



Chapter IV

The Eucharist and the Mass

UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

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(to use with your group)

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

The Last Supper (Luke 22:14-20)

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:14-20).

The Last Supper is one of the most important events in all of Scripture. It appears explicitly in three of the four Gospels and Paul's letters. Not only this, but if you've been to Mass before, you know that the Last Supper is central to Catholic worship. Given its prominence in Scripture and the Church, we must ask ourselves, "What is happening at the Last Supper?" To understand its significance, we need to dig beyond the surface. This passage is full of rich, meaningful words like "Passover," "remembrance," and "covenant," and discovering their

meaning is essential for understanding the beauty and significance of the Last Supper.

A New Passover

[T]hey shall take every man a lamb without blemish, a male a year old...[T]he whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood, and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night.... It is the Lord's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land.... The blood shall be a sign for you...when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you (Exodus 12:3-13).

God's people were once enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, God sent ten plagues to persuade Pharaoh to let Israel go free. These plagues wreaked havoc on the Egyptians and demonstrated God's judgement on the gods of Egypt. The final plague was the most devastating: The firstborn sons of both man and beast were destined to die unless they celebrated a ritual called the Passover. This ritual involved sacrificing an unblemished lamb, marking one's doorpost with the lamb's blood, and eating the sacrificed lamb. When God's angel saw the blood on the doorposts, he would "pass-over" those houses, permitting the firstborn sons to live. The Passover ultimately led Israel to escape Egypt and be freed by God's mighty hand. From that time on, God commanded the people to celebrate the feast of Passover each year as a memorial of His saving action.

Do This in Memory of Me

What does the Passover have to do with the Last Supper? We know from the Gospels that the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Lk 22:7-13). Yet, this Passover meal was different than any that preceded it. To perceive this difference, we need to understand an important word: “remembrance” (Lk 22:19). In modern English, the word remembrance means recalling what happened in the past. But that is not the full meaning of the word in this context. The Greek word in the Gospel is *anamnesis*. More than simply recalling the past, *anamnesis* means to make present again, literally to *re-present*. The Jews didn’t merely “remember” the Passover; by their observance of this memorial, they mysteriously participated in it. Even today, the *Haggadah*, the Jewish guide to the Passover evening meal (*Seder*), speaks in the present tense:

*This year we are here; next year in the land of Israel. This year we are slaves; next year we will be a free people. What makes this night different from all other nights?*¹

It is as though every Jew personally experiences anew the mighty deeds God accomplished centuries before, as if they are preparing to leave Egypt alongside Moses that very night.

What’s incredible in this passage, however, is that Jesus isn’t inviting His apostles to remember (*anamnesis*) the events of the first Passover. Instead, He reorients the celebration around Himself, saying, “Do this in remembrance of *me*” (Lk 22:19, emphasis added). We shouldn’t miss this dramatic change. To a first century Jewish audience, these words would have been astounding. They had centered their

¹ <https://w2.chabad.org/media/pdf/1125/rCjo11252600.pdf>

celebration of Passover on the events in Egypt for centuries. Now, Jesus is saying, “This is no longer simply a memorial of Passover, this is a memorial of me.” Not only this, but God had commanded Israel to observe Passover “for ever” (Ex 12:14). Was Jesus violating God’s law? Was He circumventing the prescriptions for right worship? Of course not. Then what *was* He doing?

The Lamb of God

To uncover an answer, consider a title for Christ that initially appears in Scripture on the lips of John the Baptist: “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). While such a title might seem ordinary for many Catholics, referring to Christ as “Lamb of God” has incredible significance, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the Jewish Passover. Consider, for example, the parallels between Christ and the Passover lamb:

- God commands the people to select a lamb “without blemish, a male a year old” (Ex 12:5). We know that Christ was truly unblemished, for he was without sin (Heb 4:15).
- An unblemished lamb could have no broken bones (Ex 12:46). Amazingly, though the criminals hung on the cross next to Jesus had their bones broken to speed along their deaths, Christ died before his legs could be broken.
- The people were to “kill their lambs in the evening” (Ex 12:6). At the time of Jesus, the lambs for Passover were sacrificed in the temple beginning around 3pm—the exact time at which Christ died on the cross (Lk 23:44-46).²
- One scholar even notes that it was likely the lambs in Jesus’ day were sacrificed in a manner that resembled crucifixion, being hung on wooden rods.³

² Josephus, War 6:423-27.

