

Did Moses Celebrate Mass in the Desert?

KNOW YOUR FAITH SERIES

The Mass has two main parts: the Liturgy of the WORD and the Liturgy of the EUCHARIST.

Most of our Catholic Liturgy has its roots in the ancient Jewish liturgy.

Last July we spoke about the close connection between the Jewish Passover and the Sacrifice of the Mass: they both speak about “covenant”.

Let us now have a closer look at how the “covenant” was presented and signed (sealed).

You may recall that, at the first Mass celebrated during the “Last Supper”, Jesus told his disciples that His Blood was the Blood of the New Covenant.

His sacrifice on the cross, the meal that celebrates our covenant with God, was replacing a covenant that God had made with Moses and the people of Israel in the desert.

We read in the Book of Exodus:

“Then he took the book of the covenant, and READ IT in the hearing of the people; and THEY SAID, ‘All that the Lord has spoken WE WILL DO, and WE WILL BE OBEDIENT’. And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood OF THE COVENANT which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’ “ (Exodus 24:7-8)

We note that first, Moses reads the covenant to the people. When he is finished, they are faced with a decision: Will they accept the terms of this covenant?... and they do.

Second, Moses, throws the blood of the oxen he had sacrificed to the Lord on the people. As he does, he tells them this is the “blood of the covenant.”

Now remember the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, as He gives His disciples the cup filled with wine, “This is the blood of the New Covenant.”

THIS IS WHAT WE ARE CELEBRATING AT MASS.

Notice that the Mass has two parts as well. In the Liturgy of the Word, we listen to Readings from the Bible that tell us of the wonders God has done - since the beginning of time, until the fullness of time - when He took our human flesh and walked among us, then sacrificed His life to reconcile us to Himself.

At the end of the Readings, we too have a decision to make: WILL WE GIVE ASSENT to what God is asking of us?

If we do, we say the CREED, declaring as the ancient Israelites did that we believe in God and all He has done.

The second part of the Mass celebrates the passion and death of our Lord in the way He had instructed his disciples to do. No longer a sacrifice of animals, but the sacrifice of our Lord at Calvary.

In this Liturgy of the Eucharist, we fulfill the command of Christ. We agree to the New Covenant, then receive His Body and Blood to seal the deal with God.

Now we should be better prepared to explore in details the Liturgy of the Word in the coming weeks.