

Eucharistic Series - Part 2

“The Sacrifice”

- Prepare beforehand: have participants bring a Bible and journal, or have a copy of this document for each person.
- Snacks and a great sense of welcome starts the group off right!
- Opening Prayer (together):
Come, Holy Spirit and guide our group today. Help us to grow in friendship and draw us closer to you in your Eucharistic presence. Amen.
- Important note for facilitators: the guided meditation at the end is 18 minutes, so make sure you leave enough time for it. (It’s the best part)
- Warm Up Questions (feel free to substitute your own): How has your week been, high and low point? What thoughts have been resonating with you about last week’s discussion? Was anyone able to make it to daily mass for last week’s challenge, and what did you experience as you received Jesus intentionally?
- Video (8 minutes): Paul Francis shares a personal story about the Eucharist: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/754756948>
- After watching the video: What are your thoughts about Paul’s story, and how does it compare to your own?
- Group Reflection (30 minutes-ish): The excerpt below is from the document *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, written in 2021 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. This section focuses on the Eucharist as a sacrifice. Have a group member read it slowly. Underline any words or phrases that stand out to you, or that you don’t understand.

13. At the Last Supper, celebrating the Passover, Jesus makes explicit that his impending death, freely embraced out of love, is sacrificial: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:27-28). In the words and gestures of the Last Supper, Jesus makes it clear that out of love for us he is freely offering his life for the forgiveness of our sins. In doing so, he is both the priest offering a sacrifice and the victim being offered. As priest, Jesus is offering a sacrifice to God the Father, an offering prefigured by the offering of bread and wine by Melchizedek, Priest of

God Most High (Gen 14:18; see Ps 110:4; Heb 5-7 passim). Anticipating his Passion in the institution of the Eucharist, Christ has indicated the forms under which his self-offering would be sacramentally present to us until the end of time.

14. Why is it so important that we understand the Eucharist as a sacrifice? It is because all that Jesus did for the salvation of humanity is made present in the celebration of the Eucharist, including his sacrificial death and resurrection. Christ's sacrifice of himself to the Father was efficacious and salvific because of the supreme love with which he shed his blood, the price of our salvation, and offered himself to the Father on our behalf. His blood, shed for us, is the eternal sign of that love. As a memorial the Eucharist is not another sacrifice, but the re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ by which we are reconciled to the Father. It is the way by which we are drawn into Jesus' perfect offering of love, so that his sacrifice becomes the sacrifice of the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI wrote, The remembrance of his perfect gift consists not in the mere repetition of the Last Supper, but in the Eucharist itself, that is, in the radical newness of Christian worship. In this way, Jesus left us the task of entering into his "hour." "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving."

- Go back through the reading as a group. Use phones to look up any definitions or scriptures that need clarification for group members (examples could be: prefigured, efficacious, passim, salvific, Gen. 14:18).
- Share what you remember about the first Passover, and why the Israelites continued to celebrate that feast each year. Why do you think the Passover lamb had to be "unblemished?" Who does the unblemished lamb prefigure?
- "Anticipating his Passion in the institution of the Eucharist, Christ has indicated the forms under which his self-offering would be sacramentally present to us until the end of time." Why do you think Jesus chose the forms of bread & wine to be sacramentally present to us until the end of time?
- Why do you think Pope Benedict XVI chose the words "radical newness of Christian worship" to describe the Eucharist?
- Pope Benedict XVI says that Jesus left us the task of entering into his "hour." How does the Eucharist draw us into Jesus' act of self-oblation in a dynamic way and not a static way?
- Does anyone have final thoughts or questions as we wrap up our discussion?
- Challenge for the week: seek out a time to visit Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration. The closest adoration chapel is Mary Morningstar Chapel: 4905 Schofield St., Monona, WI 53716. Hours are 6am - 8pm. <https://marymorningstarchapelwi.com/>

- Our closing prayer tonight will be a guided meditation, written by parish member Mary Smith, and recorded by parish member Deb Scalissi. The experience will last about 18 minutes. When it is finished, we will take a little bit of time in silence, and then feel free to leave when you are ready. You may not want to talk to others on the way out, but continue to ponder the message and your experience. Next week when we gather, we will talk about our experience as our gathering question. Here are 2 links to the guided meditation (same meditation, just two different platforms in case one doesn't work for any reason):
<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/755174516>
<https://youtu.be/aGGF0dXlupY>

God bless you, everyone! See you next week. :)

- Recommended for further learning:
 - Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist, Brant Pitre
 - The Fourth Cup, Scott Hahn

Just in case any of the groups have trouble playing the meditation, here is the written version. It is best to read it slowly, with many pauses to allow the imagination and the Holy Spirit time and space to work in our hearts.

Guided Meditation on the Eucharist

Close your eyes and let go of everything that happened today, anything that upset you or made you unhappy or mad. Take a deep breath, and gently let it out. Take another deep breath and let it out even more slowly...

As you breathe in, imagine that you are breathing in calmness and peacefulness...

As you breathe out, imagine that you are letting go of everything that holds you back from focusing on this present moment....

Feel how slowly breathing in and out quiets your heart.

Tense and release the muscles in your hands...in your legs...and in your feet.

As you release the muscles silently say to yourself, "I let go..."

Relax the corners of your mouth and eyes, even the skin on the top of your head – and let go of any tightness in your shoulders and your neck.

You are calm, relaxed and at peace...

