



Diocese of La Crosse  
Office for Ministries & Social Concerns

**Study Questions for *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*  
By Dr. Brant Pitre**

**Session One**

**FOREWORD by Scott Hahn, Ph.D.**

It is natural for modern Christians to see Jesus' crucifixion as a sacrifice, but nothing about Calvary's event shouted "sacrifice" to a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew. Where were the altar, the priest, the temple? These were required for a valid sacrifice in Judaism. Dr. Hahn sees the answer in the Eucharist.

We thank St. Paul for his inspired reflection that connects the Old and New Testament, recalling Moses pouring out the blood of oxen and saying, "Behold, the blood of the covenant," and then Jesus lifting up the Cup of Blessing at the Last Supper, proclaiming a NEW covenant in His own blood.

**Discuss:**

1. When you look at a crucifix, is your *first* impression someone who is suffering, or someone who is loving? Did that change as you matured in age and/or spiritual development?
2. What is the transformative factor between *execution* and *offering*? How does the event of Holy Thursday – when the Lord Jesus supped with His chosen twelve – impact this shift?
3. Central to the 'Theology of the Cross' is an accurate definition of LOVE. What is it?





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**Session Two**

**Chapter 2: What were the Jewish People Waiting For?**

This chapter explores the widespread expectation of the first century Jews regarding the promised Savior. Dr. Pitre debunks commonly held views and builds a picture of a nation – God’s chosen people – awaiting a new Exodus, Covenant and Promised Land.

**Discuss:**

1. What do Christians typically think the Jews expected their Messiah to be and to do? What does Brant Pitre tell us that goes way beyond that common notion?
2. What are the parallels between the person and role of Moses, and that of Jesus? And between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant instituted by Jesus?
3. Describe the evolution (the stages) of the Temple from the time of Moses up to the time of Christ. And what were the Jewish expectations for the “new Temple,” the final one?
4. What flashes of insight did you gain from this chapter with regard to our Catholic churches, and with regard to the celebration of the Mass?
5. What is the new Promised Land?



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**Session Three**

**Chapter 3: The New Passover**

Dr. Pitre summarizes this chapter nicely in the second paragraph on page 48. He states that the key to unlocking the mystery of the Last Supper is what any 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew would have known: a new Exodus would necessarily be paired with a new *Passover*. Many pages of Chapter 3 delve into the similarities and differences between the first Passover in Egypt and the one celebrated at the time Jesus walked the earth. Once this solid foundation is secure, the author moves to “the Passover of the Messiah” and the significance of what happened that 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan in an Upper Room in Jerusalem, when the Savior of the world instituted a NEW Passover.

**Discuss:**

(Use the table that follows to help complete #1)

1. Review the five basic ‘steps’ in the Passover sacrifice laid out in the Old Testament. Discuss the significance of the points in parentheses.
  - a. Characteristics of the Lamb (list 4 or 5 requirements).
  - b. Sacrifice/ Slaughter of the Lamb (who acted as priest over the years?).
  - c. Spread the Blood of the Lamb (“Sign of Sacrifice” – Whose? Why was the blood spread on wood? Describe “basins” which collected the sacrificed lamb’s blood).
  - d. Eat the flesh of the Lamb (often overlooked: command to eat the flesh).
  - e. Keep the remembrance in perpetuity (was not a ‘one and done’ event, but commanded by God to observe forever).
  
2. Dr. Pitre draws attention to several important considerations of the “Day of Remembrance”. What are the key points? Why do you think God wanted His people to repeat the annual celebration liturgy?
  
3. How did the role of the Temple in Jerusalem change after 70 AD? How did this radically change the nature of Jewish worship?

4. What interesting detail does Dr. Pitre share about the way the lambs were prepared for sacrifice during the 1<sup>st</sup> century?
  
5. In what ways did Jesus change the traditional Passover to signal to the disciples they were celebrating “the Passover of the Messiah?”

## Compare and Contrast the Passover through the Centuries

	Original Passover	First Century Jewish Passover	Passover of the Messiah
<b><u>Where</u></b> was the Lamb prepared for sacrificed?			
<b><u>Who</u></b> sacrificed it?			
Necessary <b><u>characteristics</u></b> of the Lamb			
<b><u>Where</u></b> was the Blood Spread			
<b><u>How</u></b> was the Lamb prepared for sacrifice			
<b><u>When</u></b> was Lamb was Sacrificed			
Role of <b><u>'Remembrance'</u></b> In the Paschal Liturgy			



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**Session Four**

**Chapter 4: The Manna of the Messiah**

This is the longest chapter in the book, and one packed with information and inspiration regarding the meaning of the Holy Eucharist. Take your time with it – it’s worth it!

