

## Corpus Christi 2021 Holy Redeemer 11 AM

We have just heard one of the five accounts of the Last Supper in the NT. We can only guess at the sort of emotions that ran through the heart of the Lord Jesus as he celebrated that last Passover. So much was happening that night, so much was going to happen. St John tells us in great detail what he said, (five chapters' worth) but indicates little of what he felt. However, there are words we know that Jesus said which would indicate pretty clearly how he was feeling. Here are some of them, they are in fact the opening lines of today's psalm which we didn't hear:

*I trusted even when I said: "I am sorely afflicted "*

*And when I said in my alarm "no man can be trusted."*

This psalm 115 are part of the prayers which were sung at the Passover. That's where I like to direct our reflection today. Our psalm takes on huge significance if we remember that it was on the lips of Jesus towards the end of the Last Supper, and that knowing all that was to take place he would have prayed it with great fervour.

Very soon after this, when we find Jesus in Gethsemane and we do know what he is feeling, he tells the disciples:

*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." (Mat 26:38 )*

But of course they are no use to him, they fall asleep. *No man can be trusted*. If you are familiar with the Latin it says: *Omnis homo mendax. All men are liars*. (KJV) Remember the apostles had all promised just an hour ago that they would stay with him come what may. When the soldiers come to arrest Jesus they all scarper. They all look like liars. And so in Gethsemane he is left to pray alone, sorely afflicted but trusting.

The psalm asks the question that should guide the life of a Christian:

*How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?*

Or a more traditional translation:

*What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

Behind a great deal of religion lies the question: "How can I keep God off my back?" or: "How can I stop the gods or the spirits making my life a misery?" or: "How can I manipulate divine power and use it for my own ends. So much ritual, so much religion tries to do that. So many of people's hidden thoughts about God concern such things, and of course Christians aren't immune to it either.

But Jesus consistently makes available a God whom you don't need to keep at bay or twist round your finger. He reveals a God whom we can *serve in Holiness and Justice all the days our lives*. A God before whom St Paul says we can be confident and bold. So the right response to

such a God is not “what can I get out of him,” or “what’s the minimum I can do and still remain in his good books?” (When you look at the very lukewarm response of some people in some places on a Sunday, it does seem as if that’s the idea they have)

The right response is “how can I properly express my gratitude to God?” I once knew someone who during her first pregnancy developed a debilitating form of motor neurone disease, lost her baby and was badly disabled for the rest of her life. Her husband left her grumbling that he didn’t want to spend his life shackled to a cripple. And she was one of the happiest, cheerful, joy-giving people I have ever met, truly grateful for everything she had and for every small service you gave her, a real ray of sunshine. And we’ve all known people who are the opposite, people who have everything but still find something to grumble about. Gratitude is one of the keys to happiness. Jesus consistently makes known a God to whom we can be simply, unashamedly grateful. But then how do we adequately thank God?. The psalmist answers:

*13 The cup of salvation I will raise;  
I will call on the Lord's name.*

and then a bit later:

*17 A thanksgiving sacrifice I make;  
I will call on the Lord's name.*

Originally this cup of salvation was probably a ritual libation, but Jesus had just instituted the Eucharist and told the disciples that the cup they were drinking was a new covenant in his blood. You can’t get a more saving cup than that!

But the thing that’s really important for us is the mention of the thanksgiving sacrifice known in Hebrew as the *Todah* sacrifice. Today just means thanks or thanksgiving. If you visit Israel you will find people saying it all the time. *Todah rabah* means “Thank you very much”. A *Todah* sacrifice would be offered by someone whose life had been delivered from great peril, such as disease or the sword. The redeemed person would show his gratitude to God by gathering his closest friends and family for a *Todah* sacrificial meal. The lamb would be sacrificed in the Temple and the bread for the meal would be consecrated the moment the lamb was sacrificed. The bread and meat, along with wine, would constitute the elements of the sacred *todah* meal, which would be accompanied by prayers and songs of thanksgiving, such as Psalm 115. In the Hebrew Psalter, and therefore most English bibles it is the second half of a longer psalm which begins:

*1 I love the Lord for he has heard  
the cry of my appeal;  
2 for he turned his ear to me  
in the day when I called him.  
3 They surrounded me, the snares of death,  
with the anguish of the tomb;  
they caught me, sorrow and distress.  
4 I called on the Lord's name.  
O Lord, my God, deliver me!*

There are lots of *Todah* sacrifices recounted in the OT but perhaps the most important is one performed by David. When he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, that was the occasion of a great national *Todah* a thanksgiving festival. The sacrifices were "peace offerings," and the *Todah* was the most important and common peace offering. David offered bread and wine along with the meat of the sacrifices (1 Chron. 16:3)

At this pivotal point in Israel's story, David not only changes the location of the ark, but he also transforms Israel's liturgy. At the *Todah* celebration that brought the ark into Jerusalem, David gave the Levites a new mandate — *And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel:* (1Ch 16:4 NKJ) One of the most important purposes of a *todah* meal was to commemorate, to remember the saving deeds of the Lord. The Levites were to give thanks and praise to God "continually" (1 Chron. 16:37, 40). This perpetual adoration characterized the Temple liturgy as a *Todah* liturgy — a liturgy of thanksgiving.

Now clearly what Jesus celebrates at the last supper is a Passover meal but it also has all the characteristics of a *Todah* sacrifice. Jesus tells the disciples to *do this in memory of me*. The first function David gave his Levites was to remember, to commemorate. Jesus tells his apostles, whom he makes priests at the last supper to do precisely that. At the time of Jesus the obvious Greek translation for the word *Todah* was *eucharistia*, and this is probably why the early Church, the Catholic Church, very quickly starts calling her central act of worship not 'the breaking of bread' or 'the Lord's supper', but the Eucharist.

The ancient rabbis believed that when the Messiah would come all sacrifices except the *Todah* would cease, but the *Todah* would continue for all eternity. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed and all of the animal sacrifices stopped. The gospels make it quite clear that Jesus replaces the Temple, so the only sacrifice which still remains is the *Todah* - the *eucharistia*, the Final Sacrifice. The rabbis were right, but those who don't accept Jesus as the Messiah of Israel don't know just how right they

were. And if you celebrate Mass in Hebrew the last words are *Todah l'Adonai*, "Thanks be to God."

So to back to the first question the psalm asks:

*How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?*

The answer is I can't. But Christ can and in the Eucharist Jesus gives me the means to do that. The Mass is not our prayer in the first instance. It's the eternal prayer of Christ, praising and thanking the Father and by partaking in it we unite ourselves with him and so are enabled to truly pray as we ought.

Oh, and when you celebrate Mass in the Extraordinary form, the old Latin Mass as some call it, this psalm appears in the most beautiful way. When the priest has consumed the Body of Christ he then says part of this psalm – in Latin of course.

*Quid retribuam Dómino pro ómnibus, quæ retribuit mihi?*

*What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?*

He then picks up the chalice and says the next line:

*Cálicem salutáris accípíam, et nomen Dómini invocábo.*

*The cup of salvation I will raise; I will call on the Lord's name.*

In fact because these prayers are private I say them at that moment at every Mass I celebrate. If you see my lips moving at that point, that's what I'm saying. I cannot think of a more perfect fulfilment of scripture than this. What was already true 1000 years before Christ becomes 1000 times truer, more real, in the Mass.