³ Pitre, Brant, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper*, p. 63.

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- Just as the blood of the lambs was spread on the doorposts and lintel, Christ's blood was spread on the wooden beams of the cross.
- Finally, even the plant used to apply the blood to the lintel, hyssop, appears in the Gospel, when it is used to give Jesus a sponge full of vinegar (Ex 12:22, Jn 19:29).

Passover Lamb	Jesus, the Lamb of God
Unblemished, no broken bones	Without sin, his bones are not broken
Male, a year-old	Male, in the prime of life (age 33)
Sacrificed (or crucified) in the evening twilight	Crucified at the time when lambs were being sacrificed in the temple
Blood on the doorposts and lintel	Blood on the wood of the cross
Blood splattered with hyssop	Given vinegar on a branch of hyssop

Now we can begin to see the significance of the word "Passover" in the Last Supper. Jesus isn't abolishing the Passover. He is fulfilling it. He is giving us a New Passover, one in which He is the New Passover Lamb.

Sacrifice, Meal, Covenant

Sacrifice

To further unpack the meaning of the Last Supper, we must also understand the significance of sacrifice in the Bible. For Christians, the idea that Christ offers himself as a sacrifice is somewhat familiar. Indeed, His death on the cross is a sacrifice offered for our sins (Heb 10:12). But how is Christ's sacrificial death connected to the Last Supper?

Sacrificial language is deeply embedded in the Last Supper narrative. First, simply the words "body and blood" would recall the separation of the blood from the body in ritual animal sacrifices. Jesus also speaks of his body being "given for you," a phrase connected with sacrifice other places in the New Testament (Lk 2:24, 22:19, Mk10:45, Jn 6:51, Gal 1:4). Further, Jesus says his blood will be "poured out," which is reminiscent of the temple sacrifices, when the blood of animals was "poured out" on the altar (Lv 4:7, 18, 25, 34). By using these phrases, Jesus is directly linking the Last Supper to His sacrifice on calvary.

By connecting the themes of Passover and sacrifice, we begin to see a more complete picture of the Last Supper. Jesus is showing His apostles that He is the true servant of God, Who offers the perfect sacrifice, fulfilling the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament. The Book of Hebrews tells us, it was "impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb 10:4). These sacrifices merely symbolized the transformation of heart that God desired. Jesus' sacrifice, however, is the perfect offering, capable of accomplishing salvation "once for all" (Heb 10:10). While the original Passover led the people of Israel out of slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, Christ's Passover leads to true freedom, not from physical bondage but from the greatest enemies of all: sin

and death (see Jn 8:34). Indeed, Christ's sacrifice "completes and surpasses all other sacrifices" (CCC 614, see Heb 10:1-18).

Meal

Now that we've seen how the Last Supper is connected to Passover and the idea of sacrifice, we must go a step further. One obvious element of the Last Supper is that it is a meal. Why did Jesus choose to make a sacred meal the centerpiece of Christian worship?

While it might seem less obvious to us, the connection between sacrifice and meal would have been entirely natural for Jesus' Jewish audience. Throughout the Old Testament, sacrifices and meals were deeply intertwined. Consider Passover itself. The Israelites didn't simply sacrifice the lamb. They were also instructed to eat of it. In fact, the sacrifice was incomplete until it was eaten (Ex 12:8). If the Israelites failed to eat the Passover Lamb, they would have suffered the disastrous consequences of the tenth plague, the death of their firstborn sons.

Jesus' sacrifice follows the same logic. He didn't simply give His life in sacrifice on the cross; He also invites His apostles to complete His sacrifice by eating of it in a sacred meal. That is why Jesus takes the bread and wine and tells his apostles "This is my body...this is my blood." He is inviting them to complete the New Passover by eating His flesh, the flesh of the sacrificed New Passover Lamb (see Jn 6:41-58).

