

JESUS AND THE NEW COVENANT

UNIT TWO: JESUS FULFILS HIS MISSION

Lessons 3

A Historic Meal...A Gift of Life

CONTENT:

1. The 'Last Supper' of Jesus is a high point in the history of salvation, indeed in the history of humankind. It is the moment when Christ's desire to give us life became tangible, real.
2. The Bible has many references to this event, which bring out its significance and meaning. Some of them are:
 - The king-priest Melchizedek bringing bread and wine as an offering.
 - The Passover meal at the time of the Exodus from Egypt.
 - The 'manna' provided in the desert.
 - The feeding of the crowds by Jesus.
 - Jesus' declarations (in John6) that he is the Bread of Life.
 - Jesus breaking bread at Emmaus.
3. The signs of bread, wine, lamb, blood are repeated in the passages. We see that God, in his love, gives life to his people: not just physical life, but spiritual life, eternal life.
4. 'Eucharist' means 'thanksgiving'. As we reflect on the Biblical events above and Jesus' actions at the Last Supper, we are filled with gratitude. At every celebration of the Eucharist, we thank the Father for the life-giving gift of Jesus to the world.



REFERENCES: Luke 22:7-20; John 13:3-5,12-14. Genesis 14:18-20 Exodus 12:1-14; 16:31-35; Matthew 14:15-20; John 6:51-58; Luke 24:28-31. CCC 610-611; 1333-1335; 1337-1339.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Good News Bibles; handouts.

ASSIGNMENT: Students ask family or other Catholics: "Do you believe that the bread and wine at Mass really becomes Jesus? Why?" They note down the answers to share at the next class.

I. STARTER:

- [Check if the students have noted down the names of the 12 apostles:] Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew (or Nathaniel), Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus (or Judas, son of James), Simon, Judas Iscariot.

- Have you heard of the 'Make a Wish Foundation'? It is an organization that tries to grant the wishes of children who are dying. It has taken a lot of trouble to grant the wishes of thousands of dying children. Here's one story:

Diagnosed with HIV, a 7-year old girl from Florida, Jonalya wished to be a firefighter so she could save lives. She started her wish-experience by riding from her home to the nearby Hollywood Fire Station. The flashing lights and blaring sirens let everyone know this was no ordinary firefighting recruit. When she arrived, her new colleagues dressed her up in her new firefighting gear including a pink fire helmet.

Greeted by cheers from the entire company, Jonalya toured the firehouse with a huge smile on her face. Suddenly the station alarm sounded. Crews rushed to their engines. Jonalya was already on her first call, which took her to a burning, smoke-filled "house." Conquering her fears, she helped the crew rescue a stuffed dog from inside.

There was little rest for the new recruit before she was off again, this time climbing more than 100 feet into the air on the engine's ladder and later dousing another blaze. The fire battalion then hosted a lunch for Jonalya to celebrate her life-saving exploits. During her ride home, she told her family that her work was done: She'd saved a life.

- Today we come to the story of Jesus as he approaches his death. He also had a wish, something he wanted to do very much before he died. Let us read about the very last meal he had before he died. This meal (called the Last Supper) could be considered the most important meal in human history, because it has had a huge effect on us, human beings. 2000 years later we are still benefitting from it. As you read, be ready to answer: What was Jesus' great wish before he died?

II. DEVELOPMENT:

[Give out handouts. Read the account of the Last Supper [1] together. Ask:]

- Jesus said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you." What did this mean? What do you think was Jesus' great wish? *[Like Jonalya, he wanted to save life: not just one person's life, but the lives of all human beings. This was clear by the words he spoke later. We also see him washing the disciples' feet. He wanted to show his love in a practical way and teach us how to love each other.]*
[Students write the answer to [1] in their own words.]

- If we look through the Bible we see that God had prepared for this moment right from the beginning. There are hints of this meal in many places. We will now read some of these stories. Try and get the connection between the Last Supper and these stories. Also fill in the blanks, and using the letters in the blocks, find the meaning of the word 'Eucharist'.

[Students do exercise [2] in groups depending on the number of Good News Bibles available. After about 20 minutes, bring out the following using the students' answers:]

1. A mysterious king-priest named MELCHIZEDEK brought BREAD and WINE to Abraham.
2. The BLOOD of the lamb saved the Israelites from death. They ate bread without YEAST. This feast was known as the PASSOVER.
3. God fed the people with MANNA which kept them alive on their journey. They preserved some of it and kept it in front of the COVENANT box.
4. Jesus fed the hungry crowds after THANKING God and BREAKING the BREAD.
5. Jesus said, "I am the LIVING BREAD that came down from HEAVEN. If anyone eats this bread, he will LIVE for EVER. The bread that I will give is my FLESH."
6. The two disciples recognized Jesus when he BROKE the BREAD.

EUCCHARIST means: THANKSGIVING

- Can you see any connection between the stories you read and the Last Supper? *[Bring out:]*

 1. Jesus is like Melchizedek. He offered bread and wine also, but when he offered it, it had a much deeper meaning. Today the priest, standing for Christ, makes the same offering.
 2. Jesus chose the Passover meal to be his last meaningful meal. Instead of the Passover lamb, whose blood saved the people of that house from death, Jesus became the lamb for us. Here too, we see the symbol of unleavened bread (bread without yeast).
 3. As the Israelites journeyed through the desert, God provided 'bread from heaven' to keep them alive. Now Jesus has become our bread from heaven. Today we keep our 'bread from heaven' in the tabernacle, which could be called the new 'Covenant Box'.
 4. When the crowds became hungry, Jesus miraculously provided them with food. He did the same actions of thanking God and breaking the bread before he distributed it.
 5. Soon after the miracle of the bread, Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life!" He promised eternal life to those who ate his body and drank his blood. Of course, he was not inviting people to become cannibals, (people who eat human flesh), but was talking about the Eucharist.
 6. The last story took place after Jesus rose from the dead. Again we have the actions of 'breaking the bread'. The early Church called the Mass the 'Breaking of the Bread'.

III. REFLECTION & PRAYER:

Think about all we have been reading and talking about: How God planned ages ago to give us Jesus... how Jesus himself had the great wish to be our bread, to save us from spiritual death. Do you feel it is good to thank God for this very special meal? In your own words write down why 'Thanksgiving' is a good word to describe it: What do we have to thank God for? *[Students reflect and then write in [3]]*

ASSIGNMENT: Ask your family members or other Catholics: "Do you believe that the bread and wine at Mass really becomes Jesus? Why?" Note down the answers.