

Holy Eucharist: This is My Body; This is My Blood

Lesson # 21 of 27

Scripture/Memory Verse

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Lesson Goal & Objectives

Goal

- \$ The students will gain a deeper awareness of and appreciation for the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.
- \$ The students will understand that sharing in the Eucharistic feast brings them to participate in Christ’s Body and Blood as well as “all other benefits of His passion.”

Objectives

- \$ The students will read the Scriptures in which Jesus says, “This is My Body; this is My Blood” in order to understand the miracle of the Holy Eucharist.
- \$ The students will examine nature of the Eucharistic Liturgy in order to understand how and why we celebrate the Holy Eucharistic every Sunday for the purpose of encountering the Risen Jesus Christ.
- \$ the students will develop an understanding of “remembrance” as a translation of the Scriptural term: *Anamnesis* which means, “to experience here and now the reality and power of an event which began in the past.”
- \$ The students will gain an enhanced ability to participate actively in the Holy Eucharist.

Introduction and Background for the Teacher

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer says, “The Holy Eucharist [is] the principal act of Christian worship on the Lord's Day and other major Feasts” (page 13).

Until the 1970s, in the Episcopal Church and throughout the Anglican Communion, a rather elaborate service of Morning Prayer was typically the Principle Service on Sundays, most often with a simple early morning celebration of Holy Communion as well. Holy Communion was usually the “Principal Service” on only one Sunday of the month except in more Anglo-Catholic dioceses, such as our own Diocese of Albany, where Holy Communion might even be celebrated daily. The general recovery of a weekly Eucharist returned Anglican worship to the pattern of the first fifteen centuries of Christian worship – and also to the original intention of Archbishop Cranmer (the author of the first Book of Common Prayer) and the early English reformers who wanted the members of the Church to participate in Holy Eucharist as frequently as possible. Our current Book of Common Prayer preserves the central pattern of Christian worship going back to the beginning of the life of the church and practiced throughout Christianity in both the Eastern and Western Churches. At this time, even many Evangelical,

Pentecostal and “mainline” Protestant churches, who previously did not see a compelling need for frequent Communion, are developing a desire for and ways of increasing their participation in Communion services much more often than they had in the past.

The first Book of Common Prayer (1549) entitled the service of communion, “the Supper of the Lorde and the Holy Communion, commonly called the Masse.” In previous Books of Common Prayer of the American Episcopal Church the term used was “The Holy Communion.” Our 1979 Book of Common Prayer has recovered the term, “Holy Eucharist” from the earlier Church.

The term “Eucharist” is a Greek word from the early church that means “Thanksgiving.” Giving thanks for something or “over” something was and is the way in which that thing was blessed in the rabbinical tradition. For this reason, some of the earliest forms of the prayer of “Eucharist” from the 2nd century bear some resemblance, in part, to early Jewish table graces or prayers of thanksgiving. In these earliest liturgies, the person presiding over the Eucharistic celebration was instructed to “give thanks to God as best he is able” because the act of giving thanks was the method of blessing. This is why our prayer book uses the title, “Great Thanksgiving,” for the prayers over the bread and wine. It has been said that the essence of all Christian life is “eucharistia,” or thanksgiving in response to the grace of God in accomplishing our salvation by the incarnation, death and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ. We need an attitude of gratitude, and the Holy Eucharist is the central focus of this.

However, there is much more happening in the Holy Eucharist than only giving thanks. In the 1928 Book of Common Prayer the prayer over the elements of Bread and Wine was called the “Prayer of Consecration.” In this Prayer Book, our current Prayer Book and previous American Prayer Books, the Eucharistic prayer includes an invocation to the Holy Spirit to “bless *and* consecrate” the elements. To “consecrate” something means to make it holy in a special and particular way. The elements of Holy Communion are not merely blessed, they are also consecrated because they become the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Savior, Who is intimately with us in this Sacrament. In receiving Holy Communion we are also, in a sense, “consecrated” because we are actually participating in the Body and Blood of Christ. Anglicans use the terms, “Real Presence” and “Participation” based on the writings of the Anglican writer and teacher, Richard Hooker who rooted his ideas in the writings of St. Paul.