Covenant

There is one additional point we must make about these sacrificial meals. In the Bible, ritual meals aimed at much more than satisfying the needs of the body; they expressed covenant union. At the Last Supper, Jesus directly connected his actions with an Old Testament covenant. In the Book of Exodus, God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex 24). The people first accepted God's word. Then, they offered sacrifices. Next, Moses took the blood of the sacrifices, sprinkled it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you." Finally, Moses, Aaron, Aarons' sons, and seventy elders ate and drank in God's presence. This was a moment of intimacy with God. Later Rabbis compared this covenant ceremony to marriage vows. This was the moment when Israel became God's beloved spouse (see Ez 16:8, Jer 2:2, Is 54:5, Hos 2:16). This scene is surely in the background of the Last Supper. Not only does Jesus speak of a "new covenant," but also in Matthew and Mark's accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus explicitly refers to His blood as the "blood of the covenant"—the same phrase used in the covenant ceremony in the Book of Exodus (Mt 26:28, Mk 14:24, Ex 24:8).

We can now see how these themes of sacrifice, meal, and covenant tie together. Jesus offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God. This sacrifice is completed in a ritual meal, which ratifies a new covenant. At the Last Supper, the apostles are brought into covenant union with Christ through a *communion* meal.

The Thank Offering

One final phrase from the Last Supper merits our attention. Scripture tells us that it was only after Jesus had "given thanks" that He gave His

body and blood to His apostles (Lk 22:19). While Jesus was certainly expressing His gratitude to the Father, much more is contained in these words.

Many people have heard of some Old Testament sacrifices, but fewer are familiar with the *todah*, that is, the thank offering. The *todah* was incredibly significant to the Jews. There is an old rabbinic saying that “in the coming Messianic age all sacrifices will cease, but the thank offering will never cease.”⁴ Indeed, the *todah* was one of the greatest of all Old Testament sacrifices. Therefore, when we read that Jesus had “given thanks,” it’s expressing much more than mere gratitude. He was offering a *todah*.

What was a *todah* sacrifice and why was it so important? Biblical scholar Tim Gray explains:

*A todah sacrifice would be offered by someone whose life had been delivered from great peril... The redeemed person would show his gratitude to God by gathering his closest friends and family for a todah sacrificial meal. The lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple and the bread for the meal would be consecrated the moment the lamb was sacrificed. The bread and meat, along with wine, would constitute the elements of the sacred todah meal, which would be accompanied by prayers and songs of thanksgiving.*⁵

The key elements of the *todah* so closely align with the Last Supper, that it is almost undeniable that, while the Last Supper is certainly

⁴ Taken from the Pesiqta as quoted in Hartmut Gese, *Essays On Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 133.

⁵ Gray, Tim. “From Jewish Passover to Christian Eucharist: The Story of the Todah,” *Lay Witness*, (Nov/Dec 2002). Accessed at <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/reli-gion-and-philosophy/apologetics/from-jewish-passover-to-christian-eucharist-the-story-of-the-todah.html>, January 26, 2023.

a Passover meal, it is also a *todah* sacrifice. Jesus was making a thank offering to the Father in anticipation of His deliverance (the Resurrection) from a great trial (the Passion). Therefore, He gathered His closest friends (the apostles) to share in a sacrificial meal of bread, wine and the lamb of sacrifice (His body and blood). The meal even ended with a hymn (Mt 26:30).

The Mass and Discipleship

With this background in mind, we are now ready to connect the Last Supper to our lives as disciples. Perhaps you've noticed some connections already. Nonetheless, let's walk through the details carefully, so that we can see how the key elements of the Last Supper are present in the Mass today.

First, the Mass is the "memorial of Christ's Passover" (CCC 1409). As we discussed, memorial (*anamnesis*) doesn't simply mean "remember." In a memorial, the events of the past are re-presented. Christ commanded His apostles to "do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me" and His apostles were faithful to His command (Lk 22:19, CCC 1342). Ever since then, Christians have celebrated this memorial—it is exactly what we celebrate as disciples today. When we go to Mass, we not only recall Jesus' sacrifice, but it actually becomes present to us. "The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's Passover...*made present* by the liturgical action" (CCC 1409, emphasis added). This is one of the reasons why we believe in the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. Indeed, "Christ is truly, really, and substantially" present at Mass (CCC 1374).

Next, the Mass is a *sacrifice*. “Because it is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice” (CCC 1365). Indeed, the Church affirms, “the Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross” (CCC 1366). This does not mean that at every Mass Christ is sacrificed again. Rather, Christ’s one, perfect sacrifice is made present anew. When we go to Mass, it is as though we are brought to the very foot of the Cross. While we could never offer a perfect sacrifice to God, the Mass allows us to unite our imperfect sacrifice with Christ’s perfect one. The Catechism explains, “In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value” (CCC 1368). Therefore, when we attend Mass, we must bring our whole selves to the Father, offering our joys, sorrows, dreams, and desires to God through Christ. This is the very heart of the “active participation” which the Church invites us to observe in the liturgy.⁶ We are called to offer all that we are and all that we have to Father in union with Christ’s perfect sacrifice.

