

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Exodus 12:1-4,(5-10),11-14

NRSV

God has assailed the Egyptians with nine plagues to convince the Pharaoh to “Let my people go, so that they may worship me [God]” (9:1). The Pharaoh has refused to listen; he has refused to come to the knowledge that “I am the LORD” (7:17). God continues to act in history to the benefit of his chosen people. As is so for the other plagues, the preparation for the last plague is described at length, but the plague itself occupies only a few verses. A lamb or goat is to be kept in safe-keeping (“keep it”, v. 6) until close to the full moon (“the fourteenth day”); then “the whole assembled congregation” will slaughter it: here all take on the role of priests. The priestly role extends further: the animal is to be “roasted” (v. 8, not boiled), and it is to be completely consumed (v. 10b): a perfect (“without blemish”, v. 5) and complete sacrifice. When eating it, the people are to be ready to travel (v. 11) and it shall be eaten “hurriedly” – but also (per another translation) *in trepidation*. In v. 12, God will do to the Egyptians more than what Pharaoh tried to do to the Israelites: “strike down every firstborn”, male and female. The people are to “celebrate it as a festival to the LORD” (v. 14), and also as a pilgrimage. This is the origin of Passover, the commemoration of how God rescued his chosen people. In vv. 29-32, God brings the tenth plague on the Egyptians, killing all their eldest children. The Pharaoh has had enough: he says “Rise up, go away from my people ... Go, worship the LORD ... And bring a blessing on me too!” God has made his point. In vv. 37ff, the Exodus begins.

Psalm 116:1,12-19

NRSV

The psalmist tells the congregation why he loves God: “he has heard my voice”. Because God helped him in his time of “distress and anguish” (v. 3, serious illness), he will “call on him” (v. 2) for the rest of his life. He was near death; he felt life slipping away. (“Sheol”, v. 3, was the place of the dead. People believed that it *ensnared* those gravely ill.) When he called on God for help (v. 4), God “delivered ... [him] from [near] death” (v. 8). (Vv. 5-6 are a lesson for those present: God cares for the “simple”, those who are direct, rather than devious, with him.) Even when afflicted, he kept his faith in God (v. 10). He now walks “before the LORD” (v. 9, follows God’s ways). How can he pay back God for saving him? (v. 12) He will make a drink-offering in the Temple for his deliverance and “call on the name of the LORD” (v. 13) in thanksgiving, in the presence of the worshipping community (v. 14). God almost always preserves the lives of the faithful (v. 15). He sees his status with God as being like a “child of your serving girl” (v. 16, one in perpetual servitude) but God makes him a free man (“loosed my bonds”). The “house of the LORD” (v. 19) is the Temple.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

NRSV

It seems that the Eucharist was celebrated at Corinth as part of a communal meal, and that there were problems when the church gathered for “the Lord’s supper” (v. 20), the supper in honour of Christ. The wealthy were expected to share with the poor, but they did not, so the poor went “hungry” (v. 21). This showed a lack of love, at a love-feast. Paul warns the Corinthians: this meal should celebrate the loving unity of God’s people. In this context, he gives us the earliest description of the central acts of the service (vv. 23-25). He has told them what has been handed down to him orally, or that he has heard “from the Lord”. “Remembrance” harks back to Exodus 12:14: Passover “shall be a day of remembrance for you”. Paul has written of “our paschal [passover] lamb, Christ” (5:7). The cup is “the new covenant” (v. 25) in which all sins are forgiven and all know God personally. It began with Christ’s death (“in my blood”). Wine was not drunk daily, hence “Do this, as often as you drink it”. In celebrating, we “proclaim” (v. 26) the fact and significance of the crucifixion, and are to continue to do so until Christ comes again. But sharing in the Eucharist when you are not in a loving relationship with Christ and with other members of the community will make you “answerable” (v. 27) for his death: you will be held to be one of those responsible for his crucifixion. So prepare for the Lord’s supper by self-examination leading to reconciliation with others (v. 28).

John 13:1-17,31b-35

NRSV

Jesus is preparing his followers for his departure; the “end” of his earthly life is near. A servant usually washed the feet of guests before a meal, but here it is Jesus who does so and he does it “during supper” (v. 2). Peter is surprised (v. 6). Jesus tells him that his action doesn’t make sense now, but it will “later” (v. 7), i.e. in vv. 12-17. Peter remonstrates: but that’s the chore of a lowly servant! (v. 8a). Jesus answers: only if I wash your feet can you “share” with me in the Kingdom (v. 8b). Peter, now getting part of the point, insists: may I share completely in Christ! (v. 9). In v. 10a, Jesus states a truism: if you have just had a bath, you need to wash only your hands and feet. Perhaps Jesus means “clean” in the sense of *pure* in v. 10b. In v. 11, John seems to be writing of Judas.

Jesus now explains. As he, “Lord and Teacher” (v. 14), has been a servant to them, so each one of the disciples is to be a servant to every other; they are to follow his “example” (v. 15). In vv. 18-30, Jesus predicts his betrayal, says that the traitor is one of them, and tells the disciple “whom Jesus loved” who it is. Judas “immediately went out” (v. 30). In v. 31, perhaps God is “glorified” by the revelation in Jesus (“the Son of Man”) of God’s servanthood and humility, and/or it is that Jesus is now inevitably on the path to the cross. Jesus is a way of seeing God now (“at once”, v. 32). While his disciples (lovingly called “little children”, v. 33) cannot “come” to heaven now, in 14:3 he promises to “come again and ... take you to myself”. He gives them “a new commandment” (v. 34): while Judaism required one to love one’s neighbour as oneself, Jesus is his follower’s example of love. This mutual love will show who are his followers (v. 35).

