

The Eucharist: Mission, Love and Death

A series of Talks from the OLC Annual Conference 2010

Fr. Nicholas King SJ

Talk One

Eucharist and Mission (Luke and Paul)

Luke's Gospel connects Eucharist with the Kingdom of God. In Luke 14:18 he speaks of the Passover Meal. He calls his companions 'Apostles'. Jesus wanted the apostles to participate in the Passover Meal with him. Luke puts the betrayal after the distribution of bread and wine. Luke introduces the blessing of wine before the bread, making sure that it is the Passover meal.

In Luke 22:19-20 he shows the connection between the Passover Meal and the institution of the Eucharist. Luke 22:24-27 when the disciples were challenging and arguing, Jesus himself joined them. In Luke 22:31-34 predicting Simon's lapse of faith, when Jesus spoke to Simon Peter, the name 'Simon' is repeated twice. This is a characteristic of Luke's Gospel.

Liturgy Leading to the Mission (Luke 24:12-35)

Fr. Nicholas King's commentary on the Journey to Emmaus was very interesting. This story is only reported in Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:13-35). The speaker made two points on the Journey to Emmaus. First was the journey which is the entire Christian life. It begins like the Gospel, in Jerusalem and ends like the Gospel again in Jerusalem but a lot has gone in between. The journey started slow and became faster when Jesus travelled with them. It came to a pleasant halt at the end of the day and the ending was similar to what took place in Jerusalem earlier on.

Second point is the Eucharistic service. The Eucharist begins with the Penitential Rite. When the two disciples were challenging and arguing about the death of Jesus and the empty tomb, Jesus himself joined them. Very reluctantly the two disciples started to speak to Jesus about their problem. This represents the Penitential Rite.

Then Fr Nicholas explains the next part, the Liturgy of the Word how Jesus took them through the Scripture readings and tying together in a homily. The two disciples' invitation to Jesus to their home is the Prayer of Intercession. When Jesus stopped to have a meal with Cleopas and his companion, Jesus took a loaf, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them. That was like the Communion Service. It is similar to what took place at the Institution of the Eucharist before the death of Jesus. Then Jesus disappeared. It was only then Cleopas and his companion recognized Jesus. Finally there is the Dismissal like during Mass they are told to 'go in peace' and that is what happened to Cleopas and his companion. They were equipped for their journey with the Liturgy, to preach the 'Good News'.

Luke's 2nd volume is the Acts of the Apostles

Promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 8)

Jesus Counsels the Apostles to go out and preach. "John baptised with water, but you, not many days from now, will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Acts frequently echoes the volume 1 of Gospel of Luke. Jesus prepares the Church for its mission with 40 days of appearances. Jesus also speaks of the promise of the Father, referring to the Holy Spirit.

Eucharist and Mission (Acts 2:46-47, Acts 11:3)

Acts 2: In the breaking of the bread, all the signs come from the apostles. The link between the Eucharist and the mission is the Lord's work.

Acts 10: Everything God created is good. The Apostles come to know that the Gentiles heard the Word of Jesus. There was tension between those who were eating together.

Acts 20:7-12: Paul gave lengthy homilies. Once when he was giving one of the homilies a young boy had a fall. When Paul knew he was still alive, he broke bread and ate it and carried on talking. In Luke too you find a similar homily on the Eucharist where there is a crisis.

Talk Two

Eucharist and Death (Mark)

Mark reminds us that Jesus is the Messiah. Death is hidden in Marks Gospel.

Jesus can clear unclean spirits

Disciples worry about drowning and Jesus effortlessly calms down.

Jesus deals with terminally ill people.

Three predictions of the passion and death of Jesus:

1. "Son of man was destined to suffer grievously to be rejected by the elders, and the chief priests and the scribes and to be put to death and rise again after three days." (Mk 8:31-32).
2. "Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men. They will put him to death. Three days after he has been put to death, he will rise again. (Mark 9:31)
3. "Son of man is about to be handed over to the chief priest and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the pagans, who will mock, and spit at him, scourge him and put him to death. After three days he will rise again." (Mark 10:33-34)

Mark does not talk much about the Eucharist, but he talks about the death of Jesus.

Jesus and Meals

Jesus had some undesirable friends. He had meals with tax collectors and sinners. This raises disappointing questions from the scribes. The answer Jesus gave to these questions was, "I did not come to call the just but sinners".

When Jesus brought back to life, the synagogue ruler's daughter, he said, "Give her something to eat." (Mark 5:43)

Jesus blessed the loaves and fish and said, "Give them to eat" (Mark 6:37)

When Jesus was at dinner at Simon, the leper's house, a woman came to anoint him. Some were annoyed about the wastage of myrrh. Jesus had compassion on her great deed. (Mark 14: 3-8)

Last Supper and Death

When evening came he arrived with the twelve, and while they were at table eating, Jesus said, "I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me, one of you eating with me." (Mark 14:17-18)

The speaker concluded the second talk by saying, "Before the cock crows three times, the disciples were sleeping, when Jesus needed them most. The disciples abandoned Jesus. The Eucharist is overshadowed by the death of the Lord."

Talk Three

Eucharist and Love (John's Gospel)

The speaker refers to John's Gospel as a 'Magic Pool' where elephants swim and children paddle. The question is, "How can I survive without Jesus?" Before the Last Supper Jesus knowing that he was to be betrayed, he loved them to the end and instituted the Eucharist. In John 13:1-14 the speaker talks about the events at the time as an acted parable of the Eucharist where it shows how we have to behave towards each other.

Washing of the feet of the Apostles took place before the institution of the Eucharist. Jesus gives a new understanding of the Eucharist. After washing the feet of the Apostles, which becomes part of the service, Jesus told them, "I am the Lord and Teacher". He expected them also to wash each others' feet, taking him as a model. Therefore Eucharist is a demanding 'love'.

Jesus has a special love for his father. It is the same love he has for the disciples. Love holds everything together. This new commandment of love goes with human frailty. The following quotations in John's Gospel show the love of Jesus: 13:1, 13:23, 13:24-35, 13:37-38 and 17:26. Even at the darkest moments of your life, you can survive with love says the speaker.

Paraclete as source of love (John 14:15-21, 14:25-31)

We do not have to rely on ourselves, but on the powerful help of the Holy Spirit. The whole of John's Gospel is when Jesus asks, "What are you looking for? Jesus takes all the fears away. Dealing with the presence of Jesus is shown with love. Jesus says, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me, do not keep my Word" (John 14:22-24).

Love as the presence of Jesus is shown in John 5:9-17, John 16:25-28 and John 17:2-23. That is what the Eucharist is about. Jesus shows his disciples who he is, and that is how he shows his love and commands his disciples to love each other, says the speaker. He finished the talk by giving a brief explanation of John 16:25-38, what the lord does in the Eucharist is bringing us together in love.