

# **The God of Loving Relationship: Eucharist and Covenant**

Robert P. Rousseau, SSS

*June*

*God loves us personally with a great benevolent love,  
with an infinite and eternal love. (He) loves us as if you  
were his only daughter, because his love is one and infinite.*

To Mrs. Camille d'Andigne

March 4, 1865

## ***Preface***

As a young curate in Chatte, France, Father Peter Julian Eymard went with his pastor to visit another pastor in a neighboring parish. While the two pastors socialized, Father Eymard climbed to a nearby hill to a stations of the cross and a trio of crosses at the summit. There he had what could only be described as a mystical experience of grace. Though he rarely spoke about it, it's clear that it profoundly changed him and very much affected his writings, and especially the spiritual advice he gave to many for whom he provided spiritual direction.

Recall that at this time, the spiritual culture was greatly influenced by "Jansenist" thought. It put a heavy emphasis on fear of divine judgment and damnation, and a general sense of unworthiness. For Father Eymard, this influence shaped his own sense of Christian perfection, focusing on austere practices and self-abasement. But this experience, what he referred to as "my rock of Saint-Romans," opened up something new - a possibility so well expressed by the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34): a covenantal relationship with a loving and compassionate God.

Gone now was the focus upon himself and his own sense of unworthiness. Gone was a preoccupation with a harsh, judgmental God. For in this profound experience, Father Eymard met a God who loved him personally with a great benevolent love, a love that he came to realize is always present, and especially in the Eucharist.

## ***Introduction to the Theme***

Our theme is Eucharist and covenant. Covenant is not a word we use every day, yet the notion of it is very important in understanding our relationship to the Eucharist. Covenant originates in the Old Testament, where it is a primary paradigm for expressing the relationship that the LORD God has with his people. The prophet Jeremiah adds a new depth to the meaning of the term. For the New Testament writers, covenant explains the new level of relationship and intimacy that is ours with God because of the paschal mystery of Christ that we celebrate in the Eucharist. During our time together we will investigate the various levels of this deeply biblical and spiritually rich idea of covenant.

## *Opening Prayer*

God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for gathering us together for this opportunity to reflect upon your steadfast and infinite love for us, especially as that love is manifested in the Eucharist.

We remember how you initiated and established a covenant with our fathers and mothers long ago and said, “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

Despite our failures to live up to our part of this covenant, you did not abandon us. In time, you sent the prophets to call us back to you and to renew our covenant love.

Our brother, Jeremiah, reminded us that our relationship with you, O God, has been written not only on stone but in our hearts.

In order to bind us to yourself forever, you gave us the gift of your son, Jesus. In Jesus and through the power of your Holy Spirit you established a new covenant that shatters the power of evil and draws all of humanity into one community of love, justice, and peace.

God of mercy and unending love, we dedicate our time together to you. May we experience the power of your covenant love all the days of our lives. We make this prayer in the blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who makes of us a new and everlasting covenant. Amen.

## *Song*

“Companions on the Journey” by Carey Landry, Music Issue of Today’s Missal – Oregon Catholic Press.



## *Teaching*

1. In both the Old and New Testaments, the notion of covenant is used to help us understand the unique nature of God's relationship to us and our relationship to God. In its essence, covenant is about relationship and community.
2. The origin of covenant as a social construct comes from the ancient Near East. The lives of one's family members and one's possessions were extremely vulnerable to conquest and pillage by any number of hostile forces. To assure a certain degree of safety and stability, you would enter into a covenant with a party who would protect and defend you. Usually, this would be the local king. Thus, suzerainty treaties were the sociological mechanism from which the Old Testament writers developed the theological implications of covenant.
3. A covenant, then, helps to define a relationship. There are stipulations to which both parties agree to adhere. The covenant is sealed with a special ritual and or a special sign.
4. What is unique about the covenants that are found in our Judeo-Christian tradition is that God, again and again, is the *initiator* of these covenants. /There is this divine impulse to draw us, God's creation, into communion with him. From the early covenants made with Noah and Abraham to the final covenant made in Christ Jesus, our God is intimately bound up in the lives of his people. Covenant history reveals God's constant presence, fidelity, and desire to save us and set us free. In short, our covenant with God is about a love that will never end.
5. For deepening our appreciation of Eucharist, the most important Old Testament covenant is the one that God made with Moses and the Hebrew people in the Sinai desert. The Passover from Egypt, the manna in the desert, the receiving of God's word (the Ten Commandments), the sprinkling of the people with blood, and the ritual meal that concludes this covenant all form part of the background from which our understanding of Eucharist as a "new" covenant emerges. (At this point, the person giving the teaching could draw out the parallels between the Jewish Passover and the Passover of Christ. The leader may wish to pay particular attention to the Passover lamb, the blood of the lamb, and the blood of the covenant as these elements find their way into the images and metaphors that contextualize the bread and cup words of the institution narratives.)
6. Intimately related to the theme of covenant is the concept of "expiatory (or "atonement") sacrifice." A modern example of this can be found in the life of Maximilian Kolbe. The suffering servant songs of Isaiah are the primary Old Testament reference to this idea of someone who freely gives his life (sheds his blood. blood being a life principle in Jewish anthropology) for the people and for their freedom. (Cf. especially, Isaiah 53) Maximilian

