

# HEARERS OF THE WORD

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116 (115); Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

## I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God

Mark 14:12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14 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?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25 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."

Mark 14:26 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Lord's Supper, as an event in the life of the historical Jesus, is both a proclamation of the Kingdom of God and an interpretation of the death of Jesus. In all probability, it was not Passover, but undoubtedly the context is

the feast is significant.

### KIND OF WRITING

These connected scenes are two *chreiai*, that is, anecdotes about a particular figure. Both are *action chreiai*, with the first leading to the preparation for Passover and the second, combined with a *prophetic gesture*, interprets the death of Jesus.

Prophetic gestures are common in the Old and New Testaments. By an unusual action, usually with accompanying words, the protagonist illustrates a message so as to shock and attract attention. In the case of Jesus, the action with the bread and the wine builds on the Passover symbolism and at the same times is the climax of the open table-fellowship, by which Jesus made the preaching of the kingdom concrete and tangible.

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbour in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and

### Thought for the day

Hospitality is deeply embedded in human nature and to say someone is hospitable is a welcome compliment. It is no accident that Jesus made use of table fellowship to give people a concrete experience of the indiscriminate love and universal compassion of God. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we experience again that proclamation of the Kingdom. We join our prayer with the prayer of Jesus and the great events of salvation are made present in our time and place. Welcomed as we have been, it is our calling then to show the same love and compassion in our daily lives.

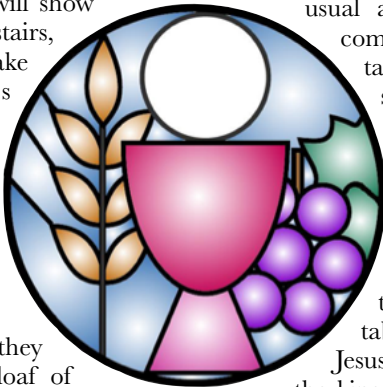
### Prayer

God of welcome and compassion: we thank you the Holy Eucharist, in which we know again your love and compassion. Help us to become what we have received. Amen.

put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exodus 12:1-13)

### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

There are four versions of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. Take a



MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	PAUL
<p>Matt 26:26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, <b>eat</b>; <i>this is my body.</i>”</p>	<p>Mark 14:22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; <i>this is my body.</i>”</p>	<p>Luke 22:19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he <u>had given thanks</u>, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “<i>This is my body, <b>which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.</b></i>”</p>	<p>1 Cor 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, 24 and when he <u>had given thanks</u>, he broke it and said, “<i>This is my body <b>that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.</b></i>”</p>
<p>27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “<b>Drink from it, all of you;</b> 28 <i>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many <b>for the forgiveness of sins.</b></i>”</p>	<p>23 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24 He said to them, “<i>This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.</i>”</p>	<p>20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “<u>This cup</u> that is poured out for you <u>is the new covenant in my blood.</u>”</p>	<p>25 In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “<u>This cup is the new covenant in my blood. <b>Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.</b></u>”</p>

moment to look at the chart overleaf. Matthew and Mark resemble each other; Luke and Paul also resemble each other. All versions are influenced by the evolving liturgical traditions of different places. It is possible that the earliest form we can get back to would have looked something like this:

*He took bread, and giving thanks [or: pronouncing a blessing], broke [it] and said: “this is my body”.*

*Likewise also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the covenant in my blood.”*

Notice that the current Roman Missal shows a further combining of texts.

**ST PAUL**

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

**BRIEF COMMENTARY**

**Verse 12** It is likely that the chronology in John is correct, which places the death of Jesus on the afternoon / evening of Passover. But, even if the last supper was not a Passover meal historically, the context was certainly present and the connections are clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and indeed in Paul.

**Verse 13** This suggests a sense of caution, by means of a pre-arranged signal. Men did not carry water jars.

**Verse 14** Notice the strong tone of authority. In any case, it is within the week of Passover.

**Verse 15** This completes the reply to the disciples’ request.

**Verse 16** This is a very succinct fulfilment, suggesting God’s plan is unfolding.

**Verse 22** The action with the bread is interpreted by the words. Looking forward *historically*, this gesture interprets the death and provides those present with a path of understanding. The message is that Jesus’ death will be their source of life and nourishment.

**Verse 23** The important action here is the distribution and drinking. The giving points to Jesus’ death as a gift. The drinking points to sharing the life received by those who take part in it.

**Verse 24** The connection with the covenant is made clear. There is also an echo of the Suffering Servant poems in Isaiah 40-55.

