

This Is My Body

Luke 22:7-20; Mark 14:22-26; Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116; John 19:28-30, 36

What We Found

Luke told us five times what meal it was, and Jesus told us his heart: I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer (Luke 22:15); literally, in the Greek, “with desire I have desired.” He chose, for his last night, the one meal in Israel whose whole logic is a sacrifice that must be eaten. Then, in slow motion, he took bread, blessed, broke, and gave, and said the words: This is my body, given for you. This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many. Identification, covenant, sacrifice, gift.

We found Sinai inside the cup: Behold the blood of the covenant, Moses’ exact words, real blood really applied, binding God and a people into family, because covenant blood that only symbolizes seals nothing. We weighed the strongest symbolic case, including the Passover Haggadah’s own this is the bread of affliction (a formula whose surviving texts are later than the first century, though its making-present logic runs back to Exodus 12:26-27 and Deuteronomy 16:3), and found it proves the opposite of what it intends: Passover language is making-present language, and Jesus loaded it with first-person, sacrificial cargo it had never carried: my body, for you. And Capernaum stood behind everything: he had already watched many disciples walk away at Capernaum rather than soften these words (John 6:66), and left the gift in the future tense. Tonight the tense changed.

Then we followed the interrupted Passover: the vow off the fruit of the vine, the Hallel sung into the night, the cup in Gethsemane, and on the cross: I thirst, sour wine lifted on hyssop, the Passover branch, and It is finished. Not a bone of him was broken, exactly as the Passover rubric required. Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed. And we read Psalm 116, part of the Hallel that, by long tradition, he and the Twelve sang before going out into the night toward Gethsemane (Mark 14:26), hearing it in his voice: I will lift up the cup of salvation... I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving. The todah found its voice. And one severe old sentence from week three now stands at the edge of everything, waiting: the lamb must be eaten.

Voices of the Church

St. Ambrose of Milan

On the Mysteries, 4th century

St. Ambrose returns to this study for a second time, now at the words themselves. The word of Christ, he taught the newly baptized, made heaven and earth out of nothing; shall the word which made what did not exist be unable to change things that exist into what they were not? It is the Lord’s own sentence that works here, and before it the elements are not what nature formed but what the blessing consecrated.

St. Hilary of Poitiers

On the Trinity, 4th century

St. Hilary wrote that concerning the truth of Christ's flesh and blood there is no room left for doubt, for by the Lord's own declaration and by our faith it is truly flesh and truly blood; and these received make it so that we are in Christ and Christ is in us. He treats the Supper's words not as one text among many but as the Lord's own testimony about his gift, which faith takes at its word.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Catechetical Oration, 4th century

St. Gregory asked how one body could become life for the whole world, and answered: the Word disseminates himself in every believer through the flesh he assumed, mingling himself with our bodies by means of the bread and the cup, so that by union with the immortal, man too might share in incorruption. What we receive at the table, he taught, is the antidote by which death itself is undone in us, one communicant at a time.

Live It This Week

1. Pray Psalm 116 once this week, slowly, as his psalm: hear each line in his voice on the road to Gethsemane, and then pray it back as your own today.
2. Memorize the words of institution from Luke 22:19-20 this week, exactly, the way you would memorize the most important sentence ever said to you. It was.
3. Sometime this week, sit for ten minutes with one question and a notebook: if these words mean what they say, what changes for me on Sunday? Write honestly. Bring nothing; this one is between you and him.

Scripture Memory Verse

"This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Luke 22:19

Before Next Session

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul's letter to a church misbehaving at this very meal, and then Hebrews 9:24-28 and 10:11-14. The Hebrews passages contain the strongest objection anyone will ever raise against the Catholic reading of everything we have found. We face it head-on next week.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1339; 1340