

The Lamb Must Be Eaten

Exodus 12:1-14, 21-28, 43-47; 1 Corinthians 5:7

What We Found

We read the Passover instructions the way they deserve to be read, slowly. The lamb was without blemish, taken as "a lamb for a household" (Ex 12:3) and kept four days before it was slain for the house. The blood on the doorposts turned away the destroyer. Salvation was personal, and it was applied, not just accomplished.

Then we found the hinge: the flesh shall be eaten that night. There is no Passover in which the blood suffices and the supper is skipped. The blood protects, and the eating completes. In Israel's founding act of salvation, sacrifice culminates in a meal, shared by a company sized to the lamb, in one house, by all the congregation.

And the meal never ends: a memorial day, an ordinance for ever, with the children's question built into the rite itself. We left with a question of our own on the table: if sacrifice is completed by eating, where is the lamb we must eat?

Voices of the Church

St. Melito of Sardis

On Pascha, 2nd century

St. Melito preached that the mystery of the Lord was sketched in advance in the Passover lamb: the sheep slain in Egypt traced the outline of the one who was to come. The model, he said, was precious in its time, and then yielded to the truth it foreshadowed, as a sketch gives way to the finished work. For Melito, Exodus 12 was the Gospel drawn in charcoal.

St. John Chrysostom

Baptismal Catecheses, 4th century

St. John Chrysostom told the newly baptized that if they wished to learn the power of the blood of Christ, they should go back to Egypt and consider its type: the blood of a lamb on the doorposts, before which the destroyer would not enter. If the figure had such power, he argued, how much more the reality it prefigured.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria

Festal Letters, 4th century

St. Athanasius wrote a letter to the churches each year to announce Easter, and again and again he framed the feast through the Passover: Israel ate the flesh of a lamb in haste, but the Church keeps the feast in Christ our Passover, the true Lamb, on whom the faithful now feed. The yearly rhythm of Israel's memorial, he taught, was training for a greater feast.

Live It This Week

- 1.** Invite someone to a meal this week on purpose, as an act of faith rather than convenience. Size the company to the food, the way Exodus 12:4 does.
- 2.** Read Exodus 12:1-14 once more on your own with a single question: what does God bind together here that I tend to separate?
- 3.** At Mass this Sunday, listen for every mention of the word lamb, and simply count them. Bring your number next week.

Scripture Memory Verse

"For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed."

1 Corinthians 5:7

Before Next Session

Read Exodus 16:1-5 and 16:13-21. Watch what the people do with their mouths before God feeds them, and watch what happens to anyone who tries to stockpile the gift.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 608; 1150