Further, the sacrifice of Christ is connected to a *meal*. St. Paul writes, “Our paschal (Passover) lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the *feast*” (1 Cor 5:7-8, NAB, emphasis added). Notice what Paul doesn’t say. He doesn’t just say, “Christ has been sacrificed, therefore, believe in Him.” As a learned Jew who knows the connection between sacrifice and meal, St. Paul realizes that the sacrifice of Christ is only complete once the ritual meal has been eaten. That is why Jesus invites us to eat His flesh and drink His blood. It’s not a symbolic gesture; we must truly eat of His sacrifice.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14. Accessed at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

This reality sheds new light on Jesus' words in the Gospel of John, "[U]nless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (Jn 6:52). Just as the Israelites would have suffered disastrous consequences if they didn't eat the Passover lamb, so too, if we don't receive Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, we won't experience the salvific effects of His sacrifice. Jesus in the Eucharist is truly the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." By participating in this meal, we are set free.

Next, this sacred Eucharistic meal leads to *covenantal* union. How do we enter into covenant union with God? How do we live as members of His new covenant family, the Church? Certainly, one primary way is by participating in the Mass and receiving Holy Communion. Just as the Israelites read the words of the law, assented to them, and ate a meal in God's holy presence, so too do we offer our "Amen" ("so be it" or "let it be done") to God's Word and share in an intimate covenant meal with Him when we go to Mass (Ex 24:4-11). We call it "Holy Communion" because this meal "augments our union with Christ" and unites us as His body, the Church (CCC 1391, 1331). Indeed, the "principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus" (CCC 1391). There is no deeper intimacy with Christ than receiving Him in Holy Communion.

The Eucharist is also our *todah*, our thank offering. The word *eucharistia* literally means thanksgiving. This is the same Greek word Scripture uses when it states that Jesus had "given thanks" at the Last Supper (Lk 22:19). We celebrate this offering with our spiritual family, the Church, thanking God for delivering us from sin and eternal death.

Final Thoughts

Given this amazing gift of the Eucharist, how should we respond? What practical steps should we as disciples take to fully embrace this great mystery? Much could be said, but here are a few simple places to start:

- First, faithfully attend Sunday Mass. Christ has humbled Himself, taking the forms of bread and wine, so that you can approach Him. Don't reject this great gift.
- Prepare yourself to receive the Lord worthily. St. Paul writes, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor 11:28-29). If you have committed mortal sin, go to Confession before receiving Holy Communion.
- Lastly, as you come to a deeper knowledge and love of the Eucharist, seek out more opportunities to approach Him, including daily Mass or Eucharistic adoration.

The celebration of the Eucharist in the Mass is at the heart of discipleship; it is the "source and summit of the Christian life" (CCC 1324). Christ has given Himself fully to us; let us give ourselves fully to Him in return.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Passages: Luke 22:14-20, Exodus 12:3-13

Introduction

1. Launching Question: Has something ever become so familiar to you that you sometimes forget what you are doing when you do it? Or have you ever done something that was so routine that you couldn't remember if you did it or not?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: Last time we considered the story of Zacchaeus and the vital need for fellowship in the Christian life, especially because it is a means by which we are transformed! We also mentioned how the Mass is the truest form of communion between believers that is possible. Unfortunately, sometimes the Mass has become so familiar that we forget how amazing it is. Today, we will continue considering the Mass and the Eucharist and dig a little deeper into what they should mean for us as disciples of Jesus. There's no better place to look than the Last Supper to begin unpacking the source and summit of our faith. Let's turn to Luke's Gospel to read about it.

The Last Supper

Read Luke 22:14-20

2. If you've ever been to Mass, you've heard these words before. They seem so routine to us; how might they be richer than we realize? But what is really going on? Does any phrase or word seem especially strange when you really sit and think about it?

Allow the group to discuss.

Possible answers: Not eating the Passover until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God, offering his body, asking them to do this in remembrance of him, the cup of wine is a new covenant in his blood.

