

“This was a night of vigil for the LORD, as he led them out of the land of Egypt; so on this same night all the children of Israel must keep a vigil for the LORD throughout their generations” (Ex 12:42). The Jewish Passover, both the sacred meal, and the liberation from slavery have a deep and profound spiritual significance for Christians. The Passover is an important foundation for the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’s triumph over sin and death.

The Passover Lamb was slaughtered during the evening twilight and its blood applied to the doorposts of every family. Jesus is the Paschal Lamb who offers his life for our salvation on the cross. We hear of this spiritual connection from John the Baptist. “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). The background for this title is threefold:

- From Exodus, it is the paschal lamb, whose blood saved Israel (Ex 12).
- From the Prophet Isaiah we learn of the suffering servant led like a lamb to the slaughter as a sin-offering (Is 53:7, 10).
- And in the Book of Revelation, we learn of the victorious apocalyptic lamb who would destroy evil in the world (Rev 5–7; 17:14).

The Book of Exodus prescribes that some of the lamb’s blood is to be applied to the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where the lamb is eaten. The mark on the doorpost is in the shape of a cross so that death will Passover the homes of the Hebrews. In the absence of that sign of salvation, “at midnight the LORD struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:29). With this tenth plague, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and asked the Israelites to leave at once. With this, the Israelites escaped slavery passing through the Red Sea and on into the desert embarking on a long journey to the Promised Land.

When we baptize in the church, a priest or deacon traces a cross on the forehead of an individual. God in turn places an indelible mark on the baptized soul. With baptism comes the promise of eternal life and the lifegiving requirement to lead a holy life patterned after Jesus.

At the Lord’s Supper, Jesus took the chalice filled with the fruit of the vine, he gave thanks, and gave the chalice 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.” With God’s help, we are strengthened by partaking of his Precious Blood.

The sacrifice of Jesus did not end with the Lord’s Supper. On Good Friday, he died on the cross. Blood and water flowed from his side when a soldier pierced it with a lance. He was taken off the cross and laid in a tomb. Passing from life to death, he descended into hell to break the gates of the netherworld. Those marked by the signs of faith were set free to rise to the Promised Land of Eternity.

The Jewish Passover was not a singular event but rather a perpetual institution. “This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the LORD, as a perpetual institution” (Ex 12:14). Each year as they gather to participate in the Passover meal, the Jewish people are spiritually part of the original event. Every generation gets to participate with Moses and the original participants of the Passover.

So too for Christians. The Lord’s Supper is a perpetual institution. We gather in church but we are spiritually connected to Jesus and the Apostles in the upper room. “At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory” (Sacrosanctum Concilium #47).

God reconciled the world to himself in Christ and entrusted his followers with sharing the Good News. By actively participating in the Mass, we help to continue the mission first entrusted to the apostles that was carefully planned by God in the Jewish roots of our Christian faith.