

Fifteenth Week of Ordinary Time
July 14, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #29

*“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, **Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, **This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.** For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. **Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. **For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.**” (First Corinthians 11:23-29 KJV)*

I concluded our reflection of last weekend by stating IF the disciples had misunderstood the words of Jesus, as recorded by Saint John (John 6:60-68), would this not have been addressed by a later apostolic writer? I questioned if Saint Paul, the first Apostle (Apostle to the Gentiles) to write in an official capacity, would offer any statement thereby clarifying this misconception. Saint Paul does offer a few verses in his First Letter to the Corinthians which shed light upon how the first Christians were taught to understand the words of Jesus.

We will begin with a history lesson. Jesus would have died around 33 AD. Saint Paul would have written his First Letter to the Corinthians around 53-54 AD. Roughly speaking, Saint Paul is writing 20 years after the death of Jesus. This is extremely important for us to know. Saint Paul lifts the veil for us to view how these very first converts to Christianity would have been catechized concerning the Body and Blood of Jesus (the Eucharist). Were they taught, as we have been, that the Eucharist IS the Body and Blood of Jesus? I believe the answer is a definite YES and, thank you Saint Paul, this YES entails another lesson concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession. Let us read his words in First Corinthians 11:23-29 (cited above) and remember, we are using the King James Version of the Bible.

My dear family, we begin by acknowledging one important fact, and yes, it is a fact. Saint Paul is handing down what he received. He is not introducing to the Corinthians a new understanding. He is stating what would be later called, the Sacred Deposit of the Faith (our Tradition) received from God through His Word, Jesus Christ. The belief he states is what is believed by all Christians at this time. And, this belief is of the utmost importance for it IS the memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus. Again, please remember, Saint Paul's repeating of the words of Jesus are the first written expression of the words of Consecration (as explained in our Mass, today). This letter predates the Gospel of Saint Mark, the assumed first Gospel to have been written, by approximately 5-10 years.

Saint Paul begins with two points which are worth noting. First, he says this is a new testament or covenant, depending upon translation. We are asked, by Saint Paul, to remember how covenants were sealed in the Old Testament. They were done so by the shedding of blood

through a sacrifice. In essence, an animal was killed, its blood shed, to remind those making this covenant of its grave nature. Second, if you notice, Saint Paul states that the Body and Blood of Jesus were offered separately. Why is this point important? Because the Body and Blood of Jesus were separated upon the cross when the sacrifice was completed. It shows the finality or totality of the sacrifice. Finally, you may have also noticed how Saint Paul clearly states this sacrifice, when offered, reminds us of everything Jesus revealed concerning the Triune God in all His words and actions. And why is this important? Because there was no Bible. Saint Paul is in the act of writing his First Letter to the Corinthians. The Eucharistic Sacrifice (the Mass we celebrate) is established before the New Testament is written. It is, historically, first in the order of revelation.

I mentioned earlier it also teaches us a lesson concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession and how it applies to the Eucharist. Saint Paul states: “*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*” (1 Corinthians 11:27). My family, do we understand what Saint Paul is teaching with this statement? Whomever receives the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of the Lord) unworthily (through selfishness, sacrilegious disrespect, or unrepented/unconfessed sin) IS guilty of damnation by their action of eating and drinking. Remember, to be guilty of another’s death, in the Old Testament, is a condemnation of death for that individual. One is required, from our first beginnings as the Christian Faith, to examine oneself and to not approach the sacrifice if one judges himself/herself unworthy to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. Therefore, Saint Paul is making an implicit statement for a form of confession/forgiveness necessary for those who are unworthy to receive. Next weekend, we will look into the Acts of the Apostles to see IF Saint Paul’s understanding is shared by the first Christians, as told by Saint Luke.