Please read aloud: The Last Supper is one of the most important events in all of Scripture. Given its prominence in Scripture and the Church, we must ask ourselves, "What is happening at the Last Supper?" To understand its significance, we need to dig beyond the surface. This passage is full of rich, meaningful words like "Passover," "remembrance," and "covenant," and discovering their meaning is essential for understanding the beauty and significance of the Last Supper.

Let's start with "Do this in Memory of Me." To unpack this, let's take a look at some key background and context for this phrase.

A New Passover

3. First, does anyone know what Passover is?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: Let's take a look at the text together.

Read Exodus 12:3-13

4. What is happening here? Could someone summarize this story?

*Answer: At the time of the Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt, God sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians in order to convince the Pharaoh to let his people go free. The final plague was the most devastating: the firstborn sons of man and beast would die unless they celebrated a ritual which was named the Passover. The ritual involved sacrificing an unblemished lamb, marking one's doorpost with its blood, and eating its meat. When God saw the blood on the doorposts, he would "pass-over" those houses, leaving the firstborn sons untouched. This led ultimately to their escape from Pharaoh and their freedom from slavery by God's mighty hand. From that time on, God commanded the people **celebrate** the feast of **Passover each year** as a **memorial of his saving action**.*

Please read aloud: So, we know the Last Supper was a Passover meal. And we've just learned that God commanded this feast be celebrated every year as a memorial of his saving work. Yet this Passover meal was different from all others.

To perceive the difference between every other Passover meal and the Last Supper, we need to understand an important word: "remembrance" (Lk 22:19). In modern English, the word remembrance means recalling what happened in the past. But the Greek word in the Gospel is "anamnesis." More than recalling the past, anamnesis means to make present again, literally to *re-present*. The Jews didn't merely "remember" the Passover; by their observance of this memorial, they mysteriously participated in it. It is as though Jews

personally experience the mighty deeds God accomplished centuries ago in every Passover feast.

5. Can you perceive any differences in what Jesus is saying and doing in the passage from Luke that we read? (*If needed ask* – He is commanding his disciples to partake of this meal in remembrance of *what?* Or rather, *who?*) What does this tell us about what Jesus is doing at the Last Supper?

*Answer: What is incredible about Jesus's words, however, is that he is **reorienting the celebration of Passover around Himself**. He is instituting a meal to commemorate the saving power of God, as he is about undertake a great saving action with many mighty deeds to set his people free from slavery of a different kind, that of sin. He is also commanding his disciples to re-present this sacrifice in the blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread and wine.*

Please read aloud: Jesus's words would have been astounding to first century Jews. Was he violating God's law? Was he undermining the expectations for right worship of God at the Passover? Of course not. Then, what was he doing? Let's dig in more by considering another key element of the Passover: "The Lamb of God."

6. Jesus is called the Lamb of God, first by John the Baptist (Jn 1:29). Why?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud: While such a title might seem ordinary for many Catholics, referring to Christ as "Lamb of God" has incredible significance, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the Jewish Passover. Consider, for example, the parallels between Christ and the Passover lamb:

- An unblemished lamb could have no broken bones (Ex 12:46). Amazingly, though the criminals on Golgotha next to Jesus had their bones broken to speed along their deaths, Christ died before his legs could be broken.
- The people were to “kill their lambs in the evening” (Ex 12:6). At the time of Jesus, the lambs for Passover were sacrificed in the temple beginning around 3pm—the exact time at which Christ died on the cross (Lk 23:44-46)¹.
- Just as the blood of the lambs was spread on the doorposts and lintel, Christ’s blood was spread on the wooden beams of the cross.
- Finally, even the plant used to apply the blood to the lintel, hyssop, appears in the Gospel, when it is used to give Jesus a sponge full of vinegar (Ex 12:22, Jn 19:29).

Now we can begin to see the significance of the word “Passover” in the Last Supper. Jesus isn’t abolishing the Passover. He is fulfilling it. He is giving us a New Passover, one in which He is the New Passover Lamb

7. What specifically happens to the Passover Lamb throughout the feast?

Answer: It is sacrificed and eaten.

Please read aloud: The lamb is key part in the **sacrifice** offered to God, the food eaten and shared in a communal **meal**, and it’s also a key element of making a **covenant** with God. Let’s look at these three elements (Sacrifice, Meal, Covenant) one by one, to continue drawing the connection between Passover and the Last Supper.

