

Body and Blood of Christ, Year C

Genesis 14:18-20

Today's selection gives us an historical event that prefigured the person and work of Jesus the Christ.⁴ This incident occurs as Abraham (here still called Abram) is returning victorious from battle. Five Canaanite kings had rebelled against the rule of four kings further east. At first the war went badly for the rebels. Abram's nephew Lot had been taken captive by the victorious kings, so Abram and his retainers went after them, winning a great victory. On his return, Abram is greeted by Melchizedek, king of Salem (an early name for Jerusalem). This king also functions as a priest; bringing bread and wine, he blesses the God of Abram.²

18In those days, Melchizedek, The name means, "king of righteousness." (Heb. 7:2) **king of Salem,** The title means "king of peace." (Heb. 7:2) This is the first man in scripture to be called a priest. He is identified in a number of both Jewish and Christian sources as Shem, the first-born son of Noah. Hence, the blessing by Noah of Shem-Melchizedek in Gen. 9:26 is understood as the patriarchal priestly blessing, which is then passed on by Shem-Melchizedek to Abraham in this passage. (The only story of blessing between Genesis 9 when Shem received it and the birth of Isaac in Genesis 21 is found here in Genesis 14.) So, the first-born son of Noah is the chief priest and patriarch over his house, that is, over all of his extended family, which through ten generations includes Abraham as well. Abraham, after receiving the blessing from Shem-Melchizedek, is designated to become the new chief priest and patriarch over all his descendants.⁵ **brought out bread and wine,** The bread and wine are first-fruits of the land offered in sacrifice as a sign of recognition of the Creator.³ From the early centuries of Christianity, Melchizedek's bread and wine have been linked with the Eucharist, and for centuries the ordination of priests has been linked to Melchizedek. There are two main points of linkage to this feast. Like Melchizedek, we use bread and wine and like him, we also bless the God of Abraham in every Eucharist.² **and being a priest** Melchizedek was both priest and king.² **of God Most High, he blessed Abram with these words:**

19"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; This shows us that the true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, was worshipped in Jerusalem under the name of "God Most High." By blessing Abram, Melchizedek blessed all his descendants. Note too, that the one who blesses is above the one who is blessed.⁵

20and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand." This encounter takes place as Abraham is returning from the slaughter of the kings who had taken his kinsmen captive. **Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.** By this action, Abraham acknowledges the Lord who is "the Creator of heaven and earth" and he implies that Melchizedek had a right to receive it. In the name of "God Most High" Abraham received Melchizedek's blessing, thereby making Jerusalem the place from where the Lord imparts his blessing.³ This story also preserved the memory of the first encounter of the ancestor of the Israelites with God at the place referred to in Psalm 76:2-3 as the place where God had his abode.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

St. Paul wrote this around the year 57, only twenty-seven years after the institution of the Eucharist. There are only three other New Testament accounts of the institution of the Eucharist and this is the earliest one. This text contains the fundamental elements of our faith in the mystery of the Eucharist: 1) the institution of this sacrament by Jesus Christ and his REAL PRESENCE in it, 2) the institution of the priesthood and 3) the Eucharist is the SACRIFICE of the New Testament.⁶

Brothers and sisters:

23I received from the Lord This is a technical expression that means “I received through that Tradition which goes back to the Lord himself.”⁶ Paul learned of the Last Supper through the Church’s liturgical tradition stretching back to Jesus and the first apostles. His account agrees in substance with the narratives of the Gospels. Paul is confident that divine revelation is safely passed on through the tradition of the Church.⁷ **what I also handed on to you,** Paul had started the church in Corinth in about 51 A.D.⁶ **that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over,** This refers to the betrayal by Judas Iscariot.⁷ This was the night of the Last Supper, where Jesus gathered with his apostles to transform the Old Covenant Passover into the SACRIFICIAL BANQUET of the New Covenant. As Passover recalls Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, so the Eucharist both commemorates and accomplishes our redemption from slavery in sin. Jesus reconfigures this ancient feast by placing himself at the center of its significance: he is the true Lamb offered for sin and given as food to God’s family.⁹ **took bread,**

24and after he had given thanks, broke it The early Christians closely associated the Eucharist with this gesture, calling it the “breaking of the bread.”⁹ **and said, “This is my body** Once Jesus consecrates the unleavened bread, it is no longer a symbol of the Old Covenant Passover but the substance of the New Covenant Passover: Christ himself.⁹ Jesus identifies the unleavened bread and the cup with his body and blood. Through his spoken words his body and blood replace the entire substance of the bread and wine, although his presence remains undetected by the senses.¹⁰ **that is for you.** The addition of this phrase emphasizes the timelessness of the celebration. We recall the original Last Supper and Jesus’ death as we celebrate in the present and wait for his coming in glory. All three stages of time are brought together in this action.¹¹ **Do this in remembrance of me.”** In instituting the Eucharist, our Lord charged that it be re-enacted until the end of time. The apostles and their successors are to imitate Jesus’ actions. Note that only “the twelve” were present with him at the Last Supper. According to the consistent teaching of the Church and defined at the Council of Trent in 1562, Jesus’ words “Do this in memory of me” are linked with the apostles’ ordination to the New Covenant priesthood.⁹

