

***Corpus Christi. Year B***  
***Lectio divina on Mk 14,12-16.22-26***

The account of the paschal celebration of Jesus and his disciples on the night before he died, is the birth certificate of the Christian Eucharist. Jesus took the initiative and the disciples followed his instructions for the preparation. This detail is important: the Lord's table is not for all but for those who are invited, and the invitation does not excuse those who are invited from the task of preparation. At the supper, the gift of bread and wine sums up what has happened, but is also to be interpreted as a sign of the giving of Christ's life in the new covenant. The remembrance concentrates on the essential. What they shared at the last supper was not the time the disciples had lived with him, but his willingness to die for those who shared the table with him. This is what we celebrate. It is the object and motive of our perpetual gratitude. Our Eucharist is born from the action of Jesus in giving his life for many. We prepare for it and celebrate it by giving our lives. Our Eucharistic remembrance is not faithful if we do not repeat the Eucharistic gestures of Jesus. Receiving Jesus' gift of himself obliges us to give ourselves body and soul for others, as Jesus did. Only in this way does our celebration become credible.

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" <sup>13</sup> So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him, <sup>14</sup> and say to the owner of the house which he enters, "The Master says: Where is my dining room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?" <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there." <sup>16</sup> The disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and prepared the Passover. <sup>22</sup> And as they were eating, he took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. "Take it," he said, "this is my body." <sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks he gave it to them, and all drank from it, <sup>24</sup> and he said to them, "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, poured out for many. <sup>25</sup> I tell you solemnly, I shall not drink any more wine until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God." After psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives.

**I. READ: UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TEXT IS SAYING, FOCUSING ON HOW IT SAYS IT.**

After describing the attitude of the three groups (14,1-2.3-9.10-11) towards Jesus on the first day of their stay in Jerusalem (Mk 14,1-11), the evangelist begins the account of a new day (Mk 14,12), It contains three episodes which are related to the Passover supper and involve only the disciples (Mk 14,12-16: preparations; Mk 14,17-21: his betrayal is foretold; Mk 14,22-25: the last supper). Jesus takes on the responsibility of preparing the common supper, and takes part in it as the just one who will be betrayed by one of his friends. And knowing it in advance, he anticipates his self-giving in words and gestures.

The liturgical text omits the prediction of the betrayal and we are left with a text that focuses on the celebration of the supper. Obviously the food prepared was that of the Passover meal

(Mk 14,12.16), but this is not mentioned. Neither is there any mention of the lamb which was the most important ingredient of the Passover meal. Only two episodes connected to the supper are recorded. In the first of these (Mk 14,12-16), the initiative comes from the disciples, but Jesus acts as the authentic Lord of events. He knows beforehand exactly what is going to happen. He not only anticipates events, but influences their outcome. The passion of Jesus is the fulfilment of God's will, and in this way the scandal of the cross is overcome theologically. In itself the episode presents a certain inner tension. In response to the question from the disciples as to where they should prepare the Passover meal (Mk 14,12), Jesus orders two of them to go to a precise place where he would eat the Passover with them (Mk 14,13-14) and where the twelve would meet. The disciples were concerned about where Jesus would eat the Passover, but he himself indicated to them where they should go, and where he would eat with them, in the house where later the early Christian community would meet (Acts 1,13).

It is significant that Mark gives the details of the preparation of the last supper. It is a good way of underlining the importance of that meal in common. Jesus is going purposefully towards his death. He enters Jerusalem (Mk 11,1-4) and prepares for his last supper (Mk 14,12-16) facing events as sovereign Lord. He is in control of everything and is able to foretell what is going to happen. His bloody death was not an accident nor a personal failure. The disciples are guided by Jesus. They ask for his instructions (Mk 14,12) and they follow them (Mk 14,16) ... as long as suffering and the cross do not touch their lives. He wants to share a meal with his disciples and spend the final evening of his life with them.

The account of the institution at the last supper (Mk 14,22-26), is the second episode of our text. It has a clear structure: a brief introduction (Mk 14,22) is followed by the account of the institution (Mk 14,22b-24), which in turn is followed by a statement of an eschatological nature (Mk 14,25), and finally the conclusion (Mk 14,26). The institution of the Eucharist takes place through a gesture of Jesus (Mk 14,22b.23a), which is then interpreted by him (Mk 14,22c.24-25). It is the last of many suppers with his disciples and is a parable of the definitive supper yet to come. The community of life, already promised and celebrated now in anticipation, still has trials to undergo (Mk 14,26-31).

Mark took this brief account from the current tradition and retouched it slightly. He reduced the description of the last supper to the account of the institution, placed significantly between the prediction of his betrayal (Mk 14,18-21) and that of his denial (Mk 14,27-31). The whole account concentrates on the action of Jesus, or better, on the meaning which Jesus himself attaches to his action (Mk 14,22.24). The interpretation given by Jesus fits in well with the actual scenario. The Jewish feast was a ritual supper. However, unlike the supper which recalled the exodus from Egypt, the account of the institution anticipates what is still to come, the passion and death of Jesus. The bread and wine of the banquet are identified with the body and blood of Jesus which, he says, is to be poured out for many. It will not be possible to have supper again with Jesus, until they drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.