Kolbe was a Catholic priest who was interred at Auschwitz. When a young man, Francis Gajowniczek, who was married and a father of children, was targeted for execution by starvation, Maximilian Kolbe successfully pleaded with the authorities to be executed in his place.

7. With the prophet Jeremiah, the idea of covenant is further enriched. Indeed, Jeremiah uses the phrase “new covenant” (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Whereas the stipulations of the covenant made by God with Moses were written on stone, in the time of the Messiah they will be written in our hearts. This notion that God’s promises and love are to be integrated to the core of our being is a marvelous type of the sacramental communion that is ours in eucharistic celebration and contemplation.
8. With the three key ideas of Passover (Exodus), expiatory sacrifice (Isaiah), and new covenant (Jeremiah) having been elucidated, the next step is to show how Christ is the recapitulation and embodiment of these ideas. 1 Corinthians 5:7 has a little phrase that summarizes it nicely: “Christ our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed.” Jesus’ death and resurrection inaugurates the new covenant. Our communion with Christ and with one another also makes of us a new covenant. We become a sign to our world of God’s mercy, compassion, love, justice, and peace.
9. At this point, the leader may wish to hand out a sheet with the four accounts of the institution of the Eucharist that are found in the New Testament (Mark 14:22-24, Matthew 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Give people a chance to read them over, and then ask the gathering to make connections between these accounts and what was discussed. Endeavor to answer any questions.
10. Let us sum up our learning about Eucharist and covenant - learnings that are steeped in Jewish religious thought and realities.
  - The Lord is the new Moses. Present in the bread and wine he brings about a new Israel as the ultimate mediator of the covenant God has made with his people.
  - Jesus, in giving up his life and shedding his blood, is the true suffering servant, offering up an expiatory sacrifice for our sins.
  - In Jesus’ acceptance of his death we see and experience his unconditional love. It is also a hopeful reminder that he - and we - will eat and drink again in the kingdom of God

### *Closing Prayer*

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

*Opening Song:* “Companions on the Journey” by Carey Landry, Music Issue of Today’s Missal – Oregon Catholic Press.

*First Reading:* Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the LORD. All, from the least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

*Period of Silence*

*Second Reading:* Luke 22:15-18

He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

*Period of Silence*

*Intercessory Prayer*

*Eucharistic Litany*

Jesus, Bread of Life: a eucharistic litany

**Leader:**

Jesus, word of God

Jesus, son of God

Jesus, son of Mary

Jesus, conqueror of death

Jesus, conqueror of sin

Jesus, risen Lord of glory

**All:**

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

Healer of the sick	grant us hope.
Friend of the oppressed	grant us hope.
Teacher of wisdom	grant us hope.
Herald of God's kingdom	grant us hope.
Worker of miracles	grant us hope.
Source of peace	grant us hope.

Lamb of God	grant us love.
Bread of life	grant us love.
Bread from Heaven	grant us love.
Bread of true freedom	grant us love.
Bread of liberation	grant us love.
Bread of reconciliation	grant us love.
Flesh for the life of the world	grant us love.
Wine of compassion	grant us love.
Wine of joy	grant us love.
Wine of forgiveness	grant us love.
True drink of God's spirit	grant us love.
Taste of our future	grant us love.
Taste of eternal life	grant us love.
Pledge of immortality	grant us love.

*(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)*

*Benediction*

*Reposition*

*Closing Prayer*

Jesus, Lord and Savior, nourishment and center of our lives,  
empower us to feast joyfully at the table of your word and sacrament.

Teach us to understand all of human reality in the light  
of your Eucharist.

Living sacrifice of praise, cleanse us in your saving blood.  
Victim that has reconciled all to God, bring us to live in peace with one another.

Bread of life, wine of compassion, transform us into your body.

Inspire us to become true adorers in spirit and in truth. Amen.

*Dismissal with some sign of peace*