

Liturgy of the Eucharist – Pati Freitas, May 1, 2005

Listen to these familiar words: The night before Jesus was to sacrifice his life for us, he gathered his disciples and together they celebrated the Jewish Passover Meal. At the end of the meal Jesus picked up some of the unleavened bread, gave thanks to His Father in heaven, held the bread up and said, "Take and eat, for this is my Body." He passed the bread to his disciples. Next He took a cup of wine and said, "Take and drink, for this is my Blood." And finally He said, "Do this in memory of me."

Do what? What was Jesus really asking of His disciples? Of us? Just that if we were to keep His memory alive after his death, we should gather and have a meal together in memory of his sacrifice for us. The core of Eucharist has always remained the same: a meal and a sacrifice in which Jesus is both the victim for the sacrifice AND the food for our meal. Eucharist has always been just what Jesus asked us to do "in memory of me."

So, the Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a meal. Let's look at each of these.

First, sacrifice: We recall how Jesus died for us so that we might unite ourselves with his sacrifice. To do that means to surrender our wills to the Father's just as he did. For Jesus, that meant death on a cross. For most of us, surrender does not mean hanging from a wooden cross but embracing the everyday crosses that life brings us. In this daily process of self-sacrifice in surrender to the Father, we become one with Christ.

Second, the Eucharist is a meal: Think about this for a moment – what happens at a meal? Usually it is one time when everyone prays together, remembering and thanking God for all His blessings. A meal includes serving each other; another reminder of Jesus and what He did and asked His followers to continue. At a meal, we are also recognized as individuals. We are accepted for who we are.

And then there is the basic fact that at a meal we gain "new life." We feed our body and gain new strength and energy. But at a meal, the life and energy are not all physical. We strengthen bonds of friendship and love too. During a meal we can experience real union with others. Not just sharing food and drink, but sharing ideas, interests, adventures, and even failures. The good times and the bad.

Can we begin to see why Jesus would tell us to do this in memory of him? Let me sum up what I've said about sacrifice and meal.

Sharing Jesus' own Body and Blood, we are recalling, re-experiencing, the sacrifice Jesus offered to his Father by dying on the cross. When we join with him in sacrifice, we surrender with him to the Father. Jesus himself, under the signs of bread and wine at this meal, is with us as our food, our source of new life, as the basis for uniting us more closely to each other in love and care, and strengthening us to carry on His word in our world.

In the Eucharist we are joined to, we are made one with, the one totally acceptable sacrifice of Jesus to the Father.