**Discuss:**

1. What qualities of manna does Dr. Pitre list, and what do they tell us about its origin and nature?
2. Why did God command the Israelites to place an omer of manna in the Ark of the Covenant? What parallels do you find today rooted in this ancient Jewish traditions?
3. What were three ancient traditions about the new manna from Heaven (see pp. 86-92).
4. How does the manna as “protological,” and as a “return to Eden” (p. 87) foreshadow Jesus as the “living bread come down from heaven” (Jn 6:51) in the Eucharist? What do they have in common?
5. Read the last paragraph on p. 91. Referencing New Testament scholar C. H. Dodd, Dr. Pitre identifies two periods in Salvation History, one covering *the time of the Old Testament manna*, and the other covering *the time of the new manna of the Messiah* (the Eucharist). Notice that both periods are *temporary*. When does each of those two periods begin and end? And why would the Sacrament of the Eucharist end?

6. According to Dr. Pitre, how should the Greek word, *epiousios* be translated (p. 94)? How does he defend his belief that this is the correct translation?
  
7. Read the famous Bread of Life discourse (Jn 6:22-59). In defending the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, we often refer to the fact that Jesus said repeatedly that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood, and he never backed down from that. But what is the *form* his flesh takes? Note the beginning of this discourse (Jn 6:32-35), the middle (vv. 48-51), and the end (v. 58).
  
8. Now read Jesus' words at the Last Supper in Mt 26:26-28 and also read 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. Now Google "Bethlehem Hebrew meaning." Are all the pieces coming together?
  
9. Conclude this reflection on the manna with an attentive reading of pp. 102-103 in the book. What does Dr. Pitre say about Old Testament prefigurations and how salvation history works in the Bible (p. 103)?
  
10. Starting on p. 104, Dr Pitre discusses the reaction of the people following Jesus as he gives his Bread of Life discourse.
  - a. What was the response of those who said, "This is a hard saying: who can listen to it?"
  - b. What was Jesus' response to those who "took offense" at his words?
  - c. What was Peter's response?
  
11. On pp. 112-114, how does Dr. Pitre reply to the argument that Jesus must have been speaking symbolically about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, because Jesus says in the same discourse that "it is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn 6:63)?
  
12. After reading this dense chapter about the Manna of the Messiah, what are your greatest 'takeaways'? How does this change the way you approach the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Communion and in adoration?



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**Session Five**

**Chapter 5: The Bread of the Presence**

The insights just keep coming. Once again, we have a chapter packed with significance for our understanding of the Eucharist in light of the “Bread of the Presence.”

**Discuss:**

1. According to Rabbi Menahem of Galilee, all sacrifices would cease in “the world to come,” except one. Which one? What does the word “Eucharist” mean (look it up)?
  
2. Dr. Pitre comments on some very striking things about the Bread of the Presence on pages 118-125. What are some of those things, and how do you see them relating to the Eucharist? Here are few prompts, but don’t hesitate if you think of more.
  - a. What does Dr. Pitre tell us was kept on the golden table along with the Bread of the Presence, and why is that important?
  
  - b. What significance does he see in the Hebrew word *panim*, and how might that connect with the Eucharist?
  
  - c. In the section on “The Bread of the Everlasting Covenant” (pp. 122-125), what important observations does Dr. Pitre walk us through?
  
3. What are a couple of ways the Bread of the Presence was different from the manna (including where God told the Israelites to keep each of them)?



4. What significance does Dr. Pitre see in the two tables for the Bread of the Presence, one being marble, but then another being gold (p. 128)?
  
5. What happened at the three pilgrim feasts (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) that would be “almost unbelievable,” according to Pitre, except that it is so well documented (pp. 130-131)? What made it so unusual?
  
6. Dr. Pitre takes a look at the episode in Matthew where Jesus and his disciples are plucking grain to eat on the Sabbath. On pages 134-141, Dr. Pitre presents us with one fascinating observation after another. What are the key points he makes?
  
7. Dr. Pitre concludes this chapter by saying that the Last Supper was not only “a new Passover,” but also “the new bread and wine of the Presence” (p. 142). That explains why, when Jesus said “this is my body,” he raised in his hands not the Passover lamb, but rather bread (and wine to become his blood). What are the parallels he lists on p. 143?
  