The Synoptic Gospels attest that at the Last Supper, Jesus took bread and wine, saying: “This *is* My Body; this *is* My Blood. In the original Greek texts, He then goes on to say, “Do this is in *Anamnesis* of Me. (An-am-NEE-sis) The word “*Anamnesis*” is translated into English as “remembrance.” However, over the centuries there has come to be a problem with this translation. The connotation of words in any living language changes over time. In our current day, “remembrance” has come to mean simply thinking about an event that is over and done. Similarly, a “memorial” is an event that is used to honor someone who is dead and gone. This is *not* what *Anamnesis* originally indicated. We very much need to restore our understanding of this New Testament term which means: **to actively participate in the power and presence of a past event here and now in our own lives.**

The Last Supper occurred in the context of the Passover celebration. The Passover meal is called the “Seder.” Jews today use a book – similar to our prayer book – called the “Haggadah,” to guide them through the Seder meal. At the climax of the meal, the leader says:

“In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt, as the Bible says, ‘And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, it is

because of that which the Eternal did to *me* when I went forth from Egypt.” For it was not alone our forefathers whom the Holy One, blessed be He, redeemed; He redeemed *us* too, with them, as it is said: “He brought *us* out from there that He might lead us to and give us the land which He pledged to our forefathers.” (Jewish Passover Haggadah)

The Haggadah stresses that it was not just the Jewish ancestors of the past who experienced the saving work of the Lord. The emphasis is on “that which the Eternal did to *me*.” The Passover meal makes God’s saving acts of the Exodus real and personal for modern day Jewish believers. The celebration of the Passover is a requirement for Jews because it gives them their very identity – it makes them who they are: a People brought out of slavery into freedom by God.

At the Last Supper Jesus’ command to “do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me,” functions in a similar way to the observance of the Jewish Seder. When we consecrate bread and wine in Jesus’ Name, and repeat the words that He said at the Last Supper, His Body and Blood are *really present* with us, and we make the redemptive event of his death and “all other benefits of his passion” (BCP 335) *really present* – in our own lives here and now to transform us.

In the Holy Eucharist we do *not* merely eat some bread, drink some wine and sit around thinking about how Jesus Christ died for us many centuries ago. *Anamnesis* means more than merely remembering a past event or honoring a dead hero. It means that we are *now* participating in the salvation provided for us in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection in a real way which changes us and makes us holy. It brings “all the benefits of His Passion” – salvation and a new, resurrected life – into our own lives in a powerful, transformative way. The great Anglican teacher, Richard Hooker, used the phrase of St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians: we *participate* in the very Body and Blood of Christ so that His own life may participate in our lives, making us holy as He is holy.

Have you ever heard the phrase: “You are what you eat?” In receiving the Body and Blood of Christ we become the Body of Christ in this world. This is why Holy Communion is the essential element of our worship. As you ponder this reality more deeply, you will become better able to teach it to your students.

Materials

- \$ Bibles, or printed copies of the verses of Holy Scripture that you will be reading.
- \$ Have copies of the Book of Common Prayer available.
- \$ Access to the aumbry with the help of your rector or deacon *or* permission to make use of some Eucharistic vessels as described in the Introductory Activity
- \$ A crucifix (with the image of Jesus on it– not just an empty cross) placed in a prominent location in your teaching space.
- \$ Handouts to take home: Sheets of paper with the words *Anamnesis* and *Remembrance* printed on them with their definitions given below in the “Lesson” section. Further down the page copy and print the “Anima Christi” prayer found at the end of this lesson.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

O Lord Jesus Christ, who in a wonderful Sacrament has left us a memorial of your passion: Grant us, we pray, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of your Body and Blood, that we may ever perceive within ourselves the fruit of your redemption; for you live and reigns with the

Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP page 834) *Also take a few minutes to invite your students to offer their own prayers especially of thanksgiving to God for His many gifts to them.*

Introductory Activity: (5 – 10 minutes)

Choose the first option if you can, or make use of option #2. You may always use an activity of your own invention that may work better with your group in your own setting.

If a priest, deacon or lay Eucharistic minister is teaching this class, or is available to help with this class, go into your church and have the students come into the sanctuary and stand in front of or around the altar. Maintain an atmosphere of quiet and great reverence. Have the priest, deacon or LEM bring the Consecrated Elements from the aumbry and put them on the altar. Ask the students to answer briefly: What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “This *is* My Body; This *is* My Blood?” (*Keep this discussion short*).

After reverently returning the Consecrated Elements back to the aumbry, bring the class to its usual space for the rest of the discussion.

Option #2: If no one is available to open the aumbry, you may be able to get permission from your rector to do this on your own. (Don’t merely presume to do this without checking with your rector.) If you do not have the opportunity to do the first activity described above, then see if you can obtain help from your altar guild in bringing out some of the Eucharistic vessels: chalice and paten. Put them on a clean white cloth in a prominent place in your teaching space. Ask the students: Why do we use expensive and beautiful silver vessels for Holy Communion? And then: What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “This *is* My Body; This *is* My Blood?”

Lesson (20 – 30 minutes)

Have a crucifix (as described in the “Materials” section) hung or mounted in a prominent place.

