

Exodus 24:3-11; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Mark 14:12-26

Holy Thursday  
March 28, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As I drove around town early this week running errands and visiting shur-ins, I noticed what seemed like a good number of church signs announcing their Good Friday and Easter Sunday schedule, but making no mention of a Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday) service. But, when Christians disconnect Good Friday from Holy Thursday (or, in Scriptural timeline, “Friday morning from the *previous* hours of Friday evening”, for Genesis says, “there was evening, then morning the first day”), when Christians disconnect the two, it becomes easy to fail to see that our God has always worked through **covenants**... and those covenants have always been confirmed with blood of the sacrifice... and the benefits of those covenants have always been poured out, because the Lord who promises is faithful.

In our reading from Exodus, God confirms His covenant with Moses and Aaron and all the people of Israel... that covenant He promised them in the previous chapters – a covenant full of his holy will, highlighted by the Ten Commandments, but also a covenant full of his gracious promise to guard His people in their journey to the promised land, that land of Canaan, which He

promises to conquer and give to them, just as He had promised it to Abraham more than 400 years before.

And, how does the reading highlight this covenant between God and His people? The text says,

“And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD (the transcript of the covenant)... And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD (yes, a covenant is always made with a sacrifice)... Then Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people (the reading of the will). And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel... And he did not lay his hand on [them]; they beheld God, and ate and drank.”

Herein we have all the five ‘ingredients’ of God’s covenant-making with His people: (1) a covenant spoken and recorded and read over the people... (2) that covenant based upon God’s holiness and full of God’s promise... (3) that covenant enacted by the sacrifice and blood that assures peace between the covenantal parties... (4) the cleansing blood sprinkling the people that they may be declared holy before the LORD... (5) and the confirmed

covenant being celebrated in the eating and drinking of the sacrifice.

It's a beautiful description of God's *regular* pattern, that we might recognize that *same* pattern in the new covenant which Christ speaks and has recorded that it may be read over the people... Christ's covenant based on his holiness and full of God's cruciform promise.... That covenant enacted by Christ's sacrifice and the blood that assures peace between God and sinners... that cleansing blood sprinkling the people in Holy Baptism that we may be declared holy before the LORD... and that confirmed covenant being celebrated in the eating and drinking of the Sacrifice's body and blood.

All of it is so beautifully spelled out, that we may be assured of God's plans. But, even as we think so highly of *His* part in the covenant, are we not burdened by *our* part in the covenant? Isn't a covenant a contract between two parties? Did not the people of Israel respond, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient"? Do **we** not owe such a response as we mentally prepare to partake of the covenantal meal? And yet, *do* we ever think in such ways? Or do we think the meal is for the forgiveness of sins "so that I don't have to keep the covenant"?

It raises the deeper question: Do we deserve such a covenant?

Isn't it remarkable that God would be willing to make His covenant – not with an equally trustworthy partner – but with sinners? Think of the very first words you hear each time the Supper of the covenant is celebrated: “One the night Jesus was betrayed”... well, betrayed by whom? Certainly, the one called the betrayer, the one for whom it would have been better off had he not been born... but was Christ not also *deserted* by the very ones with whom he in that hour shared the covenant? And do we in daily life not desert him at times in the same way? – “we all like sheep have gone astray, every one to his own way” – isn't it our sinfulness that *requires* Him to intervene in such an ‘extreme’ yet necessary sacrifice and life-giving... *so* required because our sin is so deep... so deep, not against a nameless, faceless party; but so deep against Him, the One with whom we are to be in covenant. And if it is so deep, how could He in good confidence *make covenant* with us? For he knows how daily we fail to honor or uphold our part of the covenant! *And yet*, in the person of Christ – true God and true man – in that one perfect person, there is perfect covenant keeping between God and man. In the two natures of his one person and body, there the covenant is perfect,

there the harmony is perfect, and thus – in the one person who is Christ Jesus – God and man are in perfect covenantal agreement.

And so, what does that Christ do, but – as our advocate with the Father – he gently calls us to repentance (notice, he doesn't ignore or excuse our going astray; *that's* not some 'fine print' in the covenant!, that we can just ignore our part in the covenant) ... but He gently calls us to repentance that He may prepare us to again share with Him in the meal of the covenant God made with us! Not just the meal He prepared for us, but the meal that is the body and blood in which *is* the perfect covenant of God and man made one.

In other words, your participation in the covenant is not based on **your** righteousness, but on **Christ's**. On Christ's righteousness and God's mercy! And, it is a covenant all about God's mercy in Christ precisely because it could not be based on your righteousness... for, if based on your righteousness, there could be no covenant!