8. Read aloud the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, one of the “Doctors of the Church,” on p. 146.



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**Session Six**

**Chapter 6: The Fourth Cup and the Death of Jesus**

Dr. Pitre opens this chapter reviewing key points discussed thus far. We recall that the Jewish people at the time of Christ had been awaiting:

- A new exodus of the Messiah
- A new Passover
- A return of the miraculous manna

We have seen how Jesus was the embodiment of each of these expectations.

- We have also noted the devotion of the Jewish people to the mysterious Bread of the Presence, and how Jesus fulfilled this sign of God's covenant love.

In this chapter, Dr. Pitre shows us how this "new Passover" not only encompasses the Last Supper (the "Seder," the memorial meal), but prolongs it to the very moment of Jesus' death on the cross, by its connection with the "four cups."

**Discuss:**

1. What is the Greek word for Passover? Explain what Christians mean by the term 'Paschal mystery'?
2. Let's look at each of the four cups of wine:
  - a. *Kiddush* (pp. 151-152) – Do you see some words and actions that resemble what happens during the Offertory at Mass?
  - b. *Haggadah* (pp. 152-155) – What does the father of the family do that might make you think of elements of the Mass? And what was special about the "remembrance" led by the father that made it different from a routine reminiscence of past events? How does this apply even more to the "memorial" that is the Mass?

- c. *Berakah* (p. 155) – What happens between the mixing of this third cup and the point at which all drink it? What does the recited blessing remind you of? What connection does Pitre draw here with Judas (read John 13:26-27)?
  
  - d. *Hallel* (pp. 156-158) – As you look over the words of the Hallel (what does that word remind you of?) Psalms, which phrases jump out at you the most in connection with Jesus’ death and Resurrection, and why? What would normally happen with this fourth cup after the singing of the Hallel Psalms?
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- 3. As Jesus told the apostles to drink of the third cup of wine, he said, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Then he made a vow. What was it? What significance does Dr. Pitre see in this vow, as summarized in the quote from Jewish scholar David Daube (p. 162)?
  
  - 4. Jesus referenced ‘the cup’ three times in the Garden of Gethsemane. Dr. Pitre sees this as highly significant. Explain (see especially pp. 164-165).
  
  - 5. On pp. 166-168, Dr. Pitre describes, in the course of Jesus’ passion, the moment that He *refuses* wine, and the moment when he *accepts* wine. What sense does Dr. Pitre make of the refusal and then the acceptance?
  
  - 6. Dr. Pitre draws everything in Chapter 6 to a conclusion in the last two paragraphs on p. 170. Read those two paragraphs aloud.



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**Session Seven**

**Chapter 7: The Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith**

This chapter ties together the various pieces, and cements further the bridge between the Old and New Testament covenants. And Dr. Pitre confesses that virtually all the elements he has focused on in this book were not “discovered” by him, but are to be found already in Sacred Scripture and the inherited tradition of the Catholic Faith, starting with the early Fathers of the Church.

**Discuss:**

1. As he travels around the country speaking to groups about the results of his research, Dr. Pitre says that ONE question always comes up. What is it? Do you share the same question?
2. In what key ways did Jesus reconfigure the ancient Jewish Passover into the Messianic Passover?
3. Dr. Pitre makes a point to underscore that the Passover meal was not merely a sacrifice, centered on the slaughter of an unblemished lamb. What else was it? What did God command the Israelites to do specifically to the lamb? What did the blood of the lamb protect them from?
4. Discuss the significance of Revelations 5:6, and St. John’s vision of heaven. Who/what stands in the center?
5. Dr. Pitre says on p. 180 that “in a certain sense, the manna is even more important than the Passover.” How does he go on to explain that (for the next 8 pages!)?



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**Session Eight**

**Chapter 8: On the Road to Emmaus**

**Discuss:**

1. Read aloud Luke 24:13-24.
2. What is the importance of the disciples' eyes not recognizing the Stranger for who He is?
3. The two despondent disciples had demoted Jesus to a prophet for what main reason?
4. How did Jesus respond to their lack of faith?
5. What allowed the disciples to recognize Jesus?
6. Connect the dots: What is Dr. Pitre suggesting is the significance of this passage for current disciples of Jesus? Why is it so important to emphasize Jesus' Risen body?
7. What is your biggest take-away from this study? What would you want to shout from the rooftops, to let other people know?