**Verse 25** This makes the vital link between Jesus’ proclamation and the outcome of his life. In our Western tradition, the death is really cut off from the life—a sudden payment of a price for redemption. But in the New Testament, the death of Jesus is of one piece with his ministry. The ministry not only leads to the death (historically) but the death brings about the kingdom (theologically). The language is apocalyptic and looks to the future fulfilment.

**Verse 26** The link with Mount of Olives makes it clear that we have been dealing all along with the meaning of Jesus’ death.

**POINTERS FOR PRAYER**

1. The symbolic gesture of Jesus at the Last Supper symbolised the offering of himself that he would make on Calvary, giving his life for others. Sometimes we also are called to give our lives for others. We can do this grudgingly or with a generous heart. What difference has it made for you when you were able to give yourself freely?

2. In his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is essentially fragmented.” What has helped you to be aware of the importance of the link between the Eucharist and your lifestyle?

3. Jesus involved his disciples both in the preparation for the Last Supper and in its celebration. Recall times when you had a heightened awareness of participation and involvement in the Mass. What helped to give you this awareness? Are there lessons from these experiences that you can bring with you to the Sunday Mass?

**PRAYER**

God ever faithful, you have made a covenant with your people in the gift of your Son, who offered his body for us and poured out his blood for all.

As we celebrate this Eucharistic sacrifice, build up your Church by deepening within us the life of your covenant and by opening our hearts to those in need.

## For this reason, Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant

Heb 9:11 But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

Heb 9:15 For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Although appropriate to the feast, this reading does need careful handling. It is almost impossible for people brought up on the *Anselmian* doctrine of redemption not to read the medieval theology back into a first century text. The Letter to the Hebrews comes from a completely different context and reflects a radically different set of concerns.

The Letter teaches that Jesus is a priest (unexpectedly, because he was of course a layman) but not because of spilling of blood and suffering but on account of prayer, faithfulness and communion. The biblical roots of this radically different priesthood lay not in Levi but in Melchizedek. The teaching of Hebrews is consistent with the ministry of Jesus who was himself an insistent critic of the Temple “system.” In this way, Jesus’ ministry and death broke down for ever the ancient distinction of sacred and profane.

### KIND OF WRITING

Hebrews is perhaps the most culturally sophisticated document in the NT. It moves between doctrinal sections and exhortations. In a way, it is a sermon which itself contains several sermons (and not unlike Deuteronomy, also a sermon with sermons within). Our passages comes from the central section on

the priesthood of Jesus, 7:1-10:39. The writer sets a complex pattern of fulfilment, abolition and perfect realisation. His use of Middle Platonism—cf. the ideal transcendent world of the greater, more perfect tent—places him in the same category as Philo of Alexandria, another culturally adept Jew of the period.

### ORIGIN OF THE READING

Hebrews is cited by Clement of Rome, so the Letter is not later than 95/96 AD. Timothy (13:23) seems to be still in ministry, in the second generation Pauline churches, yielding a date some time after 60 AD at the earliest. The destruction of the Temple in 70 AD obliged a radical re-think, giving birth to Rabbinic Judaism as a religion of the book. Given the tremendous focus on Temple and priesthood in Hebrews, it is possible that the Letter was also a deeply considered response to the catastrophic ending of Temple sacrifice.

The author is unknown. All we can say that s/he was a master of Greek language and rhetoric, was highly educated (Middle Platonism), and consistently used the Septuagint (the Greek OT or LXX).

The title “To the Hebrews” is both secondary and misleading. The Letter was addressed to a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians, experiencing some kind of harassment. In all probability, it was written to Roman Christians by a Roman Christian teacher, writing from abroad.

### RELATED PASSAGES

And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” (Hebrews 2:13)

Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’ (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).” Then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. (Hebrews 10:7, 9)

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. (Hebrews 13:12–13)

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 11** The good things are perhaps access to God and cleansing of conscience (vv. 8-9). The Temple in Jerusalem was a sign of the more perfect sanctuary in God’s presence. This transcendent place of meeting is not of human construction or creation. Jesus took worship beyond appearances and into the real presence of God.

**Verse 12** Both continuity and difference place a role here. Unlike the earthly priesthood with its repeated sacrifices, Jesus entered into the true Holy of Holies on high and brought about final and full redemption. Redemption here means being set free. The earthly priests made use of animal blood; in contrast, Jesus comes with his own blood, that is, his very self. This inner disposition of Jesus is repeatedly underlined in Hebrews: Heb 2:13; 10:7, 9 (see above).

**Verses 13-14** Technically, this is an *a fortiori* argument (along the lines “if so... how much more”). The reason for mentioning the heifer is perhaps the slaughtering *outside the camp*, just as Jesus was put to death outside the city. See Heb 13:12-13 above. Jesus thus fulfils and does away with the OT priesthood.

