

Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

Cycle B

June 10, 2012

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Today's Contracts and Covenants

We are all familiar with agreements like contracts, treaties, and covenants.

New employees often sign a contract or work agreement with their employer. Athletes sign contracts usually for gazillions of dollars to play baseball or football.

Countries often sign treaties to establish peace or enter into trade agreements. When we buy a home, we sign a contract of sale and maybe also a covenant that stipulates what color of exterior paint we can use.

Old Testament Contracts and Covenants

Our experience with all of this helps us to appreciate covenants in the Scripture.

In the Old Testament, there was a basic pattern to these covenants. Two parties bound themselves to do something, verbally or in writing, and then they sealed the deal.

Today, we seal an agreement or covenant with a handshake or a signature. But in the Old Testament covenants were often sealed with the sacrifice of an animal.

The animal was killed, the blood was drained, and then the animal was cut in two. Both of the contracting parties then walked between the two halves of the animal.

Each of them was agreeing that a similar fate would happen to them if they broke the covenant. Now, all of this is very strange to us, but remember, we are talking 3,000 years ago in a Middle Eastern culture

In the covenant ceremony in today's first reading, the blood that was taken from the animal was then sprinkled. Again, this may seem repulsive to us, but we have to remember the different time and culture.

The rabbi sprinkled half of the blood on the altar, and then sprinkled the other half on the people. The altar symbolized God and the blood symbolized the life of God himself.

So the sprinkling of this on the people symbolized a sharing in God's life. These sacrifices and covenant renewal ceremonies were done at set times every year, and they meant that God would never stop caring for his people and his people were never to turn their backs on God.

The New Covenant

That was the ritual of covenant in the Old Testament and it helps us to appreciate the rich meaning of the Eucharist and the Mass.

To begin with, Jesus on the cross makes himself the sacrifice. So, no longer is an animal to be sacrificed.

Jesus then tells us to repeat this sacrifice of himself under the forms of bread and wine. It is important to see the parallels here.

The ancient Jewish people sprinkled half of the animal's blood on the altar. Now we consecrate the bread and wine into Jesus' body and blood on the altar.

In the ancient Jewish sacrifice of the animal, they then sprinkled the other half of the blood on the people. Now we consume Jesus' body and blood under the forms of bread and wine.

This gives us a sharing in God's own life. And, of course, Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross is permanent, lasting, once-and-for-all-time.

No new sacrifice and no other sacrifice will ever be needed. The relationship with God and life of God that the sacrifice of Jesus gives us is intended to be forever.

This is what Jesus means by the words "*new and eternal covenant.*" Jesus uses these words at the Last Supper and we repeat them in the consecration of the Mass.

This covenant is new because it perfects and fulfills all the covenants of the Old Testament. And it is eternal because Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross is done only once and its effects last forever.

At Mass, we simply repeat this sacramentally, under the forms of bread and wine. And we do this as a way to be drawn more and more fully into the life of God.

Conclusion

Well, maybe as you leave Mass today, I should give each of you a certificate for completing a theology course!

This is a lot of theology. But for me, this is so exciting because it explains what Jesus has done for us, and what we do when we celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist.