

The Seder Meal as a Christian Home Celebration:

(by Gerald Twomey, C.S.P.)

Passover is the great Jewish feast of redemption and liberation, the memorial of the Israelites' deliverance from their bondage in Egypt. The word Passover means "deliverance," since in the story of the Exodus Yahweh "passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt" (Ex. 12:27). Passover is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, since in their haste to flee Egypt, "the people carried off their dough, still unleavened" (Ex. 12:34). The lamb offered at each paschal meal recalls the first Passover sacrifice, whose blood protected the Israelites from the avenging angel of Yahweh (cf. Ex. 12:21-33). Passover is a festival of great rejoicing, which reveals how God "led us from captivity to freedom, from sadness to joy, from mourning to feasting, from servitude to redemption, from darkness to brilliant light."

The Seder Meal - The ritual meal which commemorates the events of the Exodus is called the Seder. The primary aim of the Seder is to transmit to future generations the story of the Exodus, the central event in Jewish history. Ideally, a family gathers around a table in its own home to celebrate the Seder, sharing in a meal which symbolizes their consciousness as a people and their faith in the future. The Exodus story pertains to all persons, since it tells of the right of all persons to be free.

Celebrating Our Heritage - In the Christian tradition the Passover Seder is also believed to be when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. Gathered around the supper table with his disciples, Jesus told them, "I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; because, I tell you, I shall not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Then, taking a cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and share it among you, because from now on, I tell you, I shall not drink wine until the kingdom of God comes'. Then he took some bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which will be given for you; do this as a memorial of me'. He did the same with the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:15-20). This Christian observance of this ritual meal celebrates not only our tradition of Christ's last supper but our own Jewish heritage which provided the context for Jesus' institution at the last supper.