Read aloud Mark 14:12-25.

- What two things did Jesus say about the bread and wine at the Last Supper?
 (“This *is* my Body; this *is* my Blood”)
- What else did Jesus say immediately after He did this?
 (“Do this in remembrance [*anamnesis*] of Me”)

1) Remembrance as “Anamnesis”

Use the handout sheet with the following definition printed on it:

Definition: **Anamnesis** means to experience here and now in our own lives the reality and power of a past event which truly affects our lives by changing us. (An-am-NEE-sis)

Explain to the students that the word which we translate as “remembrance” in English in the original Scriptures is the Greek word, “Anamnesis.” Discuss the Definition on the printed handout. What is this word telling us?

An-amnesia is related to our word “amnesia.” The first syllable, “an” means “not.” “Not-amnesia” means to wake up from the kind of amnesia in which we forget who we really are and where we come from. We re-member that Jesus is really with us, and He is making us into His Body. He does this by giving us His own Body and Blood which He sacrificed for us on the Cross.

Discussion Question:

How is “anamnesis” different from our usual understanding of “remembrance?” We usually understand “remembrance” to mean just thinking about the past. However, in the Holy Eucharist, we are not merely thinking about the past. What Jesus did for us through His death and resurrection in the past, and Who He really is now **are made really present** with us, here and now, in a way which affects us and transforms our lives. Normally we remember what is past and no longer present; we link remembrance with “absence” rather than “presence.” But the Eucharist is a special sort of remembrance in which the thing that we “remember” is made “really present” to us. St. Paul tells us in his letter to Corinth: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again” (I Corinthians 11:26); and also: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

2) The Context of the Last Supper

Question: According to the text, when did the Last Supper take place?

According to the Synoptic Gospels, it occurred during the Passover Seder. Mark 14:12

Explain to the students that the Seder was to include unleavened bread and a sacrificed lamb: Exodus 12:1-28 (you don't need to read the whole passage in class – it is very long – but you should be familiar enough with it to give the students a summarized description or to read parts of the story)

The Jewish Seder

The Passover meal is called the “Seder.” Jews today use a book – similar to our prayer book – called the “Haggadah,” to guide them through the meal. At the climax of the meal, the leader says:

“In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt, as the Bible says, ‘And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, it is because of that which the Eternal did to me when I went forth from Egypt.’” For it was not alone our forefathers whom the Holy One, blessed be He, redeemed; He redeemed us too, with them, as it is said: “He brought us out from there that He might lead us to and give us the land which He pledged to our forefathers.” (Jewish Passover Haggadah)

The Haggadah stresses that it not just the Jewish ancestors of the past who experienced the saving work of the LORD. The emphasis is on “that which the Eternal did to me.” The Passover meal makes the God's saving acts of the Exodus real and contemporary for modern day Jewish believers.

Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples occurred in the context of the Passover. Jesus' command to “do this in remembrance of me,” functions in a very similar way to the observance of Jewish Seder. When we break bread in Jesus name, and repeat the words that he said at the Last Supper, His Body and Blood are **really present** with us, and we make the redemptive event of his death and “all other benefits of his passion” (BCP 335) **really present** – in our own lives here and now to transform us. This is anamnesis.

3) Real Presence

Jesus very simply said, “This *is* my Body; this *is* My blood.” He also said, “My flesh is truly food and My blood is truly drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him.” (John 6: 55 – 56). Christians have always believed that what Jesus said about His Body

and Blood is true. However, problems occurred when theologians tried to explain exactly *how* this happens. They tried to define the Holy Eucharist in philosophical terms. This (of course) gave rise to disputes and different ways of interpreting His words:

A) Merely Symbolic Presence: On the one hand, many Protestants believe that Jesus was speaking only “symbolically.” That is, nothing actually happens to the bread and wine that changes them at all. Therefore, the elements do not in any real or literal sense convey the presence of Christ. The problem with this belief is that it eliminates any substantial sense of Jesus being really present.

B) Transubstantiation: the Roman Catholic doctrine is that during the Prayer of Consecration (or “Great Thanksgiving”) the substance of the bread and wine completely disappears and is replaced by the Body and Blood of Christ. Only the apparent outward appearance of bread and wine remains. The difficulty with this idea is that it relies too much on philosophical language that explains away God’s transcendence which always exceeds the ability of our small brains to explain Him.

