



## Breaking Open the Word in the Summertime

### Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ June 14, 2009

*Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the Gospel passages and the reflections aloud, pausing between them. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your summertime commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.*

### The Call to Prayer

**Leader:** My friends let us pause as we prepare to hear the word of God proclaimed in the Gospel. **[Lead all in the Sign of the Cross]** + In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### The Word of God

*Readings for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ:* Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

### Gospel Acclamation (John 6:51)

**Leader:** Alleluia, alleluia

**Leader:** I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord; whoever eats this bread will live forever.

**All:** Alleluia, alleluia

**Read Mark 14:12-16, 22-26**

### Reflection

#### *The Staff and Stuff of Life*

The Gospel reading today deals with two of the major necessities and symbols of life: bread and blood. To appreciate the meaning of blood in the Bible we need to realize that the people of the ancient world had a way of seeing the obvious: blood carries the stuff of life. They noticed that when an animal loses blood the life goes out of it. It made sense to reverence blood as the carrier and, therefore the primal symbol of life. Thus

offering animal blood in sacrificial ritual could clearly symbolize the acknowledgement that all life is from God. Everything that twenty first century hematology has to say about the function of blood in the human body as both the carrier of nutrients and components of our complex immune system only enhance our sense of blood as the stuff of life.

From this natural and scientific understanding of blood comes the symbolism and power of Moses' gesture in this Sunday's first reading. When the assembly of the people hears the words of the covenant and agrees to keep it, Moses takes large bowls filled with the blood of young bulls, pours half of it on the altar representing the invisible God and sprinkles the other half on the people. The meaning of the blood sprinkling would have been obvious to all; they are now God's kin. Both God and they have the same blood type sharing life together.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus consciously builds on this tradition at the Last Supper. At the end of his last meal, Jesus takes a cup of wine, gives thanks and passes it around for the disciples to drink from. This gesture is something special, for the usual way of drinking the cup of blessing at the Passover meal was for each person to drink from their own cup. When the disciples have shared the one cup, Jesus says: "*This is my blood of the covenant which will be shed for many.*" In so doing, Jesus associates the blood shed in his approaching death with the Sinai covenant. Instead of the blood of bulls, his own blood will establish the relationship between God and the people of God. Jesus, his disciples and all of us are now kin with God.

Another tradition that Jesus builds on is that of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This Jewish feast observed with bread lacking fermentation like pita bread or matzo reminded the Jews of their first Passover from slavery in Egypt to freedom. This was a time when they had no time to allow their bread to rise for they were to leave in haste. At the last supper Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and shares the unleavened bread as an act of solidarity with both his ancestors and with those at table. Everyone was sharing together the same food. Those at table were bound together with Jesus and one another in the staff of life that they shared. The bread broken symbolized Jesus' body being broken by death on the cross.

Every time we are at Mass we remember what Jesus told us; "take and eat, take and drink." When we eat the broken body of Christ we are reminded that we are all broken people and it is in our brokenness that God and Jesus feed us. This nourishment can make us whole. When we drink from the cup it is the blood of Christ that is flowing into our body warming us and giving us the strength and nourishment we need for the journey called life.

## Questions For Reflection

- ✚ When have you felt nourished by God?
- ✚ How is God part of the staff and stuff of your life? Give an example
- ✚ How has the body and blood of Christ that you receive at Mass strengthened you?

## Closing Prayer

**Leader:** We thank you God for this time spent together experiencing your revelation through the Gospel.

**All:** May we continue to be informed and formed by your word in Sacred Scripture.

**Leader:** Let us go forth to live our faith.

**All:** Thanks be to God.

## Summertime Activities

Bake some homemade bread using your favorite recipe. Watch the dough rise. Smell the aroma of the bread baking. Eat a piece of it while it is still hot, and ask yourself how it is the staff of life?

Pack up some crusty bread and your favorite wine and go on a picnic with a loved one(s). When you are eating and drinking think about the following quote: “I feast on wine and bread and feasts they are.” (Michelangelo Bounarotti 1475-1564, Italian sculptor, painter, architect, and poet).

## Summertime Reading

Stephen J. Binz, *The Feasts of Judaism*. Mystic, Ct.: Twenty Third Publications, 2006. (This is a volume in the Threshold Bible Study series; it explores in a readable fashion the biblical roots of the Eucharist and provides exercises and reflections for an individual or a group.)

Richard N. Fragomeni, *Come To The Feast*. N.Y.: Continuum, 1998.