

The Eucharist and life

The divine intimacy with Christ, in the silence of contemplation, does not take us far from our contemporaneous, on the contrary, it makes us attentive and open to the joys and afflictions of men. It widens our heart to the dimensions of the world. It disposes us to solidarity with our brothers in humanity, mainly with the least ones, the beloved of the Lord.

Through adoration, the Christian contributes mysteriously to the radical transformation of the world and to the diffusion of the Gospel. Those who encounter the Lord fulfil an eminent service: they present to Christ all those who do not know Him and are far from Him; they keep a vigil before Him on their behalf.

(John Paul II)

Final Prayer

We follow you, Lord Jesus, but you do call us so that we may follow you.
No one can ascend without you.
You are the way, the truth, the life,
the possibility, the faith, the prize.
Open our heart to whatever is truly good,
to your divine goodness.
Show us the unalterable, unique, changeless good,
in which we may be eternal and we may know every good;
in that good we find serene peace, immortal light,
everlasting grace, the holy inheritance of souls,
tranquillity without turmoil,
not destined to perish, but exempted from death:
there, where there is no tears,
where weeping does not dwell
where your saints are freed from errors and worries,
from fear and anxiety,
from greed and filthiness,
from each bodily trouble,
where the land of the living extends itself.

(St. Ambrogio)

cards of formation



“This day must be commemorated by you”

Ex 12, 14

Towards the re-discovery
of the mystery of the Eucharist.



To begin...



The Eucharist, as it is kept in the faith of the Church, presents an amazing aspect that upsets the intelligence and moves the heart. We find ourselves before one of the abyssal gestures of God's love, before which the only possible human attitude is a surrender of adoration filled with limitless gratitude. The Eucharist is not only the modality wanted by Jesus to make the Paschal saving efficacy perpetually present. Present in it is not only the will of God that institutes a gesture of salvation.. Present in it is simply Jesus himself (but how many mysteries are present in this simplicity).

In the Eucharist Jesus donates himself to us. He alone can leave himself as a gift for us, because He alone is one with the infinite love of God who can do everything.

It isn't at all easy to put the Eucharist at the centre! It's not is to welcome the message of the sacrament of the Eucharist in its very strength. In the Eucharist God's love manifests itself in its purest and most upsetting forms and meets a man who feels lost before such things as are immensely greater than he.

The Eucharist at the centre is half of a long journey.

(Card. Carlo Maria Martini)

To reflecter

From the encyclical "Ecclesia de Eucharistia", by John Paul II

14. Christ's Passover includes not only his passion and death, but also his resurrection. This is recalled by the assembly's acclamation following the consecration: "*We proclaim your resurrection*". The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour's passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice. It is as the living and risen One that Christ can become in the Eucharist the "bread of life" (*Jn* 6:35, 48), the "living bread" (*Jn* 6:51). Saint Ambrose reminded the newly-initiated that the Eucharist applies the event of the resurrection to their lives: "Today Christ is yours, yet each day he rises again for you". Saint Cyril of Alexandria also makes clear that sharing in the sacred mysteries "is a true confession and a remembrance that the Lord died and returned to life for us and on our behalf".

In the last Supper, after celebrating the Passover with his disciples, while passing to the Father from this world, Christ instituted this sacrament as Perpetual memorial of his passion ... the greatest out of all miracles; He left this sacrament as a consolation beyond compare to all those who would be filled in with sadness because of his absence.

St. Thomas Aquinas

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The Paschal lamb

The lamb sacrificed by the Israelites in the temple the first day of the Passover, as a memorial of the sacrifice offered before the deliverance from Egypt, when God, seeing the house of the Israelites whose door-posts and lintel were signed with the blood of the lamb, "passed over", sparing their first begotten children. The lamb at the time of the New Testament was killed in the temple. The priests poured the blood near the altar and the meat was eaten in the Paschal supper. The lamb is the prefiguration of Christ, whom Paul calls "our Passover".(1 Cor. 5,7)

ablutions were made and the meal was consumed. After the third and fourth cup, they sang the last part of the *Hallel*: after the last blessing, the banquet was over.

