

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Maundy Thursday  
April 18, 2019

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When Our Lord Jesus made plans for the Last Supper it was no spur-of-the-moment decision. Jesus did not think, “Well, we have to eat somewhere!” Holy Scripture gives us insight into the Lord’s intention. He said, “With *desire* have I desired to eat this Passover with you.” In that brief phrase Our Lord revealed the long-buried plan in His Sacred Heart to provide us with His Very Self in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

The beloved disciple, John, (who does not name himself in his gospel account) was one of the few eyewitnesses to the whole Passion and death of Christ: from the Last Supper through the heartbreaking trial and crucifixion. Through all these events St John noted how *patient* and *uncomplaining*, how *gentle* and *loving*, Jesus was. The mission of Jesus had not gone wrong. It was going *right!* And in his reflection on these events, John saw a striking comparison to the historic Passover of the ancient Hebrews.

Let’s see how this is so. St John noted the timing of the crucifixion. Our Lord hung upon the Cross at the very hour the innocent lambs were being slain for the ancient Paschal meal. Earlier on Good Friday, in commenting on the final sentencing of Jesus, John noted “it was the preparation of the Passover.” Later, on Calvary itself, when sour wine was lifted to the lips of Jesus, the sponge holding the wine was put upon *hyssop*. Hyssop is one of the herbs eaten at the Passover meal. And then when the soldiers, desiring to hasten the killing before sundown, broke the legs of the two malefactors, they did not break the Lord’s legs, seeing that He was already dead. St John remembered the rule in preparing the Passover lamb. “A bone of him shall not be broken.” In all of this it is clear that the beloved disciple, who was there to see it all, meant to convey to you and me that *Jesus is our Lamb* Whom we receive whole in our Christian Paschal Supper which is the Mass.

And then there is that mysterious moment after the Lord had died, when blood and water flowed from the pierced Heart of Christ. There was a long-standing rabbinic teaching that when Moses struck the rock in the wilderness, *blood flowed first* and then water. This was seen as a sign to the Hebrews of God’s presence with His people in their distress. And at Calvary, a New Covenant is launched, providing

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the cleansing and life-giving properties of the sacraments of Christ's Church to His people. It is God's Presence in His Beloved Son for His people in their distress.

There was only one difference between Our Lord's intention for His Passion and that of His accusers. They wanted to take His life. He wanted to *give* His life to them. They cried out in complaint that His Blood was upon them. He longed to pour It over our hearts and our consciences. They wanted to waste the Precious Blood and invoked It as a curse. Jesus desired His Blood to be our *source of eternal blessings*.

Why do we read so much of St John's Gospel during Holy Week and Easter? John is our eyewitness. The events he describes are crucial for the saving of our souls. And we do not want to miss any of them. Thanks to his gospel record we remember the connection with the ancient Passover. That connection is no coincidence! God was always preparing His people for the perfect sacrifice of His Son. So we let His Sacred Blood be smeared to the door-posts of our senses, our hearts, and our lives, that the angel of death may pass us by. And then through this wilderness with all its temptations may we be nourished and strengthened by the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar and transfused with His very life and love, for our everlasting benefit.