

**Tim Sullivan** Family Life Director

## Bible full of references to Eucharist and unity of faithful

*This is the fourth and last in a series of articles which explain the basics of Catholic faith by using the Bible. In this final column, we'll study the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and what the Bible has to say about unity.*



A central, distinguishing principle of Christianity is that we believe in a God who loves us so much that He, through His Son, suffers for us. You have to think about that. We believe in a God who, though all-powerful, suffers for those He created.

God not only suffered for us through His Son's crucifixion and death 2000 years ago, but He allows us to participate in a real and very dynamic way in this mystery through the Eucharist. Deeply embedded all through the Bible is the theme of the banquet with God in which God offers Himself to humanity as the ultimate meal. So central is this theme in the Bible that one who does not accept the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist can't truly and fully understand the Bible.

Martin Luther himself said that the sacrament of the altar "is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink, established by Christ Himself." He bases this statement on Holy Scripture.

In Exodus 12, God instructs Moses on the details of the Passover ritual, which is to be celebrated "as a perpetual institution." This isn't a temporary thing. It's to be done forever. The key elements are the sacrificing of the lamb, the eating of the lamb, and the spreading of the lamb's blood on the houses of the Israelites.

In Exodus 16, God sends manna, the bread from heaven, to the Israelites when they are starving in the desert. He instructs Moses on how the manna should be consumed. He also tells the Israelites to keep some of the manna for their

descendants.

Moving into the New Testament, the Last Supper is described in detail in Matthew 26, Luke 22 and Mark 14. Jesus, while celebrating the Passover ritual, gives the Twelve the bread and says, "Take and eat. This is my body." Raising the cup, He says, "Drink from it. This is my blood." Then He instructs them, "Do this in memory of me."

So that's what we do. Jesus didn't tell us to sing some songs, listen to a long sermon and then go home. He didn't tell us to do something with a high entertainment value. He said, "Do this," referring to the consumption of His body and blood.

This instruction cost Jesus many followers. In John 6, Jesus identifies Himself as the living bread, the manna, that came down from heaven, and He states that whoever eats this bread, His very flesh, will live forever. The Jews ask the obvious question: "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

Knowing they are bewildered, Jesus does not back off. He does not say, "The bread and wine are just symbols." On the contrary, His words become even stronger.

"Unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood," Jesus says, "You do not have life within you. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. The one who feeds on me will have life because of me."

Many of the disciples stopped following Jesus after He gave them this teaching. The Twelve remained, however. When Jesus asked them if they also were going to leave, Peter responded by saying, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Today, 2000 years later, many of us are tempted at times to leave. Some go where the music is better. Some go where the preaching is better. Some go where there is more obvious enthusiasm. But if we truly understand the Eucharist and the Bible, there is nowhere else to go. We have the greatest gift on the face of the earth, the real presence of Jesus who offers us His body and blood at every Mass.

A footnote: Does the Bible indicate that the Eucharist was celebrated after Jesus died and rose? Yes. Check out Acts of the Apostles 2:42 and 20:7 and 11.

A few words about unity in Christianity. Jesus was most emphatic about the value of unity. "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd." John 10:14-16.

From John 17:20-21: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me."

St. Paul also emphasized the need for unity. "I urge you brothers that there be no divisions among you for it has been reported to me that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Kephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" The author of the Letter to the Ephesians echoes these words in Chapter 4, referring to "one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Unity is a great quality of the Catholic Church. We can go all over the world and celebrate the Mass, regardless of what language is used. The same faith will be taught. The same gospel will be preached. This is how Jesus intended it.

If you have persevered in reading these last four columns, I hope that you have learned that, as Catholics, we need not have any fear of the Bible. The Bible, properly understood, supports our Catholic beliefs. All of us need to reclaim the Bible as our own, to immerse ourselves in it and let it be a constant guide for our lives.