¹ Josephus, War 6:423-27.

Sacrifice, Meal, Covenant

Please read aloud: Sacrificial language is deeply embedded in the Last Supper narrative. The words “body and blood” would recall the separation of the blood from the body in ritual animal sacrifices. Jesus also speaks of his body being “given for you”. Jesus says his blood will be “poured out,” which is reminiscent of the temple sacrifices, when the blood of animals was “poured out” on the altar.

8. What is the purpose of Jesus offering a sacrifice, which is his very self?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Jesus is showing His apostles that He is the true servant of God, Who offers the perfect sacrifice, fulfilling the sacrificial rituals of the Old Testament. Jesus' sacrifice is the perfect offering, capable of accomplishing salvation “once for all” (Heb 10:10). While the original Passover led the people of Israel out of slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt, Christ's Passover leads to true freedom, not from physical bondage but from the greatest enemies of all: sin and death. Indeed, Christ's sacrifice “completes and surpasses all other sacrifices” (CCC 614).

Please read aloud: We've seen how the Last Supper is connected to Passover and the idea of sacrifice. Now, we must go a step further. One obvious element of the Last Supper is that it is a meal. While it might not be obvious for us, the connection between sacrifice and meal would have been entirely natural for Jesus' Jewish audience.

9. At the Passover, the sacrifice of the lamb was incomplete until the Israelites consumed it. How might this shed light on the meaning of Jesus' words at the Last Supper for us today?

Answer: Jesus' sacrifice follows the same logic. He didn't simply give His life in sacrifice on the cross; He also invites His apostles to complete His sacrifice by eating of it in a sacred meal. That is why Jesus takes the bread and wine and tells his apostles "This is my body...this is my blood." He is inviting them to complete the New Passover by eating His flesh, the flesh of the sacrificed New Passover Lamb (see Jn 6:41-58). We are called to participate in the sacrificial offering of Christ's body and blood by consuming it as well.

Please read aloud: There is one additional point we must make about these sacrificial meals. In the Bible, ritual meals aimed at much more than satisfying the needs of the body; they expressed covenant union. To see this exact reality in the Old Testament, let's turn to Exodus 24. *Read Exodus 24:3-11*

10. We read that the people offered sacrificed to God, then God made a covenant with his people after they had accepted his word, and, finally, Moses, Aaron, Aarons' sons, and seventy elders ate and drank in God's presence. This was a moment of intimacy with God! Later Rabbis compared this covenant ceremony to marriage vows. Why might meals be an expression of intimacy? If covenants are connected to meals, and meals to intimacy, what does this tell us about the Last Supper?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: We can now see how these themes of sacrifice, meal, and covenant tie together. Jesus offers Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God. This sacrifice is completed in a ritual meal, which ratifies a new covenant. At the Last Supper, the apostles are brought into covenant union with Christ through a communion meal. This communion meal is a place of great union and intimacy.

The Thank Offering

One final phrase from the Last Supper merits our attention. Scripture tells us that it was only after Jesus had “given thanks” that He gave His body and blood to His apostles (Lk 22:19). While Jesus was certainly expressing His gratitude to the Father, much more is contained in these words.

Many people have heard of some Old Testament sacrifices, but fewer are familiar with the *todah*, that is, the thank offering. The *todah* was incredibly significant to the Jews. There is an old rabbinic saying that “in the coming Messianic age all sacrifices will cease, but the thank offering will never cease.”⁴ Indeed, the *todah* was one of the greatest of all Old Testament sacrifices. Therefore, when we read that Jesus had “given thanks,” it’s expressing much more than mere gratitude. He was offering a *todah*.

What was a *todah* sacrifice and why was it so important? Biblical scholar Tim Gray explains:

*A todah sacrifice would be offered by someone whose life had been **delivered from great peril**... The redeemed person would show his **gratitude to God** by gathering his **closest friends and family** for a todah **sacrificial meal**. The lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple and the **bread** for the meal would be consecrated the moment the **lamb** was sacrificed. The bread and meat, along with **wine**, would constitute the elements of the sacred todah meal, which would be **accompanied by prayers and songs of thanksgiving**⁵*

11. The key elements of the *todah* so closely align with the Last Supper, that it is almost undeniable that, while the Last Supper is certainly a Passover meal, it is also a *todah* sacrifice. What elements of a

todah offering do you see present in the Last Supper? Why do you think Jesus would have been offering a *todah*?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Jesus was making a thank offering to the Father in anticipation of His deliverance (the Resurrection) from a great trial (the Passion). Therefore, He gathered His closest friends (the apostles) to share in a sacrificial meal of bread, wine and the lamb of sacrifice (His body and blood). The meal even ended with a hymn (Mt 26:30).

