Christ, the Lamb of Sacrifice had taken upon himself the sins of the world once and for all. Christ, the High Priest of the new Covenant- by His death on the Cross- entered the most perfect of all Temples- God's Temple in heaven- and offered blood far more precious than that of any animal- His own Precious Blood. The pouring out of Jesus' precious Blood on the altar of the Cross made all other sacrifices redundant. It was once and for all. The rupture between God and humanity caused by sin was healed forever. At the moment Christ died, the veil of the Temple protecting the Ark of the Covenant was torn asunder as a sign that Temple sacrifice had been superseded.

At the Last Supper, Jesus said: "This is my Blood, the blood of the New Covenant, which is to be poured out for many."

The sharing of the Precious Blood among all at every Mass, makes Christ's sacrifice on the Cross present for us in the here and now.

As you sip the Precious Blood from the Chalice, imagine yourself being present at the Last Supper and later being at the foot of the Cross and being sprinkled with the Precious Blood of Christ which sealed the New Covenant between God and ourselves. As you consume the Precious Blood you are saying 'Yes' to the promises made at your Baptism and Confirmation. You are saying 'Yes, Jesus is my Lord and Saviour. Yes, I believe in the Gospel. Yes, I will be faithful to the New Covenant; forged so radically by Jesus on the Cross.'

In truth as we receive Holy Communion we are celebrating the Marriage between Christ and the Church. We are publicly manifesting our acceptance of the New Covenant established by Christ. In the sharing of one Cup we are also proclaiming that we are all brothers and sisters- sharing in the one life- the life of Jesus, our Risen Lord.

How profound is this? How privileged are we to be members of God's Chosen People- the New Israel!!