

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, S.T.L., S.S.L., D.Phil.

June 6, 2012

Gifts of Eucharist offer many blessings

Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND International License.



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/fatherlawrence_frizzellphil/9/

Gifts of Eucharist offer many blessings

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Sunday Readings for June 10, 2012 for Cycle B:

Ex 24:3-8; Ps 116; Heb 9:11-15; Mk 14:12-26

GIFTS OF EUCHARIST OFFER MANY BLESSINGS

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The celebration of Holy Week involves so many aspects of our faith that we cannot absorb their manifold dimensions. Holy Thursday is not a holiday of obligation, so perhaps some of the faithful do not have the opportunity to express gratitude for Christ's self-giving in the Eucharist. Although every Sunday provides such an occasion, in 1264 the Church instituted a special feast to solemnize our appreciation for Christ's Eucharistic gift. In every age, the Bishops and their associates "should constantly exert themselves to have the faithful know and live the Paschal Mystery more deeply through the Eucharist and thus become a firmly knit body in the solidarity of Christ's love" (Vatican II, *Decree on Bishops* #15).

For centuries theologians and philosophers have discussed and debated the wonderful doctrine of Catholic faith that Christ is truly present under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine. These efforts to understand and to answer objections to this teaching are very important. However, only by focusing on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' Death-and-Resurrection can we begin to realize the full implications of the surprising gift that Jesus offered at the Last Supper.

St. Mark emphasized that this was the feast of Passover, when lambs were sacrificed in the Temple and unleavened bread was eaten at all meals. As was the custom, home-owners in Jerusalem offered hospitality to pilgrims from afar. The lamb, bread and bitter herbs reminded the participants of the hardships that an enslaved Israel had endured in Egypt. When Jesus took the bread and said the blessing (an act of thanks-and- praise), the disciples expected the Master to offer pieces of the one loaf to them. The words should have been an Aramaic formula: "This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." What a surprise were Jesus' words: "This is my body!" Yet after the resurrection, they came to grasp that Jesus had accomplished a new Passover, liberating people from slavery, not merely to oppressive men but to sin and Satan. They knew that each generation experienced the redemptive power of God through these symbols of bread and the lamb. They realized that Jesus had come, not only to bring gifts, but to offer himself as sacrifice and gift to humankind; the full implications of his words struck home as they recalled his command: "Do this in memory of me!" The Hebrews had learned long before that the memorial *re-presented* the inner reality of God's gifts which had been experienced in a given moment of history. For the faithful, the work of Jesus could be no less fruitful, its power transcending the limits of time and space. Indeed, he is Emmanuel, "God with us."

The abundant wine in the Passover Meal symbolized the fullness of joy in Kingdom of God to which Jesus alluded. The "fruit of the vine" was also known as "the blood of grapes" (Gn 49:11). Jesus again surprised his disciples: "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of the many." The Passover was linked intimately with the Covenant at Mount Sinai, so the disciples would have recalled the sacrifice of Moses to seal the bond between God and Israel. Now his people was a nation with the promise of a land of its own. In that Land the Israelites would be

free to serve God alone. So after the people promise to obey, Moses sprinkled blood on them: "This is the blood of the Covenant" (Ex 24:8). Among other points, Jesus intended his death to be a sign of his witness to the obedience that all creatures owe to their Creator. But an act of reconciliation for sin was required to render people worthy of this vocation. The death of Jesus took place for the deliverance from transgressions committed under the first Covenant (Heb 9:15), and at all other times. The work of Jesus was accomplished on behalf of all humanity, and this unique offering was made once-and-for-all. As eternal high priest, he continues to offer this worship, to which we have the privilege of uniting our own praise. Then, as we receive Christ we grow as his Body and as the living Temple of God, united with each other in the solidarity of his love.