

Our Sunday Readings

for Holy Thursday:
 EXODUS 12:1-8,11-14
 PSALM 116:12-13,15-18
 I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26
 for the Easter Vigil:
 MARK 16:1-7*
 *This study guide includes v.8.

Proclaim the Death

I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

Reading closely

1. How do you imagine Paul receiving instruction about the eucharist?
2. What do you think *remembrance* means?
3. What were the Christians to remember?
4. How often were they to remember this?
5. What is *the new covenant*?

Living the word

6. Why do you go to Mass?
7. What do you proclaim by participating in the Eucharist?
8. What is the purpose of celebrating the Eucharist?

I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

Early eucharists

At this time there weren't church buildings. Instead, Christians gathered in people's homes to celebrate the Eucharist, usually in the homes of wealthy people because their houses could hold large groups. The Eucharist was often celebrated during or right after the evening meal because it was adapted from the prayers and ritual actions of Jewish meals, most notably the meal commemorating Passover.

Sacrilegious celebrations

Verses 23-26 are part of a larger passage in which Paul expresses outrage at the way the Christians at Corinth broke bread together.

Wealthy members of the community, who didn't have to work much, if at all, were gathering earlier to have dinner among themselves. By the time others arrived, tired and hungry, the feasting was well underway. The wealthy might also have eaten better food or even excluded the poor from the dinner part of the gathering.

The meaning of the meal

By forming a clique and indulging themselves, the wealthy Corinthians contradicted the meaning of the Eucharist. They weren't imitating Christ, who cared about the needs of others, especially the poor. Paul reminds everyone that participation in the Eucharist is a participation in the death of Christ, which is the ultimate act of self-giving.

Paul thus emphasizes the inseparable link between participating in the Eucharistic celebration and imitating the Lord Jesus in whose name this meal is celebrated.

MARK 16:1-8

Entering the word

1. Imagine that you are going to Jesus' tomb.
 - a. When do you go?
 - b. What all are you feeling and thinking about?
 - c. Do you speak with those who are with you?
 - d. Is the walk long? Is the path easy or rough?
 - e. What are you carrying?
 - f. Describe the tomb and its surroundings.
 - g. How do you react to the open tomb?
 - h. How do you react to the presence of the *young man*?
 - i. Do you understand what you're told?
 - j. Why do you run away?
 - k. Where do you go?
 - l. How do your thoughts and feelings change in the days and weeks to come?

Living the word

2. How has God surprised or even shocked you?
3. What about the gospel frightens you?

MARK 16:1-8

Disbelief about the empty tomb

Opponents of early Christianity, who had as much difficulty believing that a person could be raised from the dead as people do today, claimed...

- Jesus didn't really die, (which begs the question of where his body went)
- it was the wrong tomb
- the disciples hid the body

Mark makes it clear that the women knew where Jesus' body was (15:47). As for the notion that the disciples hid the body, it's unlikely that they would endure persecution and death for something they knew wasn't true.

Interpreting the empty tomb

The empty tomb isn't by itself a clear statement that Jesus was raised. The young man, an angelic, otherworldly figure, must explain what's happened.

The women are *amazed*, as in *stunned* or *baffled*. They saw Jesus die on the cross (15:40). They probably believed that God would raise him at the general resurrection of the just, but they hadn't expected him to rise before then.

An unexpected resurrection

Some Jews believed that God would one day raise the just to eternal life, but only when God exercised final judgment over the earth. By raising Jesus before then, God worked a miracle that went beyond anything anyone had expected.

The shocking ending (v.8)

The last verse of Mark's original Gospel, verse 8, is abrupt and unsettling. It was cut from our Easter reading. Mark's ending, however, is a bold challenge.

Mark begins his Gospel somewhat strangely: "the beginning of the gospel..." (1:1). Well, obviously it's the beginning. What Mark means is God's saving activity is about to enter a new era in Jesus. Once Jesus has been raised, this good news must be handed on by people brave enough to proclaim it.

In order to proclaim that God has brought about salvation in Jesus, a person must believe that new and eternal life comes from giving of oneself even into death. This is hard to believe. Despite Jesus' efforts to prepare his disciples for his Passion and death, they fled when he was arrested.

The *trembling and bewildered* women are like the male disciples, except they flee when they learn that Jesus has been raised. Mark's ending reminds us just how extraordinary these events were. These events also make extraordinary demands of those who believe in them.

PRAYER

adapted from Ubi Caritas

O Living God,
 You are love itself.
 The love you offer us in Christ, your Son,
 gathers us into one.
 May we rejoice and be glad in him.
 May we love and reverence you
 and love others from the depths of our heart.
 May Christ be in our midst, putting an end
 to our bitterness, quarrels, and strife.
 May we see the face of Christ in glory
 and know pure and unbounded joy forever. Amen.