25In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant The expression “new covenant” is used in the Gospels only at the Last Supper.⁹ **in my blood.** As the Old Covenant between Yahweh and Israel was sealed through sacrificial blood on Mt. Sinai, the New Covenant between Christ and the Church is sealed through his own blood poured out in the upper room.¹³ **Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”** The word “remembrance” is charged with the meaning of a Hebrew word, which was used to convey the essence of the commemoration of the exodus from Egypt. For the Israelites the Passover rite not only reminded them of a bygone event; they were conscious of making that event PRESENT, reviving it, in order to participate in it in some way, generation after generation. So when our Lord commands his Apostles to “do this in remembrance of me”, it is not a matter of merely recalling his supper, but of renewing his own PASSOVER SACRIFICE of Calvary.⁶

26For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. The command of Jesus to repeat his actions and words “until he comes” does not only ask us to remember Jesus and what he did. It is directed at the LITURGICAL CELEBRATION, by the apostles and their successors, of the memorial of Christ, of his life, of his death, of his Resurrection, and of his intercession in the presence of the Father.¹² (CCC 1341) From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord’s command. Of the Church of Jerusalem it is written: “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*”¹² (CCC 1342) The Eucharist is the proclamation of the Lord’s redemptive death that the Church makes un-

til his coming, when there will no longer be need of his sacramental presence.⁸ The liturgy awaits its fulfillment at the coming of Christ in glory.⁷

Please note that when one receives Holy Communion, one is entering into communion with Jesus Christ, who is truly present in the Eucharist, and one is also in communion with the Church and is identifying himself as being in union with the one, holy, apostolic Catholic Church and with the Holy Father. The CCC says that no one may take part in the Eucharist unless he BELIEVES what the Church teaches is true, has received baptism and lives in keeping with what Christ taught.¹² (CCC 1355)

Luke 9:11b-17

Besides the Resurrection, today's story of the multiplication of the loaves is the only miracle told in all four Gospels. It recalls previous miracles from the OT like the manna that fed Israel in the desert and the story of Elisha who multiplied 20 barley loaves to feed 100 men with some left over.¹⁰ The event anticipates the Holy Eucharist. Jesus performed this miracle shortly before promising that sacrament (John 6:1) and the Fathers have always so interpreted it.¹⁵ It also connects with a larger theme in Luke where Jesus describes God's kingdom as a great feast. This messianic banquet is celebrated first at the Last Supper and later in heaven.⁹ The apostles had just returned from being sent out on mission and Jesus withdrew with them for a time of rest, but when the people came, eager to hear him speak, he changed his plans. Bl. Escriva points out that "Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance."¹⁵

11 Jesus spoke to the crowds about the kingdom of God, and he healed those who needed to be cured. Mark says that "he taught much" (6:34) and Matthew writes that "he healed their sick" (14:14) but only Luke has the combination of preaching and healing before the people are fed.

12 As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions; for we are in a deserted place here."

13 He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves." They replied, "Five loaves and two fish are all we have, St. John, Patriarch of Alexandria wrote that the five loaves signify alms given to the poor. As here, the size of the donation is less significant than the generosity of one's heart. Gifts given to the poor are, in return, multiplied by God back to the giver as treasure in heaven.¹⁰ unless we ourselves go and buy food for all these people."

14 Now the men there numbered about five thousand. This is in addition to the women and children!

16 Then he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty."

15 They did so and made them all sit down.

16 Then taking the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing over them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. In each of the multiplication scenes (Mark and Mt each record two such events plus the one in John), in the words of institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and at the Emmaus supper, the same words, in the same sequence, occur; "took...looked up...blessed...broke...gave."⁸ Jesus feeds the crowd through the hands of the apostles. Their intermediary role points forward to their priesthood. They distribute the bread provided by Jesus in anticipation of the Eucharistic liturgy where the priests of the New Covenant give the Bread of Life as Holy Communion to the Church.¹⁰ Consider Holy Viaticum (which is the last sacrament of the earthly journey¹² (CCC 1517)) for the soul about to die as being similar to this feeding of the people who are weary and Jesus will not let them start out for their homes without sustenance.¹⁶

17 They all ate and were satisfied. And when the leftover fragments The Greek word that is translated as "fragments" here, is used in the Didache, a first-century document, to refer to the broken par-

ticles of the Eucharist.² **were picked up, they filled twelve wicker baskets.** Christ wanted the leftovers to be collected to teach us not to waste things God gives us, and also to have them as a tangible proof of the miracle.¹⁵ The generous scale of this miracle is an expression of the liberal generosity of the messianic times. The Fathers recall that Moses distributed the manna for each to eat as much as he needed but some left part of it for the next day and it bred worms. Elijah gave the widow just enough to meet her needs. Jesus, on the other hand, gives generously and abundantly.¹⁵

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Catholic for a Reason: The Priest as Spiritual Father" by Fr. Pablo Gadenz, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (4) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rossier, (5) "St. Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (6) "The Navarre Bible: Corinthians," (7) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 1 Corinthians" by Mary Ann Getty, (12) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (13) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) "The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew," (15) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark," and (16) "The Sunday Epistles And Gospels" by Monsignor Patrick Boylan.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.