**Verse 15** The writer returns to the significant theme of the new covenant, with a background Jeremiah and a foreground the Last Supper. How can the death of Jesus set us free from sin? He makes for us the journey to God through his fidelity and obedience and his communion with us shows us God’s love and forgiveness reaching into the heart of human brokenness. Thus, in him, we have moved from the first covenant prohibitions and transgressions to the new covenant in Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What is your understanding of “the great events that give us new life in Christ”? Does Hebrews speak to me?
2. In Jesus, we come into the very presence of God himself. How “Jesus-centred” is my life of faith and prayer?

### PRAYER

God of the covenants, you hold out to us an example of faithfulness and communion in Jesus and in him you offer us our inheritance as your children. Help us receive with joy these gifts of grace and to live our new covenant with the his own fidelity of heart and life.

# All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient

Ex. 24:3 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." 4 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. 5 He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the Lord. 6 Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. 7 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." 8 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."

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In a time when many biblical expressions have lost their natural resonance, it may be that even so basic a word as covenant not longer really means much. It would be interesting to replace it, at least mentally, with the word treaty in the reading above (cf. "the cup of the new and everlasting treaty"). At the very least, it implies "signing up" for something and that sense of commitment might be a good place to start. The significance of this kind of the religious symbolism / language continues in the New Testament, e.g. He 9:18-22.

## KIND OF WRITING

Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) treaties show the following features:

- Identification of the Covenant Giver
- The Historical Prologue
- The Stipulations
- The Provision for Deposit and Periodic Public Reading
- The List of Witnesses to the Treaty
- The Blessings and Curses
- The Ratification Ceremony

Exodus 20 contains the first three elements above (a, b and c) and Ex 24:3-8, is a ratification ceremony (g).

## ORIGIN OF THE READING

1:1-15:21 The story of oppression in Egypt and the exodus.

15: 22-18:27 Israel's journey through the desert to Mount Sinai

19: 1-24: 11 The covenant on Mount Sinai

24: 12-31: 18 The Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle

32: 1-34: 35 Golden Calf incident; covenant renewed

35: 1-40: 38 The Tabernacle is built; God's glory descends upon it

Exodus is not history we would understand it. It is rather a theological reading of the past with a firm eye to contemporary religious practices at the time of writing. There are problems of historical corroboration with the following "facts": the presence of Israel in Egypt; the lack of any specific information about particular pharaohs; the lack of evidence for the exodus itself and indeed for the entry into the land. At the same time, the book shows signs of sources within it. For example, it looks as if all the material about the Tabernacle in Ex 25-31 and 35-40 has been added to a fundamentally Deuteronomistic account (D). This added material reflects the priestly interested precisely in the Tabernacle and is evidence that the final editing was done at priestly hands (P).

The last event recorded is the release in King Jehoiachin in 561 BC) in 2 Kgs 25: 27- 30. Thus a post-exilic context seems not unreasonable. For our particular text, it seems clear that vv. 3-8 reflect a tradition independent of vv. 1-2 and 9-11.

## RELATED PASSAGES

Cf. Gen 15:17-21 and Exod 2:6-9.

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 3** The references seem to be to the Decalogue ("words", Exodus 20) and to the laws ("ordinances"; Exodus 21). Earlier in the narrative, the people had made a similar commitment (Ex 19:8; 20:16).

**Verse 4** Writing it all down again marks the seriousness of the undertaking. The symbolism is clear: the altar = God; the twelve pillars = all Israel.

**Verse 5** Sacrifices establish the relationship with the transcendent God. Young men have to be used because there was as yet, in the biblical narrative, no priesthood. Peace offerings were communion sacrifices because the people ate the meat.

**Verse 6** The blood, symbol of life, is sacred. In kosher law, blood is highly polluting because of its immediate link with life, God and the sacred. The division may reflect covenant curses. Cf. Jer 34:18-20).

**Verse 7** The repetition here is awkward and may point to some even earlier version behind parts of the narrative. The repetition of commitment forms a kind of frame.

**Verse 8** Moses speaks the performative words, which seal the covenant. The blood dashed, perhaps on the symbolic pillars in purification and atonement, binds the people to their oath and covenant with YHWH. Some communion of life between Israel and God is intended. Even if the precise meaning of the gesture is not explained, the sealing of the covenant is sufficiently clear.

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

**1.** A useful experiential way into a passage which could seem very remote might be to reflect on your own experience of commitment (e.g. the marriage covenant, or indeed any life-long commitment). What helped me to make the commitment? What kept me faithful? Similar questions could be asked on the basis of baptism (our entry into the new covenant).

**2.** The mass, too, is a kind of covenant renewal ceremony, as it apparent in the words over the cup. When did I myself come to realise that mass "binds" me to Gospel living? How has that touched my life?

