

In the first reading, Moses sprinkles half the blood of a sacrificed animal on the altar and the other half on the people. The blood signifies the life force that seals the commitment between the Holy One and Israel. Not only are God and the people bound together irrevocably but the people themselves are united to one another. The twelve pillars erected at the foot of the mountain represent the whole of the people. They acclaim with one voice their loyalty to all the words and ordinances of God.

In the same way, Jesus' blood shed for all reaffirms God's unbreakable bond with us. What Jesus says and does at the Last Supper is the culmination of an entire lifelong pouring out of himself in love. The words and gestures echo God's life sustaining self-gift to Israel in the wilderness, symbolized in manna (Exod 16:12-35), and Jesus' feeding of the hungry multitudes when he was in Galilee. These continual manifestations of God's commitment to us reach their climax in Jesus' gift of self. In Mark's Gospel, the Last Supper is a Passover meal, recalling how the blood of lambs smeared on the doorposts kept the fleeing Israelites safe from the destroyer, and how the flesh of the lamb was consumed in haste for the journey to freedom.

So Jesus' flesh and blood sustains, protects, and frees us as a people who then embody for others his unbreakable commitment of love. His blood seals this covenant for all people. In the words over the cup, Jesus says his blood "will be shed for many." This reflects a Hebrew idiom, where the contrast is between "one" and "the many." "Many" does not mean that some are left out; instead it signifies the totality.

This blood bond is already a reality for us, yet it awaits perfect fulfillment, as Jesus' final words in today's gospel indicate. In our Eucharistic gatherings we make present again Jesus' gift of self while we also celebrate a foretaste of the eternal feasting, where we will experience perfect oneness with the Holy One and with one another.

The Eucharist is the greatest gift we have on this earth. It comes from the very hand of Christ. If we keep close to the Mass, to the Eucharist, wherever we are, we will always be close to Christ.