

Maundy Thursday
Years ABC RCL
Revised

Exodus 12: (5-10), 11-14

Our reading is from the latest writer in the Book of Exodus, the Priestly writer (P), who completely reworked the old Passover tradition in verses 21-27. The old tradition was principally concerned with the sacrifice of the lamb and the sprinkling of its blood on the doorposts as a talisman against the Angel of Death. Four centuries after the old narrative strand JE reduced this tradition to writing, P turned the emphasis toward the meal itself, emphasizing the readiness of the Israelites to leave the land of Egypt (verse 11) as well as the protective nature of the blood. Both agree that there should be a rite of remembrance, but only P gives directions for it.

Psalms 116: 1, 10-17

When a Judahite experienced difficulties, that person would often go up to the temple in Jerusalem to implore the Lord's aid by means of a prayer of entreaty we call a "lament." The laments of the Psalter often contain a promise to bear witness to the Lord's faithfulness and mercy in time of trouble. *Thanksgivings*, such as Psalm 116, constitute the prayers by which such vows were completed. Note the reference in 116:3-4 to the previous lament.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

The words "received" and "handed on" in verse 23 are specific reference to transmission by oral tradition. In the Mishnah, the way to say "Rabbi A learned a tradition from Rabbi B" was to say "Rabbi A received [*sc.* the tradition] from Rabbi B." The Mishnah's *Pirke Avot* begins with the words, "Moses received Torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua." Verses 23-26 are not only the earliest form of the words of institution of the Eucharist in the New Testament, but also comprise something Paul learned by heart as coming from the Lord. Paul offered this formula during a complex argument against esoteric Christians in Corinth who had become so "spiritual" that they had forgotten their poor coreligionists.

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

The previous lectionary offered us the choice of Luke's description of the Last Supper (Luke 22:14-30), but the current one does not. The Gospel for this evening contains the story of Jesus washing the feet of his students, a story that stands where we would expect the story of the institution of the Lord's Supper to stand. Despite the strong Eucharistic allusions in John 6, there is no actual institution of the rite in this Gospel. Westerners who may have feelings about the washing of feet being menial or find themselves squeamish about it do not easily recognize that this act comprises the act of a gracious host. Although the students arranged the meal, Jesus hosts it. Peter, however, objects that Jesus is the guest for whom the meal has been prepared. Surprisingly, Jesus counters this objection with a stern warning that this new relationship between teacher and student, in which the teacher serves the student, must define the new, saving relationship with Jesus (13:8-9)

© Fred L. Horton. All rights reserved.