And yet, there **is** a covenant! A covenant calling us to love God's holiness precisely because we live on account of His mercy... and according to that mercy, we may be partakers of the covenant we do not deserve! Partakers through the body and blood of the One who is righteous.

And, what a covenant it is – with every detail of the covenant and its distribution being planned out. We’ve talked recently about the very detail with which Jesus institutes and hands down the Supper. Perhaps Jesus’ meticulous planning is on the greatest display in a detail we rarely even consider: from St. Mark’s account, as we heard Jesus plan it,

“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ And he will show you a large upper room *furnished and ready.*”

Think of the detail with which Christ planned this and what he divinely foreknew!: He had *planned* for “a man carrying a jar of water” to meet the disciples; he charges them to ask with expectation where the guest room is (not *whether* one is available with all the throng coming to Jerusalem for the Passover, but *where* is the one the Lord plans). The master of the house “will show you a large upper room” and it will be “furnished and ready.” In fact, so meticulous is this planning that the word for “furnished” is the same word used to refer to making a bed. Parents and children alike know that a bed is not properly made, not properly furnished, when the kids just quickly throw the pillows and covers together, but when – with care and patience

and precision – the last little wrinkle is given proper attention. *Then* it's furnished. This is how we must interpret how the disciples found the room to be – perfectly prepared for Jesus' plans to institute the new covenant with His Church.

Anyone who claims that the details of Jesus' covenant-making meal and His spoken institution of it are 'accidental' or 'incidental' hasn't meditated upon our account from St Mark. So mindful of this great covenant-establishing gift was our Lord, that he had every detail planned down to the furnishing of the room he would use.

Thus, with the same planned detail, Jesus can *institute* – and his apostle can *speak of* – our participation in the *covenantal gifts distributed*: from our reading in 1 Corinthians, the apostle declares that we participate in the covenant by partaking of the very blood that sealed the covenant. We participate *with God* (as St Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ" ... yes, down to the detail, the Lord Jesus Christ says we are participants in His cleansing blood: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness," the epistle says... that blood of His suffering, poured out from His side into the cup of His suffering, but equally the cup of our blessing and the cup of salvation – so that we have genuine covenantal participation with God "in the blood of Christ" – in

that righteous God-man in which the covenant is perfect) and, as St Paul says, also covenantal participation with one another, as the apostle says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

So, notice, Paul himself recognizes the symbolism of the one bread and the one cup – that we share the cup of Christ’s suffering and we break bread with one another as one body. Indeed, divinely given symbols of the covenant between God and man, and thus also between brother and sister in Christ... that we fervently one another.

But that does not mean the meal of the covenant is merely ‘symbolic.’ The strength of the covenant is not found in symbolism – even though it be *divine* symbolism – but the symbolic practice only matters because it is divinely connected to and hosts the very substance that matters – “This is my body; this is my blood... for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” In this body and blood of the one God-man, perfect covenant keeping!

There is the **fullness** of the covenant – spoken, recorded, and proclaimed in those words of the covenant. And we can be sure of those Words because on the very day (in “evening and morning” fashion) – on the very day the covenant was spoken, it was sealed by the testator’s death – no time to worry that the testator might reconsider his promises, might decide to alter the



words and details of the covenant, no time for the testator to backtrack, even if he in all of his anguish thought of the possibility – “Father, let this cup pass from me, but not my will but Thine be done.” ... “Thine be done,” so that the Christ may establish the new covenant as planned, and you may receive all of its benefits as promised.

Thus, the covenantal words conclude: “do this in remembrance of me.” The remembrance *is* truly an act of remembering (don’t shortchange that!), but no *mere* act of remembering. It is a remembering of the testament Jesus made as the one in whose body the covenant is perfectly kept... it’s a remembrance of the testament Jesus made. And...: *any and every* testament is – at the death of the testator – fully enacted until the benefits run out. And, because the Christ is God (and, thus, the testator is God)... and because that Christ is the victor over death, is risen and lives and reigns to all eternity, thus the benefits and inheritance will never run out; His body and blood will forever be available and given to feed and strengthen and sustain His Church: “As often as you drink it,” He promises. No limitations, for we need never ration the inheritance or fear it running dry.

So yes, “do this in remembrance of Me” – for great joy and reassurance is yours in hanging on every Word of His promise, that very Word that – in the Table blessing – makes the

Sacrament. As God promised even in Exodus, “I will come to You and cause My name to be remembered” the Lord promises those who gather at His altar.

So the Lord again tonight gathers us at His altar, that by eating the bread and drinking the cup, we may remember and proclaim His death which sealed this everlasting and ever-flowing covenant... and in the divine details of His meticulously planned covenantal meal, we may participate in the blood of Christ, participate in the body of Christ... for in His body and blood, the covenant between God and man is perfect, and thus the inheritance and its benefits are yours forever.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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