



FR. DANIEL'S CORNER

Mass Moment: Part 24

THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVE

In the Institution Narrative, a precise and specific event from the life of Jesus is retold—namely, the supper with his disciples the night before he died. The Jewish roots of the Passover meal help us to understand the Institution Narrative. Jesus took this Jewish feast and gave it a new meaning. The Jewish people remembered God's saving act by sharing food and drink. Just as the Passover became a liturgical memorial of God's saving action of His people from Egypt (the Exodus), Jesus turned the Passover into the Eucharist, a 'new and eternal covenant' which entails a memorial, an *Anamnesis*.

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

All four Gospels record the Last Supper event, but only Matthew, Mark, and Luke have the Institution Narrative (see Mt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22: 19-20). The bread of life discourse is found in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. However, what happens at the time of consecration is powerful.

What is striking is that Jesus uses these basic human elements (of bread and wine) – symbols of love, desire, and communion - to symbolize his voluntary death. What is death for him is meant to be nourishment (bread) for us. What is death for him is even meant to be a feast (wine) for us. One immediately is awed by the sacrificial language used here: "given up," and "blood poured out." This informs our understanding of the Eucharist as a Sacrifice. This is the one single and perfect Sacrifice and there can be no other.

Although Christ's sacrifice on Calvary is present at Mass, the Institution Narrative remembers and enacts the supper on the night before Jesus died. It does not enact the scenes on Calvary. However, this supper points to the meaning of the cross, which is finally revealed in the Resurrection and Ascension. This is ultimately what we do in remembering the Lord's Supper— the central event of Salvation History.

You will notice that there is the elevation of the Body and Blood of Christ followed by the veneration by the priest. In many traditions a bell is rung to signify the sacredness of the moment. Some people also mutter "My Lord and my God!" It is not done everywhere, but it is borrowing the words of the apostle Thomas who upon seeing the resurrected Jesus came to believe. This is a practice that I find fulfilling and recommend to everyone. In some other climes, some people use "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into this world." These are not necessarily said aloud as the liturgy does not make that provision. This is an act of faith; the faith that tells us that Christ is present. Thus, the priest says immediately after the elevations: *The Mystery of Faith*.

Faith perceives that something is hidden in the bread and wine. The acclamation of faith provides a short recollection of Christ's Paschal Mystery; placing it contextually in its historical form, in its present reality and the future glory it prepares the Church for. The assembly cries out the holy death of Christ, his blessed resurrection, and his coming in glory. There are three possible responses with which the assembly may answer the priest's exclamation. Each expresses the center of our salvation and mentions the past event of Jesus' death, the present reality of his resurrection, and his future coming in glory. All of that – past, present, and future- is hidden in what lies on the altar, and faith perceives it and proclaims it.

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.