## **II. MEDITATE: APPLY WHAT THE TEXT SAYS TO LIFE**

Following an ancient tradition, Corpus Christi is a special day, marked by a public display of faith. Who among us has never taken part in a Eucharistic profession, or perhaps accompanied

a relative for their first communion on this special day? The Church makes the celebration of faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist part of the life of the country or of the family. In this simple way, it has succeeded very well in showing that the daily life of the believer is the best place and the best reason to adore the mystery of the Body of Christ. By worshipping the Eucharist publicly in the full light of day, on the streets of our towns and cities, the Christian community is assured of God's presence, and bears witness to the world of its faith in the presence of God in our midst. This is no small thing, especially at the present time.

We believe that Christ is present in the Eucharistic bread and wine. This is our faith, but is it also our daily experience? Do we live every day what we say we believe? How is it, then, if we believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, that we are unable to find him in our everyday existence? It is no mere coincidence that those who complain most about God being missing from their lives are the very people who absent themselves frequently from the daily celebration of the Eucharist and personal reception of communion. It stands to sense that those who have stopped receiving the Eucharist should complain that they no longer feel God close to them, or, worse still, that God has abandoned them. It is not enough to know that Christ is waiting for us in the Eucharist if we fail to take advantage of this opportunity to allow him into our lives and our daily difficulties. It is not enough to believe that we have the body and blood of Christ as nourishment, if we continue to find little excuses to keep God on the outside of our world and do not allow him into our inner lives.

We pay a price for our forgetfulness or lack of appreciation of the Body of Christ in our daily lives – and we are paying that price without any doubt – through our forgetfulness and lack of appreciation of our God. Anyone who does not appreciate the gift received, cannot feel appreciated by the Donor. In other words, if we have lost respect and veneration for the Most Holy Sacrament, we do not deserve the respect and attention of Our Lord Jesus Christ. If we have ceased the practice of frequent communion, a distance develops between God and us. We could not pay a higher price for our lack of interest in the Body of Christ. And if this is the case, then we who believe in the real presence of Christ in the world through his presence in bread and wine, are contributing to the growing sense of the absence of God from our world. Anyone who celebrates Christ present among us in the form of bread and wine – which is what we Christians celebrate in this feast – must of necessity become a witness to that special presence of God. Anyone who takes part in the Eucharist knows that God remains at the heart of the world, as its nourishment and its hope.

It is not enough, then, for us to proclaim the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and to celebrate it as a mystery of thanksgiving to God. We must also become witnesses of that presence, by our lives and by our words. The miracle we profess imposes on us the obligation to make it known. Nobody has any right to feel cheated by a God who chooses to remain with us in the form of bread and wine; nobody has any right to complain about a God who is so close to us, as readily available as the bread and wine on our table.

Knowing this has its consequences. As long as there is someone around us who has not found God, we cannot be content that we have found him personally. Our Eucharist will not be authentic as long as there are people who are hungering and thirsting for God and do not have the joy of encountering him in the Eucharist. The Eucharistic bread will not become the Body of

Christ if some of the members of Christ are missing, nor will it be the food of life if his guests are not present at his table. When we approach Christ in the Eucharist we should ask ourselves not only if we are well prepared to meet him, but also if all those he is expecting are there with us. It would be a tragedy if we spent more time examining ourselves on our own failures, often small and inevitable, than we do concerning ourselves about the fact that some of our brothers and sisters are missing from the Eucharist. A good preparation for receiving Jesus in the sacrament is not complete, just because we find that we have no serious fault. It must extend also to asking ourselves do we regard all those who share the Body of Christ with us as our brothers and sisters.

It is significant that when Jesus wanted to have supper with his disciples, he sent two of them to find a place and a family where he could celebrate the Passover meal. Christ does not remain in the Eucharist for the benefit and advantage of just a few people. Anyone who wants to celebrate Christ's wish to remain present in bread and wine must seek to find other table-guests to share that bread. Sharing the Eucharist and entering into communion with Christ mean that we must return to our brothers and sisters and help them to discover that only God can satisfy their hunger and thirst. Whenever people suffer anxiety, pain, need, loneliness or death, they should be invited to receive Christ in the Eucharist. Nobody who has received Christ can ignore his neighbour in need. Anyone who has experienced the love of God, a love that has become bread made from grain, should not distance himself from a brother or sister in need of practical love in the form of food for body or soul. Our cities and our homes will become places where God is encountered, if we carry in our hearts the neighbour who needs us. God who is present in a piece of bread, is also present in our hearts, if we feel there the needs of our brothers and sisters. This is the price and the condition he has laid down for his coming.

Corpus Christi is, then, the feast of fraternal charity. It is not enough to thank God for the gift he has given us in the Eucharist. We need to ask ourselves what good does our sharing in the Eucharist do if we do not put ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters most in need. It does not make sense for people like us who are so frequently open to God, to remain closed just as frequently to our neighbour. Having Christ in our lives should fill us with love for our brothers and sisters. We cannot satisfy our own need for God and leave unsatisfied the need that others have of us, brothers and sisters who have less, both materially and spiritually, than we have. Those who do not believe in the love of Christ present in the Eucharist, will come to believe only if they see that those who enter into communion with Christ take care of all who have need of him. Whether or not the world believes in Christ's love, depends on our devotion and our daily practice of brotherly love

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