

Do This in Remembrance

1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Hebrews 7:1-10, 23-25; Hebrews 8:3; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:11-14; Malachi 1:11

What We Found

The earliest written account of the Last Supper turned out to be Paul's, older than the Gospels, framed in the vocabulary of guarded tradition: received from the Lord, delivered to you. And Paul named what the meal does: as often as you eat and drink, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Then he showed us the stakes: unworthy eating makes a person guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord, and in Corinth it had already meant weakness, illness, and death. Warnings calibrated to a Real Presence, and several sizes too large for a symbol.

We recovered the word remembrance: in Scripture, a memorial makes the saving event present, the way every Passover generation eats the exodus as its own. Then we faced Hebrews at full strength, once for all, the strongest objection in the study, and answered it from Hebrews: Christ always lives, holds his priesthood permanently, and it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. The Mass repeats nothing; it is the memorial that makes the one sacrifice present. Same victim, same priest, different manner. And because the sacrifice becomes present, its fruits become present: the Church offers the Eucharist to the Father for the forgiveness of sins, for the living, and for the dead. The Mass does not add to Calvary; it applies Calvary. And Hebrews 7 closed our oldest file: the tithe we noted in week two is the New Testament's own proof that Melchizedek's priesthood outranks Levi's.

Last, Malachi's riddle fell. The Didache, the earliest church manual we possess, directs the Church to gather on the Lord's Day, break bread, and give thanks, that the sacrifice may be pure; and it quotes Malachi 1:11 as the prophecy this fulfills: a pure sacrifice offered to God's name in every place. Only one sacrifice could ever be offered everywhere and remain pure: the once-for-all offering of Christ, made present on every altar from the rising of the sun to its setting. One scene remains. Next week is our final session.

Voices of the Church

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Against Heresies, 2nd century

St. Irenaeus, who learned the faith from St. Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, wrote that the Lord took bread and gave thanks and taught the new oblation of the new covenant, which the Church, receiving from the apostles, offers to God throughout all the world; and he named this the fulfillment of Malachi's word, that in every place a pure sacrifice is offered to God's name among the nations. Two generations from the apostles, the everywhere-offering was already the Church's self-understanding.

St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on Hebrews, 4th century

St. John Chrysostom, preaching on Hebrews itself, met tonight's objection sixteen centuries early: what then, he asked, do we not offer every day? We offer indeed, but making a remembrance of his death; and this remembrance is one and not many. We do not offer another sacrifice, as the high priest of old offered many, but always the same; or rather, we perform a remembrance of a sacrifice. The Church's daily offering, he insisted, multiplies nothing; it is the one sacrifice, present.

St. Gregory the Great

Dialogues, Book 4, 6th century

St. Gregory wrote that at the hour of the sacrifice, heaven is opened at the priest's voice, the choirs of angels are present, and things lowest are joined to things highest, earth is united to heaven, the visible and the invisible become one. What the eyes see in that hour is small; what is joined together in it is everything.

Live It This Week

1. Go to one weekday Mass this week if your schedule allows any at all, and attend it knowing what you now know: same victim, same priest, different manner. Afterward, write down one thing you saw differently.
2. Before Sunday, make a real examination of conscience, and if it has been a while, go to confession; discerning the body begins with examining yourself, and Paul says so in the same breath.
3. Reread Hebrews 7 on your own this week, slowly, and notice how many verses you now recognize from the inside. Nine weeks ago you could not have read that chapter. Now it reads like your own notes.

Scripture Memory Verse

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

1 Corinthians 11:26

Before Next Session

Read Luke 24:13-35 once, slowly, and do not study it; just walk the road. Next week is our last session. Come hungry, and bring everything.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1366; 1367