

SESSION 6

Blood of the Covenant

Passover, Sinai, and the Meal on the Mountain

TAKE-HOME SHEET

WHAT WE FOUND

The exodus turned out to be an oath being kept, not a rescue improvised: "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham" (Exodus 2:24). And God gave the whole nation a family name: "Israel is my first-born son" (4:22). Then our hunt paid off: Exodus 6:7 carries the covenant formula in its fullest form yet, both halves at last, "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God."

Passover taught us the anatomy of redemption: a lamb without blemish, kept inside the household four days, its blood on the doorposts, and, the requirement everyone forgets, its flesh eaten, because in God's economy sacrifice ends in communion. And Passover was commanded forward as a *zikkaron*, a memorial thicker than memory: fathers who never saw Egypt must say "what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt" (13:8), and Moses told the new generation gathered on the plains of Moab, "Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us" (Deuteronomy 5:3). In Israel's liturgy the saving events become, as the Catechism puts it, in a certain way present and real (CCC 1363). A biblical memorial is something you enter, not something you look back at.

At Sinai the tribe became "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:6), an office held for the sake of all the earth, and 1 Peter 2:9 showed us the same office on the shoulders of the baptized today. Then the summit: the covenant was sealed with words read, vows spoken, and blood thrown half on the altar and half on the people, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you" (24:8), memorize that sentence, and it ended the way covenant-making in Scripture so often culminates, with family at table: seventy elders on the mountain, a sapphire pavement, and "they beheld God, and ate and drank."

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Melito of Sardis *On the Passover (c. AD 170)*

In one of the earliest Christian sermons we possess, St. Melito preached the Passover as a mystery both old and new: old according to the law, new according to the Word; the model was in the law, the reality in the Gospel. For Melito the lamb of Egypt was precious precisely because of what it prefigured, the way a sketch is honored for the sake of the finished portrait.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory of Nyssa *The Life of Moses*

St. Gregory of Nyssa read the exodus as the map of every soul's journey: the slavery, the blood marked door, the sea, the wilderness, and the mountain are stages of the life of grace, and Moses' ascent into the dark cloud teaches that the closer one draws to God, the more one must leave behind everything the senses grasp and the mind comprehends, entering the darkness where God dwells beyond all seeing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom *Baptismal Catecheses (Cat. 3; read in the Office of Readings, Good Friday)*

St. John Chrysostom asked his congregation why the blood of an irrational lamb could turn away the destroyer in Egypt, and answered: not because of what it was, but because of what it signified. The power was on loan from the sacrifice it prefigured. Even in Egypt, Chrysostom taught, the blood on the doorposts saved by pointing forward.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- At Mass this Sunday, listen for the words spoken over the chalice and simply notice what you notice. Write down one phrase afterward. Bring it next month; do not research it yet.
- Pick three people who do not know God and pray for them by name each day this week, deliberately, as a priest of 1 Peter 2:9 standing before God on their behalf.
- Before next session, read Exodus 32:1 to 29 and Deuteronomy 30:1 to 6. Watch what the people do at the foot of the mountain, and watch what God promises to do to the heart.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Exodus 24:8 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session: Read Exodus 32:1 to 29 and Deuteronomy 30:1 to 6. Watch what the people do at the foot of the mountain while Moses is still on it, and watch what God promises to do to the human heart.

Catechism References: CCC 62 to 63, 709, 1150, 1363