



**June 10, 2012**

## **Ordinary Time—Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ**

*"Then he (Moses) took the blood and sprinkled it on the people saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you...'—Exodus 24:8*

Dear Friends;

Once when I was very young (many years ago) I had a good friend. One evening we took an oath and became 'blood-brothers' each of us made a small cut and spilled a little blood. I have no doubt that many years later either one of us would do anything for the other out of friendship. This taking a blood oath was a graphic way of symbolizing our friendship and the brotherly connection that we felt.

Our ancient ancestors in faith, the Jewish people, were earthy, nomadic herdsman of sheep and goats. Their understanding of life, biology and death were physical, visceral and graphic. For the ancient Israelite the human person consisted of some very real material parts: the body, blood and breath or spirit. Blood was seen as the life force of God and also was what inter-related us as families and tribes. Spirit/breath was the wind/air that God breathed to animate us. When these things were together you were alive when they were separated you were dead.

The challenge that Moses faced as he leads a disparate group of unrelated tribes is to bring them together as one and make them a nation. This would prove to be difficult to a primitive people who only related to blood-kin. Those not of the same blood were enemies. Even as their history plays out we see that the ten northern tribes would separate themselves from the two southern tribes.

The God who is revealed through Moses invites these, unrelated tribesman, to join together as one with this God. They who had been oppressed have been liberated. God is forming a new and holy people. Moses inaugurates this people through a sacrifice. The blood (the divine life force) he sprinkles on the altar (which symbolizes God) and then on all the people. Through this action the people are of one-blood, joined together. Now the same life force of God courses through all of them.

Jesus in his ministry worked to restore the "House of Israel." The tribes which had divided and scattered he sought to gather in as one again. He would say in the Gospels that he has come to seek out and find the lost. The many fellowship meals that we see him eating are prophetic signs of the restored people of God. They are moments of healing and reconciliation. Those who break bread together, that is, share a meal, are truly companions. And every meal becomes an opportunity to celebrate the reign of God. Jesus was a unification movement. Eventually, the disciples will extend this fellowship to non-Jews who come to believe.

Each year Jews would celebrate the Passover meal which recalled the people's liberation and their formation as the people of God. Special unleavened bread was blessed, and four cups of wine were drunk. Wine in some cultures is referred to as the blood of the grape. It recalled the blood that was placed on the doorposts so the angel of death might passover the house of Israel. It symbolizes the blood of the Covenant that God formed with his people.

On the night before he dies Jesus has a meal with his closest followers. We do not know for sure if it was the Passover or not, but it certainly had Passover implications. In the meal he identifies with the symbols of the bread and wine. He is the bread of liberation that nourishes us for our journey to freedom. His is the blood, the life-force that is sprinkled on us, unites us to one another and joins us to God. He breathes out his Spirit that we might have life forever in God.

The Eucharist is celebrated with both the bread and the wine. During the liturgy at the Breaking-of-Bread the priest places a fragment of the Eucharistic bread in the Eucharistic cup. This action symbolizes the resurrection—to be alive in the Jewish sense one had to have body, blood and breath. The breath comes from the words proclaimed. The complete Eucharistic symbol is to eat AND drink. Under the graphic symbols of eating and drinking we become the very blood brothers and sisters of Jesus. It is important to take part in both.

One should refrain from drinking only for serious reasons—alcoholism, you are sick, serious psychological phobia. For your information before the common cup was introduced by the bishops they had the practice studied. And they received an OK by the American Medical Association who stated that the common communion cup has not been shown to be a source point for disease.

If you cannot receive from the cup we do invite you to stop and reverence the cup in solidarity with those who are able to receive. Just as those who sometimes refrain from eating of the Eucharistic bread come forward to be blessed we invite you to be blessed by reverencing the cup.

Peace,

*Fr Ron,*

Your blood-brother in Christ