

May 5, 2017

Images of Remembrance: Passover and the Eucharist

It is spring and there is a new vibrancy in the air. We are increasingly surrounded by the color green as each additional color blooms onto nature's palette. And as Catholics and Jews, we have celebrated the religious rites and holy days that reawaken our spiritual natures and are central to our beliefs.

Both Easter and Passover embrace themes of rebirth and reawakening. Both celebrations emphasize memories of the ancient past.

The History of Passover

The first Passover meal took place four thousand years ago when Moses, his brother Aaron, sister Miriam and all of the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt after enduring 400 years of slavery there. Moses was the greatest prophet and leader of the Jewish people and his story is the story of the Exodus. Passover celebrates the rebirth of the Jewish people after God's redemption. Their new life after slavery will be in a new land with a new set of guidelines for how to live (*Torah*) that were given to them by God.

The Passover Meal (*Seder*)

Jews celebrate Passover each year with a *seder*, a festive meal that commemorates the exodus from Egypt, the journey from slavery to freedom. It is a meal filled with symbolism. Major components of the *seder* meal are blessing and drinking the wine, blessing and eating the unleavened bread (matzah—one piece is always broken by the leader of the *seder*) and telling the story of the exodus from Egypt. History is not just remembered, it is personally experienced. As mentioned in Hebrew Scriptures (specifically the Mishnah), "In each generation, each [person] ought to consider himself as having personally come out of Egypt." The Passover observance lasts for eight days during which Jewish people around the world refrain from eating any foods that might be leavened or contain any leavening ingredient.

Jesus' Passover

Nearly 1,400 years after the Moses' first Passover meal, Jesus sat with his disciples at what is understood to be a Passover meal. The story of Moses and the journey from Egypt would have been retold, a story of freedom and resistance to powerful political rulers that must have had special meaning and resonance in the midst of the oppressive Roman Empire.

The Last Supper and the Eucharist

Jesus' Passover meal, known to be his Last Supper, is one of the most famous in history. Each time Catholic communities celebrate the *Holy Eucharist* (literally meaning "thanksgiving") also known as *Holy Communion*,

this event is remembered and reenacted. The priest blesses and breaks the bread (usually unleavened), then gives it to each parishioner to eat. In a similar way, the chalice of wine is blessed and offered to each person to drink. This symbolism not only evokes the memory of Jesus' Last Supper, but the bread is believed to become the actual body of Jesus and the wine Jesus' blood that would be sacrificed through the crucifixion.

At the Last Supper, Jesus gives thanks to God for His love and for the new life to be granted in the Resurrection. In the Eucharist, Christians give thanks for God's deliverance (from sin) and remember how Jesus brought about a new exodus with Jesus' death and Resurrection. The Eucharist is an act of remembrance, for Jesus told his disciples to "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

Catholic and Jewish Imagery

If you are Catholic, what images come to mind when you receive Holy Communion? I imagine that you are thinking of Jesus as his disciples carefully and perhaps mournfully listen to his instructions as they partake of the bread and the wine at the Last Supper. Perhaps the image in your mind's eye is of Jesus on the cross.

As a Jewish woman observing my colleagues and friends receiving the Eucharist during the Mass at Sacred Heart, I imagine Jesus as my family member and fellow Jew, who might be joining my family and friends as we sit around the seder table every year. We bless and partake of the wine, the matzah and the bitter herbs, thank God for God's deliverance, and pray in the hope that one day Elijah will come.

Jews and Christians share a common sacred tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures. Much can be gained in terms of understanding one another when we talk to each other about our beliefs, practices and insights.

Fr. Gideon Buya, Sacred Heart Alumni, Speaks at Holocaust Remembrance Service

On April 23rd, the Milwaukee Jewish community remembered the victims of the Holocaust at the annual Yom HaShoah (Day of Holocaust Remembrance). Rev. Gideon Buya, Associate Pastor at Holy Name and St. Clement parishes in Sheboygan and former Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology student, addressed the group of over 300 people as the Interfaith Community Representative.

Fr. Buya stated that having grown up in Kenya, he had known little about Judaism or the Holocaust. During his years of priestly formation at Sacred Heart, Fr. Buya attended the Holocaust Study Institute, a 14 week course about the Holocaust that was sponsored by the Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies and the Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center. Following this course, Fr. Buya received a scholarship to attend a two week summer trip to Germany and Auschwitz in Poland from the Fellowship at Auschwitz for the Study of Professional Ethics (FASPE).

Fr. Buya stated, ". . . as a priest, as a leader of a community, I have embraced as one of my roles to be that person who links people together, to be that bridge that helps to dispel the sense of fear, suspicion and hate of others—within the communities I serve, especially based on religion, by clearing misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Judaism and Islam amongst other religions. I believe we need more bridges between Catholicism, Judaism and Islam for our peaceful coexistence."

He emphasized the importance for all people to remember the persecution and murder of Jews and all others who were persecuted during World War II. As stated by Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel,

"We must remember, not only because of the dead; it is too late for them. Not only because of the survivors, it may even be late for them. Our remembering is an act of generosity, aimed at saving men and women from apathy to evil, if not from evil itself."

The Lux Center Congratulates Graduates

The Lux Center extends hearty congratulations to this year's graduates of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology and wishes each much luck as they begin their ministries. This includes Leo Blasi, Adam Bradley, Daniel Dorau, Marcellinus Emeh, Francisco Franquiz Arroyo, Peter Kieffer, Steven Langenbrunner, Ferdinand Lokoa, John Martin, Michael martin, Michael Neeland, Thang Duc Peter Nguyen, Virginus Osuagwu, Mark Ouma, Matthew Rappl, Bernard Rosinski, and Ruben Villalon Rivera.

The Lux Center wishes SHSST students, staff, faculty and all friends and supporters a wonderful summer filled with good health and blessings.

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