

Eucharist: participating in the mystery (a series based on Fr Frank Anderson's book)

“The Eucharist is a human attempt to describe God”

When we struggle with issues like suffering & compassion; freedom and servitude; self giving and community it is the divine within in us that is involved.

God emerges in human history through us as Eucharist: human lives create God's presence on earth - we make God visible - the process is never completed but it is our greatest calling.

Eucharist commemorates Jesus's total involvement in this vision.

Where We Start - The Tradition Jesus Inherited

Jesus inherited the Jewish insights: using his sense of his people's continuity through history and the stories of his people.

Religious ritual focuses shared memories in ways which preserves the wisdom learned from the community's past - for the Jews and for Jesus the greatest festival was Passover.

A local example is how Australia attempts to find meaning for today in the sacrifice of the ANZAC story - the rituals speak to those who knew no-one directly involved.

Exodus and Passover

“Memory is one of humanity's supreme endowments. Each of us acts today and hopes for tomorrow in the light of past experiences that have been woven into a life-story. When we want to know someone else, we ask that person to tell us something of the story of his or her life, for in this way personal identity is disclosed. To be self is to have a personal history... In a larger sense this is true of human communities... Judaism is the religion of a people who have a unique memory that reaches back through the centuries to the stirring events of their Bible, events that formed them with a sense of identity and vocation.” [Anderson, B.W. “The Living World of the Old Testament.”]

A Passover People

The history of the Jews has been one of enslavement and holocaust - Egypt/Babylon/Rome/Diaspora/Banishment/Pogroms/Auschwitz

Exodus / Passover is the crucial event through which their history and destiny is understood.

Numerous retellings of the event - looking back.

The song of Miriam ?oldest in the bible

“Sing of Yahweh: he has covered himself in glory,
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” Exodus 15:21

“My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down into Egypt to find refuge there, few in numbers; but there he became a nation, great, mighty, and strong. The Egyptians ill-treated us, they gave us no peace and inflicted harsh slavery upon us. But we called on Yahweh the God of our fathers. Yahweh heard our voice and saw our misery, our toil and our oppression; and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great terror, and with signs and wonders.” Deut 26:5-8

Passover charts as passing over from slavery to freedom

Exodus -

- geographical transition: Egypt to Palestine
- social transition: fragmentation to community
- moral transition: anger to compassion

Possible responses to unjust suffering

- Violence - closed heart responds in anger and perpetuates the cycle of violence and disintegration
- Compassion - the wounded heart is opened and having known suffering has compassion for the sufferings of others

The Covenant Vision

The covenant was the plan for a new nation where, having experienced alienation and suffering in Egypt and having met God in the desert, a people design a lifestyle where justice and mercy will rule and all will be protected from the alienation of slavery they had lived through.

In their tragedy they had met God: God offers them a covenant - the people listened to their experience of oppression and committed themselves to a better way.

This way is expressed in the Ten Commandments to which the people respond - the commandments are a plan for a community to live within God's justice - a commitment to compassion, patience, love and an affirmation of the dignity of all.

The people pass over from what they were to what they could be - the process is never complete - the rituals keep the vision before their eyes.

The Covenant Liturgy

Liturgy expresses truth and mystery through symbols where words fail us.

Exodus 24: 4-8

Moses ... built an altar at the foot of the mountain, with twelve standing stones for the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he directed certain young Israelites to offer holocausts and to immolate bullocks to Yahweh as communion sacrifices. Half of the blood Moses took up and put into basins, the other half he cast on the altar. And taking the Book of the Covenant he read to the listening people, and they said, "We will observe all that Yahweh has decreed; we will obey." Then Moses took the blood and cast it towards the people. "This," he said, "is the blood of the covenant that Yahweh has made with you, containing all these rules."

Altar - where we met God

12 standing stones - 12 tribes - the people gathered

Blood - blood is life and death

Blood sprinkled on the altar - God's blood - God's life

The program is presented - The Covenant - The Word - a challenge to the people

The people accept "We Obey"

The people are sprinkled with the blood - God's life becomes their life when they agree to embrace the covenant as a community - the blood of the covenant is a shared event

Drinking from the Chalice

Implications for Eucharist

“This is the cup of my blood, the new and everlasting covenant”
Clearly arising from Passover and Exodus.

We gather

We hear the word and we assent as a community “We Obey”

The life of God is given to us in God’s blood

By sharing the blood of Christ we are taken into the story of Jesus

We pass over into God when agree to live by his word as a community

Drinking the blood of Christ seals that commitment just as the Hebrews sealed their commitment to the Covenant in the desert.

Holy communion is communion with God and with each other.