

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible, lighted candle, and glass of wine or juice at the center of your group. Pray together the hymn below, Psalm 118, which Jesus and his disciples sang and prayed to conclude the Passover meal they ate together on the night before Jesus died.

LEADER: God's steadfast love endures forever.

ALL: This is the day God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

LEADER: The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

ALL: This is the day God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

LEADER: This is God's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.

ALL: This is the day God has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

A colleague who helps primary children prepare for First Communion has a wonderful way to help them understand at their level what eating and drinking Jesus' body and blood is about. She tells them how much she liked chocolate chip cookies when she was a child like them. In fact, sometimes her mother told her, "You are going to eat so many chocolate chip cookies you will turn into one."

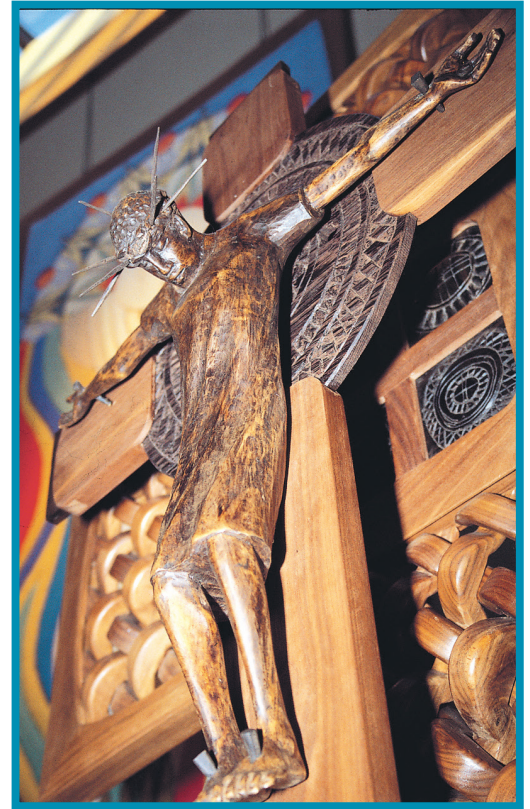
SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Her example explains well why we celebrate Sunday's feast and why we celebrate Eucharist weekly and daily. We gather as the body of Christ to become the body of Christ. We share the body of Christ because as persons and as an assembly we want to turn into the body of Christ—to embody who Jesus is in our world.

The body of Christ that we become through sharing eucharist is an image of the Church, of all of us in communion. Baptism makes us one in Christ as Sister Shawn Copeland describes, extending Galatians 3.28. "In Christ, there is neither brown nor black, neither red nor white; in Christ there is neither Creole nor *mestizo*, neither senator nor worker in the *maquiladoras*. In Christ, there is neither male nor female, neither gay/lesbian nor straight, neither heterosexual nor homosexual."*

In gathering for Eucharist, Christians see in one another who they can be, who they can turn into. At Jesus' table we share the food that fuels us to become his body—Jesus' feet, hands, eyes, ears, and heart in



the world. What we eat and drink becomes part of us.

Participating in this sacrament aims to transform us over our lifetimes. It is the font of Christian community. Every gathering sustains the hope to build the kin*dom of God, where the creatures of Earth become together the commonwealth of the Creator.

● As what part of the body of Christ do you think of yourself—feet, hands, eyes, ears, heart?

*M. Shawn Copeland, *The Strength of Her Witness*, "Marking the Body of Jesus, the Body of Christ," 281.

GOSPEL

Jesus and his disciples celebrate Passover.

NARRATOR 1: On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples said to him—

DISCIPLES: Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?

JESUS: Go into the city. A man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, 'Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.

NARRATOR 1: Two disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

NARRATOR 2: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

JESUS: Take this; this is my body.

NARRATOR 2: Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.

JESUS: This is my blood of the covenant, which will be poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

NARRATOR 2: After singing a song of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.



Mark 14.12-16, 22-26

At the Passover meal Jews bless and share both bread and wine as they retell the story of their salvation. As part of the prayer, they pray the hallel psalms (113-118), praising God's steadfast love

throughout their history. *Hallel* is the Hebrew word for *praise*; it is the same word that begins *allel-uia*, which means *praise God*.

- Share any experiences you have had of eating Passover meals with Jewish families or Christian friends.
- How do you picture the last supper in your mind? What influence is art on how you picture the gospel scene?

Christians from the beginning have gathered together, celebrated in Jesus' memory, and given a familiar form to the story of Jesus' last supper. In Mark's story—as in Paul's account in his first letter to the Corinthians, written early in the A.D. 50s (11.23-26)—Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to his friends. Then he takes a cup of wine, gives thanks, and gives it to his friends. These are the actions Christians continue to reenact in every eucharist.

At the last supper, Jesus makes bread, broken and given, a sign of his body—of himself. Through this sign his life nourishes ours. This sign calls us to turn into bread

We are the Body of Christ.

Mark clearly makes Jesus' last supper with his disciples a Passover meal. In gathering for this festal meal, Jews then and now remember and celebrate the event that founded Israel as God's people—their exodus out of slavery into freedom. They celebrate the exodus in story, song, psalms, and symbols.