The Paschal Banquet took unavoidably over a particular character in the epochs in which the people suffered because of slavery: since Israel had lost the freedom once again, the remembrance of the past immense redemption arose the hope in a future deliverance. The past was a pledge for the future, for the eschatological action of the Messiah, saviour and deliverer. The atmosphere of the Paschal Banquet, at the time of Jesus, was thus characterised by the memorial of the redemption already fulfilled and by the waiting for the perfect and lasting deliverance that has still to come. This waiting, that was full of hope, was also an ardent supplication, In this already very rich picture, the unheard news of the Christian Passover was inserted.

To meditate.

From the Rule of the true faith (19), by Fulgenzio of Ruspe.

Assume with supreme firmness and do not doubt at all that the same Word of God, the only begotten son made flesh, offered himself for us in sacrifice and host to God, a “sweet smelling sacrifice” (Eph 5,2). In the Old Testament animals were sacrificed to Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, by the patriarchs, the prophets and the priests; today, in the New Testament, the holy Catholic Church ceaselessly, with faith and love, offers on earth the sacrifice of bread and wine to Him, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit -with whom he has the same divine nature. The carnal victims were a figuration of the flesh of Christ that He, the spotless, would immolate because of our sins, and of the blood that he would shed in remission of all our sins. This sacrifice is, instead, a thanksgiving and a commemoration of the flesh of Christ that He offered for us and of the blood that God himself shed for us. Thus blessed Paul speaks of Him in the Acts of the Apostles: *Be on your guard for yourself and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the guardians, to feed the Church of God which He bought with the blood of His own Son” (Acts 20,28).*

Those sacrifice, therefore, represented symbolically what would be donated to us: this sacrifice, instead, shows clearly what has been donated to us. Those sacrifices announced that the Son of God would be killed for the sinners, this, instead, announces that the Son of God has already been killed for the sinners, just has the Apostle of Christ attests, *“When we were still helpless, at the appointed time, Christ died for the godless” (Rm 5,6),* and that, *“while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Rm 5,10).*

The Word of God

From the book of Exodus 12, 1-14

“Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: This month must be the first of all the months for you, the first month of your year. Speak to the whole community of Israel and say, ‘On the tenth day of this month each man must take an animal from the flock of his family: one animal for each household. If the household is too small for the animal, he must join with his neighbour nearest to his house, depending on the number of persons ... You must keep it till the fourteenth day of the month when the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter it at twilight.

Some of the blood must then be taken and put on both door-posts and the lintel of the house where it is eaten. That night the flesh must be eaten roasted over the fire; it must be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ...

That night I shall go through Egypt and strike down all the first-born in Egypt, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are. When I see the blood, I shall pass over you and you will escape the destructive plague when I strike Egypt.

This day must be commemorated by you, and you must keep it as a feast in Yahweh’s honour. You must keep it as a feast-day for all generations: this is a decree for all time”.

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Passover

The word *P a s s o v e r* derived from Greek and Latin “Pascha”, itself derives from the Aramaic *Pésakh*. And it means “to go over”, “to cross”, (pasakh), therefore with the passage of the Lord or of his angel in the night of deliverance. The “Pascha” or Passover was the annual sacrifice that commemorated (the memorial) the Exodus, namely the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt; it is a culminating moment of Salvation History, when God enters the human events for the first time as “S a v i o u r”, realizing the promises made to Abraham.

Self formation

The Hebrew Paschal banquet

To understand exactly the gestures and the words of Jesus in the last supper, it is necessary, therefore, to put oneself in the context of the Hebrew liturgy, particularly in the Paschal banquet.