C) Real Presence by Participation: The Anglican position has (typically) been between these two. Anglicans are reluctant to use the term, “transubstantiation” because it relies too much on merely human philosophical terms. However, most Anglicans in most places have also been reluctant to say that there is nothing special about Holy Communion – that Jesus is not present at all in relation to the elements. We hold that the Body and Blood of Christ are “really present” in a way that is tangible but which goes beyond our small human efforts to explain it. We are truly receiving Jesus when we receive Holy Communion – how this happens, we are not willing to say. Like the Eastern Orthodox Churches, we “remain silent in contemplating the Mystery.” Richard Hooker, the Anglican teacher of the 16th Century, used St. Paul’s idea of “Participation” from his First Letter to the Corinthians 10: 16 (as quoted at the end of section 1), in summary: Jesus Christ’s Body and Blood participate in the elements of bread and wine so that we may participate in His Body and Blood, thereby becoming the Body of Christ, Who participates in our lives. Christ’s Real Presence is in the elements, and therefore He is really present in us as well. We live in Him and He in us.

4) The Holy Eucharist in the Book of Common Prayer

Take a few minutes to look at some of the Eucharistic Prayers in the Prayer Book: Rite I, Eucharistic Prayer I page 333, Prayer II page 340 and/or Rite II, Prayer A page 361, B page 367, C page 369 and D page 372.

Discuss:

- \$ Each prayer is characterized by giving thanks to God.
- \$ The “Words of Institution” (“this is my body; this is my blood”) are found in all of the Eucharistic Prayers.
- \$ There is also an invocation to the Holy Spirit to come upon the elements of bread and wine, to consecrate them, *and* also upon us as well to make us holy.
- \$ Each prayer ends with an affirmation of the glory of God in the Holy Trinity

5) Resources: Quotes from Holy Scripture, Patristics and Anglican Leaders

These texts will be helpful in clarifying our understanding of the Holy Eucharist. Use them as you may find them helpful and you have time to fit them into your class. You may want to

include some of them on your hand-out sheet. Do what works in your own situation.

John 6:52-58: “I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to Me shall not hunger, etc.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32: Paul speaks here of “discerning the body.”

In the Early Church

Justin Martyr (150 A.D.) “For we do not receive these things as common bread or common drink; but as Jesus Christ our Savior being incarnate by God’s word took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer which comes from him, from which our flesh and blood are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus.”

Irenaeus of Lyons (180 A.D.): “For as the bread, which comes from the earth, receives the invocation of God, and then it is no longer common bread but Eucharist, consists of two things, an earthly and a heavenly; so our bodies, after partaking of the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of eternal resurrection.”

Episcopalian or Anglican Teaching

“We believe...that the Presence is real. Concerning the method of the presence, we define nothing rashly, and, I add, we do not anxiously inquire, any more than how the Human and Divine Natures are united in one Person in the Incarnation of Christ.” (Lancelot Andrewes, 1555-1626)

“Christ’s was the word that spake it,
He took the bread and brake it,
and what His word doth make it,
That I believe and take it.” Queen Elizabeth I

Reflection (10 minutes)

Wrapping it Up: The Walk to Emmaus – the Eucharist in motion

Look at Luke 24:13-35 (A long passage; you might summarize it and just read key verses). Note how the story has a Eucharistic “shape” as the disciples encounter Jesus in two ways:

1. ...in the exposition of the Word, as Jesus “interprets in the scripture all the things concerning himself” (“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”), and..
2. ...in the meal, when Jesus “was known to them in the breaking of the bread” and “their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

Discussion Question: At the end of this Gospel account, Jesus “disappears from their sight.” Where did He go? (Let the students struggle with this question for a few moments, coming up with various possibilities.) When they have given up on finding the “real” answer, tell them:

They no longer saw Him outside themselves because in receiving the “Broken Bread” He had now placed His “Real Presence” inside their hearts.

This is why we come to the Eucharist: to have our hearts burn within us as we hear Jesus in scriptures, to have our eyes opened to His Real Presence and to Participate in His Body and Blood.

Take-Home Activities: (5 minutes)

1. Memorize a prayer to say quietly after you receive Holy Communion. Chose one of the prayers in this lesson, or the following prayer, (called the “Anima Christi”):

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Permit me not to be separated from Thee
From the malignant enemy defend me
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto Thee
That with thy Saints I may praise Thee
Forever and ever. Amen

Closing Prayer: (5 minutes)

Be present, be present, O Jesus, our great High Priest, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread; who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen. (BCP, page 834) *Also encourage the students to pray in their own words, adding their petitions and especially their thanksgivings.*

Scripture References

- * Exodus 12:1-28
- * Exodus 24:9-11 (a “type” or symbolic anticipation of the Eucharist)
- * Matthew 26:17-19, 26-29
- * Mark 14:12-16, 22-25
- * Luke 24:13-34
- * John 6:22-58
- * I Corinthians 10: 16
- * I Corinthians 11:17-32