The Mass and Discipleship

With this background in mind, we are now ready to connect the Last Supper to our lives as disciples. Perhaps you've noticed some connections already. Nonetheless, let's walk through the details carefully, so that we can see how the key elements of the Last Supper are present in the Mass today.

12. We've touched on many aspects of the Last Supper. How can you see all these things relating to the Mass?
- a. Passover?
 - b. Anamnesis?
 - c. Sacrifice?
 - d. Meal?
 - e. Covenant?
 - f. Thank offering?

Answer:

- a. *The Passover was the ritual commemorating the saving act of God when He freed His people from slavery to Pharaoh, so that they*

could worship Him freely. They sacrificed a lamb and its blood saved them from death. The Mass is the ritual re-presentation of the meal Jesus shared, where He became the lamb offered to free his people, and all people, from the slavery of sin so that they might enter into communion with Him. His body and His blood save us from the wages of sin, which is death.

- b. The Mass is the “memorial of Christ’s Passover” (CCC 1409). As we discussed, memorial (anamnesis) doesn’t simply mean “remember.” In a memorial, the events of the past are re-presented. When we go to Mass, we not only recall Jesus’ sacrifice, but it actually becomes present to us. “The Eucharist is the memorial of Christ’s Passover...made present by the liturgical action” (CCC 1409, emphasis added). This is one of the reasons why we believe in the “**Real Presence**” of Christ in the Eucharist
- c. The Mass is a sacrifice. “Because it is the memorial of Christ’s Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice” (CCC 1365). This does not mean that at every Mass Christ is sacrificed again. Rather, Christ’s one, perfect sacrifice is made present anew. When we go to Mass, it is as though we are brought to the very foot of the Cross. While we could never offer a perfect sacrifice to God, the Mass allows us to **unite our imperfect sacrifice with Christ’s perfect one**. when we attend Mass, we must bring our whole selves to the Father, offering our joys, sorrows, dreams, and desires to God through Christ. This is the very heart of the “active participation” which the Church invites us to observe.
- d. The sacrifice of Christ is connected to a meal. St. Paul writes, “Our paschal (Passover) lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast” (1 Cor 5:7-8, NAB). As a learned Jew who knows the connection between sacrifice and meal, St. Paul realizes that the sacrifice of Christ is only complete once the ritual meal has been eaten. That is why Jesus invites us to eat His

*flesh and drink His blood. It's not a symbolic gesture; **we must truly eat of His sacrifice.***

- e. *This sacred Eucharistic meal leads to covenantal union. How do we enter and live as members of His new covenant family, the Church? Certainly, one primary way is by participating in the Mass and receiving Holy Communion. The "principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an **intimate union with Christ Jesus**" (CCC 1391). There is no deeper intimacy with Christ than receiving Him in Holy Communion.*
- f. *The Eucharist is also our today, our thank offering. The word eucharistia literally means thanksgiving. This is the same Greek word Scripture uses when it states that Jesus had "given thanks" at the Last Supper (Lk 22:19). We celebrate this offering with our spiritual family, the Church, thanking God for delivering us from sin and eternal death.*

13. What from everything we've discussed is most striking to you?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. How should we respond, given this amazing gift of the Eucharist?

Allow the group to discuss.

*Answer: Much could be said, but here are a few simple places to start: First, **faithfully attend Sunday Mass.** Christ has humbled Himself, taking the forms of bread and wine, so that you can approach Him. Don't reject this great gift.*

Prepare yourself to receive the Lord worthily. St. Paul writes, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body

eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor 11:28-29). If you have committed mortal sin, go to Confession before receiving Holy Communion.

*Lastly, as you come to a deeper knowledge and love of the Eucharist, **seek out more opportunities to approach Him**, including daily Mass or Eucharistic adoration.*

The celebration of the Eucharist in the Mass is at the heart of discipleship; it is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC 1324). Christ has given Himself fully to us; let us give ourselves fully to Him in return.

