



EUCCHARIST AS COVENANT AND MEMORIAL NOVEMBER 23, 2020

In understanding the Eucharist as memorial and covenant, the question we must ask ourselves is: why do we celebrate the Eucharist? This question is simple to answer: “Then [Jesus] took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And

likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.’” (Lk. 22:19-22) Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, in fulfillment of his command, we renew within ourselves the covenant formed by the blood of Christ. This covenant was set by the sacrifice realized in Christ’s death and resurrection, and now we participate in this memorial of the covenant.

What ‘memorial’ and ‘covenant’ are about in a Christian setting is also important to understand. When we speak of “doing” a memorial, it is important to understand our concept of time. As Christians we see time *not* as something cyclical, but rather, as having a true past, present, and future. Time is something created by God and is how we come to realize who we are as human beings. We learn from our past actions, which help us to hope for a future reality, but we realize that we live only in the present. The past and future are intended to give shape to the present, but not control it. We are called to live in the present, but God makes use of the whole of time. We recognize that God works throughout all of human history, to establish and make clear and present his salvific will for humanity. God acts in the past to help us learn from past events and to help us understand his will and plan for us. His past actions give us hope as they reveal his intentions for our future with Him. Both the past and the future create the context in which we are presently called to live. Our lives come to be rooted in God’s saving actions, which give insight to how we are called to act here and now. God’s self-revelation and acts of salvation teach us that our choices matter, and that those choices must be grounded in God’s salvific will. The past also teaches us what happens when we choose to act contrary to his will. But God’s revelation and saving actions also point to what is to come—the redemption of all of creation.

Our future is about establishing the relationship that God had intended to have with us from the beginning—one of complete union and harmony with God. God’s actions are about establishing the conditions that will, and are, making that union and harmony possible. The ultimate purpose of the death and resurrection of Christ is to fulfill the promises of God, and also to prepare us for the consummation of those promises at the end of time. The death and resurrection becomes the fulcrum of all human history, as they are the establishment of the eternal covenant of God. Jesus’ death and resurrection, then, is the prism through which all of human history is seen. It gives the ultimate context to who we are and who we are to become. We must then come to discover the true meaning of the past, present, and future through the saving actions of Christ. We memorialize and experience these saving actions in order to more fully understand them, which, in turn, creates the context of the life that we now live. In the death and resurrection of Christ, past, present, and future merge into one reality which is the basis of Christian life. Christ’s saving actions create the hope for our future—complete union with God, which, in turn, gives direction to the life we are now called to live.

The reality of a memorial is therefore not simply about remembering, but rather, about creating the context for the life we now live. But we must take it one step further in understanding *the* Christian memorial. We do not simply remember what has occurred, but through the power of the Holy Spirit we come to actualize what God has done. As we gather to memorialize Christ’s death and resurrection, we gather to do anamnesis. (Anamnesis is a Greek word, or better yet, a concept, that speaks to how we do a memorial.) We do not simply remember what has happened, but rather, the very process of remembering makes present the reality in order for us to be participants. In other words, we do not simply remember the death and resurrection of Christ, but in remembering what Christ has done we come

to participate in his saving action. In a sense we are brought to the cross and the empty tomb. We become united with Christ in his saving actions and participate in his sacrifice of salvation. This happens for the simple reason that we act in accord with the command of Christ. We enter into the memorial at the command of Christ. This act in which we participate is ultimately initiated by God in cooperation with the action of Christ. We cannot make it happen on our own, but we join in the grace-filled event because God has chosen this as the way to renew and sustain the covenant of the cross.

The Eucharist, which is the meal that Christ has given us, is a memorial that makes present the saving reality of his death and resurrection. As we share in that meal, we do so at his command, and by responding positively to the command, we renew the one and eternal covenant of Christ in our lives. Through the renewal of the covenant, we participate in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that participation gives context to both the meal we share with Christ and the life we are called to live. We prepare for the life to come as we come to die to ourselves and rise to new life in Christ. The covenant, which becomes part of us in our baptism, finds its fullest expression through the perfect worship of God grounded in the cross. We participate in the perfect worship of Christ expressed through his death and resurrection.

The purpose of the covenant then is realized through this action of a memorial. The covenant is not something we created; rather, it was established by God for our good. We need help in living out God's saving plan, and so, in his love and mercy—the heart of the covenant—God has chosen to reach out to us. He created the covenant through the reality of the incarnation (Jesus being fully human and fully divine; two natures in Christ but one person). In and through his ministry, Christ proclaimed the kingdom of God and prepared the way for his saving actions. In the agony of the garden He showed us the way to live out the covenant He was about to create with the Father. Just as He said, "Not my will but your will be done," his words must become our words. Our side of the covenant is to live out the ministry of Christ, in and through the action of the covenant realized. It was established through Christ's free acceptance of the cross. The answer to his dying to self was his rising to new life.

We come to recognize, then, that this covenant is not one of equal partnership. Rather, we are dependent upon God, not only to create the covenant but also to sustain and renew the covenant. He does this first through our baptism and then through our actual participation in the saving actions of Christ, in and through the memorial that is the Eucharist. The purpose of this renewal of covenant is to deepen our conversion to Christ and lead us to live out the truth of the covenant in our lives. Our participation, therefore, becomes a participation in God's plan for our salvation. The reality of this covenant is not *simply* about making us "good" people. It is about rooting our lives in Christ, in order to be saved by his death and resurrection. It is about saving us from ourselves, in order to be strengthened in accepting the victory that Christ, and Christ alone, has won for us. The covenant is not simply about what is to come in the future: it is about living out here and now the salvation that must become the context of our lives.