

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Thursday, March 24, 2016*

YEAR C - MAUNDY THURSDAY

O God, make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me. Greetings everyone. Today we celebrate Holy Thursday, to which is attributed the institution of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist by our Lord. Now, we cannot know that Jesus had never blessed the bread & wine in this way before. For all we know, this may have been a customary ritual among the disciples. But the significance of finding it here in this context is that it is intended to definitively replace the Passover supper of the old law - the demiurgic law, the imperfect law - with the supper of the flesh & blood of the Living Christ, of God himself, of a new & eternal law of life, love & perfection.

The institution of this Sacrament is depicted in all three of the synoptic Gospels, and is recounted by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, as we see in today's Epistle reading. It is believed that Paul's letters are among the very earliest of Christian literature, predating the Gospels as we know them. The wording of Luke's Gospel comes closest to Paul's recounting of Jesus' words of institution, but we can probably ascribe this more to Paul's influence upon this Gospel than the other way around. It is possible that there were some sort of proto-Gospels around in Paul's day from which he drew his quotes, but if this is the case then they were certainly not Mark or Matthew, for the wording is just too different in these texts. What seems more likely is that Paul picked up these words of institution from the various Christian communities with which he had dealings, and from some of the apostles themselves. In any case, the fact that we find a description of this sacrament in such an early text is convincing evidence of its primacy in the Christian tradition.

Yesterday we talked a little about the depiction of the Last Supper in John, which takes a decidedly darker turn. All of the Gospels speak of Judas' betrayal, and mention Jesus speaking of it at the Last Supper. But in the synoptic texts Jesus merely mentions that the betrayer is one of those dining with him. He then goes on to immediately bless the bread & wine, etc. But in John's Gospel, the ritual with the bread specifically concerns Judas, for as we read of Judas yesterday, "After he received the piece of bread Satan entered into him." It was later pointed out to me by Tau Bruno that this event could be seen as justifying the idea that to the unworthy the Eucharist is a curse. Let us examine this line of thought a little bit.

We do see scriptural support for this position that is held by both the Catholics and in some ways to an even greater extent by the Orthodox. If we look at our passage from 1st Corinthians and read a little bit further, Paul goes on to say that those who have not properly examined themselves prior to receiving the Sacrament, "eat and drink judgment unto themselves." This is not something to be discounted, but neither does it mean that one must be free of sin in order to partake of the Eucharist. For it is the Eucharist itself that purifies and perfects us. If we were truly free of sin then we would be perfect, and we would no longer have need of the Sacrament, for we would be the very embodiment of his Body and Blood.

But the scene depicted by John seems something different altogether. And it is easy to see why some of the early Gnostics - who (some of them) were very against the sacrament of the Eucharist - would see herein the rejection of this sacrament. Now, we do not hold to the extreme views of some of our early forebears, who rejected the apostolic tradition wholesale. Our philosophy and our theology is much closer to that of Valentinus and his followers. But there is clearly something going on in John's depiction of the Last Supper that is beyond the unworthiness of Judas. There is a mystery here in its own right.