Bitter herbs remind every generation of Jews that celebrates the feast of the bitterness of slavery. Lamb recalls for them how the angel of death passed over the houses

marked with lamb's blood but killed the firstborn in every other home in Egypt. Unleavened bread recalls how the Hebrews escaped so hurriedly their bread had no time to rise.

The Exodus story tells us how God the Creator saves Israel when Pharaoh sends soldiers to recapture his slaves. As the soldiers corner the slaves at the sea, the Holy One, who in the beginning separated the waters from the dry land, now opens a dry path through the sea for Israel's escape.

for others, to become what the sign signifies.

Jesus makes wine, poured out in a common cup, a sign of his life blood and of a new covenant between God and humankind in his person. This gesture links the outpouring of his life with the blood of the lambs that saved the early Hebrews. The cup of wine Jesus blesses at the meal also anticipates the cup of suffering he drinks in his passion. Jesus keeps this new covenant pledge unto the end on the cross.

On the way to Jerusalem James and John pledge to drink the cup that Jesus drinks. They want seats at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom. At the last supper James and John with all Jesus' disciples share the cup of wine Jesus pours out, blesses, and shares. Nonetheless, Peter, James, and John fall asleep after the meal while Jesus prays in agony in the garden that the cup of suffering pass him by.

The outpouring of Jesus' life in his suffering and death is the cup he blesses at the Passover meal, the cup he pledges will inaugurate God's kingdom. Peter, James, and John drink Jesus' cup in the post-Easter Church when they pour out their lives for the sake of spreading the gospel.

- **What pledges have you kept in your life?**
- **How do you keep the pledge that sharing Jesus' cup expresses?**
- **What turning points in your understanding of Eucharist can you identify?**

● **What do you see as the value of receiving communion under both species?**

My parish priest's insistence that we kids in his high school religion class go to daily Mass during Lent drew me slowly into a life commitment in the Church. Lent ended, but I kept going to daily Mass. These eucharistic gatherings became a school of transformation for me.

Jesus Christ is never the only teacher in eucharistic communities. Everywhere I have ever joined in eucharistic celebrations, Christians in the celebrating community have called me to become like them and to continue the outpouring of our lives we all know Jesus' signs represent. Bread broken and shared. Wine poured out. A common cup. Nourishment for service.

Wheat and grapes go through many transformations on the way to becoming the bread and wine that Jesus makes signs of his self-giving. John's gospel compares Jesus' death and resurrection to the life cycle of a grain of wheat. Like a seed, Jesus in his death falls into the earth and dies but rises to produce life a hundredfold.

The actions of making and baking bread profoundly reshape the wheat that has become flour. One of Jesus' parables in Matthew pictures God as a woman making bread. "The kingdom of God is like



yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (13.33). Bakers knead bread dough over and over, shape it into loaves or rolls, and bake it—each step a transformation.

Grapes, too, are first crushed and then fermented in the process of making wine. Wine, like bread, is the end product of many transformations. The bread and wine Jesus makes signs of his total self-giving call us into the continuing process of becoming the sign we celebrate.

- **When have you been planted, ground, reshaped, baked, crushed, fermented?**
- **How does your participation in Eucharist continue to transform you?**

FIRST READING

Israel swears in blood to keep God's covenant.

Moses and the people of Israel use the life blood of animals to ratify their covenant between God and themselves. Sunday's first reading describes this rite. Moses splashes half the blood from bulls killed for sacrifice on the altar. Then he reads the book of the covenant, which contains the ten commandments. When the people agree to keep this covenant agreement, he splashes the other half of the blood on them.

What does this sign mean? The blood symbolizes life and expresses the common life that flows between God and the people because of the covenant. At the same time, the blood rite is a way of swearing an oath—may our blood be spilled if we don't keep this agreement. The

Israelites agree to this covenant with their lives. At the last supper Jesus makes his own life blood the sign of a new covenant between God and humankind.

Israel ratifies their covenant with God.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do."

And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord.

Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient."

Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Exodus 24:3-8

● What likeness do you see between the Israelites swearing an oath with blood and Jesus' action of making his blood the sign of the new covenant?

PRAY

Take time to decide a way you want to pour out your life this week. Make a commitment to an action step.

LEADER: How shall we make a return to God for all the good God has done for us?

EACH: I lift up the cup of salvation and call upon God's name.

Each states his or her commitment for the week, sips, and passes the glass.

ALL: We will keep our promises in the presence of God's holy people, the Body of Christ. Amen.

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DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

● Participate in growing the food you eat to the fullest extent you can. Learn the origin of the foods you buy. Talk with the people at your table at one or more meals this week about how food you eat affects you and how to balance the fullness of your cupboard with the emptiness of others' food supplies. Identify all the people who helped bring your meal to the table when you pray at meals.

Summer Sundays

Online access makes *Sunday by Sunday* an easy companion on summer vacation. Covid-19 introduced many people to online prayer with family members, neighbors, and church members. To invite new members into online groups, call Lacy at 800-232-5533 or visit goodgroundpress.com.