To consume the Paschal meal, the Hebrew, at the time of Jesus, did not stay at table standing or sitting, according to the old custom (Ex. 12,11), but lying down on low sofas, according to the Roman custom, to underline that they considered themselves as free men. This fact introduces us immediately into the essential symbolism of the Paschal rite: the Passover (Easter) is the feast of the deliverance and redemption of Israel. This gives the joyful character to the banquet and the feast: God has manifested his love and his power in delivering his people from Egypt. Wine is the symbol of the Paschal joy. Its use was not prescribed by the Exodus, but is constant in Judaism. During the meal they drank it in four occasions. While filling the cup, the head of the family pronounced the different formulas of blessing. After the preliminary blessings, they brought to table first the bitter herbs, then the unleavened bread and the lamb. The father explained his children the symbolism of the food. The lamb remembered the night of deliverance from Egypt, when the houses of the Israelites had been spared (Ex 12); the unleavened bread remembered the hurry of the departure, before the time required by the dough to get leavened (Ex 12); the bitter herbs mean the sadness and oppression of the slaves in the foreign land.

Ex. 12, 25-27: When you have entered the country which Yahweh will give you, as he has promised, you will observe this ritual. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ritual mean?', you will tell them, "It is the Passover sacrifice in honour of Yahweh who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and struck Egypt but spared our houses

Ex. 12, 39: With the dough which they had brought from Egypt, they baked unleavened cakes, because the dough had not risen, since they had been driven out of Egypt without time to linger, or to prepare food for themselves

The speech of the family head, that explained the meaning of the Paschal night, inspired itself from an important text of the Deuteronomy. The text evoked first the misery and the humiliation of their stay in Egypt, then the power of God the deliverer who granted his people victory and an abundance of goods (Dt. 26).

Dt. 26, 5-10: ... "My father was a wandering Aramaean, who went down to Egypt with a small group of men, and stayed there, until he there became a great, powerful and numerous nation. The Egyptians ill-treated us, they oppressed us and inflicted harsh slavery on us. But we called on Yahweh, God of our ancestors. Yahweh heard our voice and saw our misery, our toil and our oppression; and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with mighty

hand and outstretched arm., with great treasures and with signs and wonders. He brought us here and has given us this country, a country flowing with milk and honey ..."

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Alliance

All that was evoked, however, in the Paschal banquet with the words and the symbolism of the elements, was not only a memory. The Paschal rite intended to associate the invitees to the reality that the banquet meant. Redemption was not commemorated as an event of the past, but was *actualised* as an event in which all the present people participated. Each was made to be before a redemption of which he himself was the object and the beneficiary. By eating the bitter herbs and symbolically participating in the hard destiny of their forefathers, they put themselves in the situation of the prisoner and redeemed Israelite. "All through the century -as the actual Paschal Hebrew rite commemorates- each of us has the duty of considering ourselves as one who has himself been driven out of Egypt ... God has delivered not only our ancestors: He has delivered us also with them". The Exodus had already affirmed this perennial reality of the first Passover (Ex.13).

Ex. 13, 8: "On that day you will explain to your son: "This is because of what Yahweh did for me when I came out of Egypt".

Everyone, therefore, must be personally associated to the glorious deliverance of that night. The goodness and power of Yahweh are for all those who sit at the banquet. The food of that banquet become, for the believers, the sign of their participation in redemption. This way of understanding the Paschal Feast is connected to what was fixed from the very beginning: "This day will be for you a *memorial*" (Ex.12,14). The word *memorial* says more than remembrance, commemoration. By celebrating the Paschal memorial that situation was re-constituted which was created by the redeeming intervention of God. Every year the covenant, made by divine grace with Israel, was made alive and actual. After singing part of the *Hallel* (Ps. 113-118),

In the antiquity, the life of the people or tribe based itself on the alliance as a demand for survival in front of the most strong enemies. The covenant of God with his chosen people, realized through Moses on Mt Sinai, is a central event of the Old Testament and is there described according to the sketch of treaties that were drawn up among different people, be it of the same strength, be it one superior and the other inferior that remained protected. The prophets constantly made reference to the covenant to re-call the people and the kings to their observance. Jesus, in the last supper, in the institution of the Eucharist, makes reference to the "Blood of the new covenant" (ref. Lk 22, 20).