Remember that you are a child of God, and that He loves you... that he loved you even before you were born...

Let Him lead you as you listen...

PAUSE...

Now, as you continue to slowly breathe in and out, imagine yourself as one of Jesus' followers many, many years ago. You are just outside the City of Jerusalem with Him and His disciples. You remember that Jerusalem has been known as the City of David for over a thousand years, and you are with Jesus...who would be known as the Son of David, the Messiah and Savior of Israel.

You have come to this historic place with Jesus and His disciples to celebrate the feast of Passover. Passover... the annual celebration of God's bringing His people, Israel, out of Egypt, where they had been slaves for 70 years. You can't remember a time when this feast was not an important event in your life.

The Passover celebration involves many rituals, all with symbolism relating to your history and your family's relationship with Yahweh.

You recall that the Passover ritual begins four days before the Seder, which is the Passover meal. Each family chooses a male lamb, as described in the Book of Exodus. In that sacred book of the Torah, Yahweh instructed Moses that:

The animals . . . must be year-old males without defect . . . and that they, the Israelites, are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses . . . they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.

“On that same night,” says Yahweh, “I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.

The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. . .

“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance. (Exodus 12:5,8,12-14)

Your thoughts come back to the present as you hear Jesus giving you and one other disciple certain instructions to prepare for His final celebration of Passover in Jerusalem. Listen to what Jesus tells you:

“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” (Mark 14:13b-15)

You immediately set out to make the preparations, and you find things just as Jesus had described. As you enter the upper room, the scent of beeswax from burning candles comes to you. You see woven napkins of pure linen next to small plates... and four cups for the Passover wine that will be shared throughout the meal.

Your table also holds the specially prepared foods described in the Book of Exodus. There are bowls of bitter herbs, including endive, chicory and freshly grated horseradish. You notice the traditional flat bread made without yeast called matzah. Finally, you breathe in the distinct, herby aroma of roasted lamb as it is brought to the table.

You and the disciples relax comfortably on soft multi-colored cushions around a low table, listening expectantly for what Jesus is going to share with you. He begins the evening in a rather startling way by telling you...

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:15b-16)

Jesus’ words about suffering make you and the other disciples uneasy. None of you understand what Jesus is talking about. Take a deep breath and allow yourself to feel the uncertainty, confusion and even fear about what Jesus means when he says that He is about to suffer...

Jesus then goes on to lead you and the disciples through the most unusual Passover meal that you've ever celebrated. Years later, the disciple named Mark will remember it with these words:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:22-24)

Later, you will realize that Jesus drinks the last cup of Passover from the cross just before He says, "It is finished." (John 19:30)

Now, think back to the suffering of the original, unblemished Passover lamb, sacrificed for the lives of the Yahweh's chosen ones in Egyptian captivity. Remember that its blood was spread over the door frame of each home. Were some of the door frames made of wood, like Jesus' cross centuries later?

Next, think about the suffering of Jesus, God's perfect Lamb, who offered Himself as a Passover sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins, sins that separated us from God our loving Father.

LONG PAUSE...

Now, imagine yourself stepping into the present day. Slowly reposition yourself, straightening your back and gently rolling your head to the right and now to the left. You are still seated, but the seat is wooden, a pew at St. Dennis...

You realize that you are about to celebrate the Passover once again in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. You are listening to the words that have echoed through the centuries, the words spoken at every Mass in remembrance of what Jesus asked us to do, the words of consecration . . .

**At the time he was betrayed
and entered willingly into his Passion,**

**he took bread and, giving thanks, broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:**

**Take this, all of you, and eat of it,
for this is my Body,
which will be given up for you.**

**In a similar way, when supper was ended,
he took the chalice
And, once more giving thanks,
he gave it to his disciples, saying:**

**Take this, all of you, and drink from it,
for this is the chalice of my Blood,
the Blood of the new and eternal covenant,
which will be poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.**

Do this in memory of me.

Allow the words of consecration to pierce your heart...

Allow yourself to feel a deep connection with Jesus...

*Listen as Jesus asks that, in communion with Him, you offer up your own
sacrifices for the honor of God....*

Sacrifices like:

Taking the time to sit with someone who is lonely or sad or scared, or

Sharing your skills or talents with a charity or project that helps others, or

*Offering up something that's happening in your life that you can't control and
that's making you angry or sad, or*

*Giving from what you've earned or received as a gift to those who are hungry
and thirsty or homeless, or*

Fasting from something that you really like to do or really like to eat.

LONG PAUSE...

You respond to Jesus' sacrifice with the whole community, saying:

"Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof, but only say the words and my soul shall be healed."

And, in your heart, you know that Jesus is healing you... that He deeply desires you to receive Him and become one with Him.

PAUSE...

Now, once again, focus on your breathing ... breathe slowly and gently in and out, in and out...

It's time for you to return to where this all began only a few moments ago, knowing that this is a place that is always with you – that you can return to it – over and over again...

Slowly begin to move your fingers and toes... your shoulders... your neck..., taking your time...

When you are ready, gently open your eyes, feeling peaceful and refreshed.

Authors: Melanie Pfeil and Mary Hoeft Smith¹

Narration and Music: Deb Scalissi

¹ Meditative breathing techniques were inspired by an unknown blogger who posts at:
<https://aligningwithgrace.blogspot.com/2013/12/an-advent-guided-meditation.html>