**3.** The words of the people—all that the Lord has spoke we will do and we will be obedient—imply a deep listening to the word of the Lord before undertaking living it out in obedience. What is my own experience of such listening? What about my experience of the scriptures as the word of God?

## PRAYER

God of all grace, we commit ourselves to the new covenant you have established with us in Jesus Christ and we ask your continued help in living out our baptismal promises.

# THE LITURGY

Exodus 24:3-8; Psalm 116 (115); Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

## READINGS 1 AND 3

The reading is chosen for today, Corpus Christi, to bring out some of the Old Testament language and thought which lie behind the expression “blood of the covenant” found in the Gospel reading and, of course, in the words of consecration over the cup.

## THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 116 (115 in the liturgical numbering) fits extremely well not only because it takes up the theme of “vows” to the Lord, but also because the cup points forward to cup in the Gospel. The appointed response is very helpful.

## SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### First reading

*Exodus 24:3-8*

At every Mass we here the words “the blood of the new and eternal covenant” and we may wonder what such words might mean. Part of the background is in today’s first reading, when the people of Israel commit themselves to the covenant and the commandments using basins (!) of blood. The link between liturgy and life, worship and discipleship could not be clearer.

### Second reading

*Hebrews 9:11-15*

Our reading comes from the long and carefully argued Letter to the Hebrews. It teaches that Jesus’ death was not simply a better version of the old priesthood but that he replaced it with an altogether different kind of priesthood. The “quantum” shift is that Jesus can help us precisely *because he is like us and not because he is different from us*.

### Gospel

*Mark 14:12-16, 22-26*

As we listen, notice the important line about not drinking the cup until he drinks it “new in the Kingdom of God.”

This makes the vital link between the proclamation of Jesus and his destiny. Ultimately, his destiny was also part of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

## WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

### Monday 3 June

*St Kevin, abbot*

*2 Peter 2:1-7*

Each of us is in this reading today. Firstly, we are there *as receivers of great gifts* from God. Secondly, *as people called upon to live up* to these great gifts.

*Mark 12:1-12*

It is important not to leave this parable safely in the past. Have *I* heard the teaching of the prophets? Am *I* open to the coming of God’s Son today?

### Tuesday 4 June

*Sts Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs*

*2 Peter 3:11-15, 17-18*

Our attitude to time says a lot about us. The reading today asks us to see each day as a gift and an opportunity.

*Mark 12:13-17*

It is easy to recognise what “belongs to Caesar”? What about what “belongs to God”? What is God asking of me, personally, right now?

### Wednesday 5 June

*St Boniface, bishop and martyr*

*2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12*

There are sentiments in this reading that make it sound like it was written for us today: am I sometimes ashamed of the Gospel myself? Do I need to fan into a flame the calling I have received?

*Mark 12:18-27*

Some Sadducees present Jesus with a fairly absurd argument. Notice, however the force of the present tense in Jesus’ response: *I am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. *He is God, not of the dead, but of the living*.

### Thursday 6 June

*St Norbert, bishop or St Jarlath, bishop*

*2 Timothy 2:8-15*

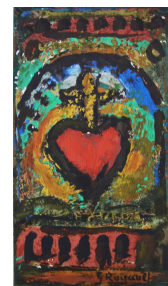
At the centre of our reading today, the writer quotes some poetic lines from an early Christian hymn. The affirmations are powerful and, at the same time, unsettling.

*Mark 12:28-34*

It is really good to ask ourselves from time to time what is at the very heart of our faith, what is at the centre. Jesus’ response still speaks to us today.

### Friday 7 June

*The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*



*Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9*

We tend to think of the God of the OT as remote and violent. This delightful reading from Hosea should put us right.

*Ephesians 3:8-12, 14-19*

You can feel the writer’s sense that the love of God in Jesus is thrilling, even overwhelming at times.

*John 19:31-37*

The symbolism should be clear: the blood stands for Jesus’ costly gift of himself; the water stands for the gift of life which is ours as a consequence.

### Saturday 8 June

*The Immaculate Heart of Mary*

*2 Timothy 4:1-8*

The reading from 2 Timothy — written in the name of Paul but not by him — expresses the feeling of loss after the death of the great apostle, something we can call empathise with. At the same time, it reflects the later time of “institutionalisation” in language foreign to Paul. The faith is now a sort of deposit to be kept...quite different to Paul’s own world of understanding.

*Luke 2:41-51*

This short vignette — unique to Luke’s Gospel — serves a double purpose. The child Jesus foreshadows his future ministry and role. At the same time, the portrait of Mary shows us how to respond to the wonderful things God has done for us.