

EXPLORING OUR FAITH

A Walk Through the Sunday Service

Session 27 – The Paschal Mystery: Eucharist and Life

With this bulletin cover essay, we conclude the long exploration of our Sunday worship that began last September. After a two-week recess for Palm Sunday and Easter Day we will do a short series during Eastertide on prayer. To explore, this morning, what we mean by the Paschal Mystery (*paschal* is Latin for Passover and Easter) is an appropriate conclusion for this series. The Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection sums up what the Eucharist, and indeed the whole of Christian faith and life are all about. It is also the mystery we celebrate in Holy Week and the Triduum of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Great Vigil of Easter; so to explore it today prepares us for those observances.

Dying and rising: the pattern of life with God. Christian faith and worship began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus's tiny group of disciples were huddled in fear and defeat – dead in a sense like him – after his crucifixion. He was gone. It was over. Their hope had rested on a false dream. But then the Mystery: he stood again among them, risen from the grave. He gave them his Spirit and sent them forth to live his life and fulfill his mission of reconciliation. It was this experience that the first Christians gathered to remember and renew in what we celebrate as the Holy Eucharist.

These first followers of Christ were Jews, as of course Jesus was. And they realized that the Paschal Mystery of death and resurrection, while new in Jesus, was not unprecedented in the life of God. The Christian Easter builds upon the Jewish feast of Passover. Passover commemorates the delivery of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom and promise in a new land. So Jesus became for Christians the Paschal Lamb, the sacrifice that brought new life. Moreover, it is no coincidence that these Jewish/Christian holidays fall around the spring equinox, for flowers, eggs and bunnies harken back to pagan festivals celebrating the coming of new life in spring.

The pattern of our lives. This Paschal Mystery of dying and rising, then, marks our own hope of new and larger life of after death. And in this present life, it speaks to the pattern of forgiveness in which we move from old lives bound by sinful limitations to new lives freed by the gift of God's grace and the Holy Spirit. What we celebrate in liturgy, we embody in how we live our lives. We are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. We are raised into citizenship in his Kingdom.

In this series of bulletin cover notes we are moving through the steps of the Sunday Eucharist. You can find past notes archived on the parish website. Each week in the 9:00 class we dig deeper into the week's subject, exploring further what we are learning.