

**Reflection on the Gospel-The Body and Blood of Christ Year B
(Mark 14:12-16, 22-26)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The Gospel for today reminds us that we are in a “covenant” relationship with our God. We renew that covenant in every celebration of the Eucharist. The Israelites of old sealed their covenant with God in animal sacrifice, a practice we may wish to critique, and in the celebration of a meal (Exodus 24:1-12). The blood of the slain animal was sprinkled on the altar and on the people. The people knew that blood signified life: if blood spilled out then life spilled out. The altar signified God. The sprinkling of the blood denoted their shared life with God. They were called to be holy as God is holy.

The symbolism of the Jewish covenant ritual informs today’s Gospel story of Jesus’ final Passover meal with his disciples. Through the actions and words of Jesus, the bread broken and shared becomes his body broken and “given” for them. The sharing of the cup of wine becomes their sharing in the life of Jesus “to be poured out for many”. Bread and wine in this context have taken on a new meaning.

While all analogies fall short, we might begin to understand this mystery by considering the Eureka flag. The flag is constructed of fabric and thread. It is housed in the Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka and protected with the utmost care. Because of its associations with the Eureka rebellion and what Eureka stands for in Australian history and folklore, it carries the story that informs its creation as well as all the goodness of its fabric and thread. It has acquired multiple levels of meaning.

Through the actions and words of Jesus, the bread and wine of the Eucharist likewise signify something entirely new along with all the goodness of their materiality. They are Life for us, the shared life of the Risen Christ. We are called to bring that life to others, to give life for the sake of the many. Reading the passage in the context of Mark's gospel provides some insight into how we might do this. The eleven preceding verses recount stories of contrasting responses to Jesus as he faces his final days: the temple authorities plot to destroy him; an unnamed woman pours healing oil on his head and thus anoints his body “for burial”; a close friend seeks to betray him. Verses 17-21 take up again the story of a disciple's betrayal.

Betrayal and rejection are ever present possibilities even in Eucharistic communities. We are all too aware of this as we endeavour to address the consequences of sexual abuse in our communities. We need to learn from the other possibility presented to us in this context, namely that of pouring out the healing oil of compassion and love on our fractured Earth communities.