

St. Nersess Armenian Seminary
1998 Deacons' Training Program
Bible Study

The Eucharist I

Matthew 26: 17-30

Introduction: Why Read the Bible?

If we want to understand the Divine Liturgy or *Badarak* (also called *Eucharist*), we have to start with the Bible. The reason is that *every single word* of the *Badarak* is either a direct quote from the Bible, or a paraphrase or interpretation of a specific passage from the Bible. Everything we *do* during the *Badarak* is firmly rooted in specific passages of the Old and/or New Testaments. Moreover, Armenian Christians celebrate the *Badarak* because in the New Testament, Jesus Christ himself commanded us to do it. Without having read the Bible (and without reading it regularly), no one can hope to understand the Armenian Divine Liturgy.

1. What do vv. 17-19 tell us about the meal Jesus had with his disciples? Why did Jesus want to eat a meal with his disciples? What does this tell us about the meaning of the Last Supper? What does this tell us about the meaning of the Eucharist?
2. Blessing, breaking, and sharing a piece of bread, and sharing a single cup of wine were standard features of the Jewish Passover Meal. Why do you think Matthew includes the details that Jesus "took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples"?
3. Jesus' words, "This is my body...", "This is my blood..." were not part of the usual Passover ritual. Why do you think Jesus added these words to the Passover meal? What do you think the disciples thought when they heard Jesus say these words? What do you think when you read these words?
4. During the *Badarak*, the priest repeats these same words of Jesus. How do you say "This is my body...", "This is my blood..." in Church Armenian? Why does the priest say these words during the *Badarak*?

The Eucharist II

1 Corinthians 11: 17-34

Introduction:

The First Epistle to the Corinthians is a letter that St. Paul wrote to the Christian community he established and organized in the city of Corinth, in what is today southern Greece, not far from Athens. St. Paul had visited the city, taught the people about Christ, and established a Church there. Around the year 53 or 54 A.D., St. Paul wrote this letter to the Church of Corinth in order to correct certain abuses that had developed in the young community.

1. What is the problem that St. Paul is complaining about in vv. 17-22?
2. Most Christians would consider it very strange to open up lunch boxes and have picnics in the sanctuary, but this was the practice of the early church. Besides practical reasons (the people were hungry), why would the earliest Christians have wanted to eat together in church?
3. Does this remind you of anything in Armenian parish life?
4. In your experience, how are St. Paul's admonitions in vv. 17-22 relevant for the Armenian Church? Be specific.
5. Compare St. Paul's account of the Last Supper with Mt 26: 26-29. How are the two accounts similar? How are they different? Why are the two versions not identical? Is this a problem?
6. What is the meaning of Jesus' words in v. 25. What does it mean to "proclaim the Lord's death"? Why is this important? How is this related to the original purpose of the Passover meal?
7. In v. 26, St. Paul interprets Jesus' words in v. 25. What does it mean to "proclaim the Lord's death"? Why is this important? How is this related to the original purpose of the Passover meal?
8. In vv. 27-29, what warning does St. Paul make regarding Holy Communion? How does this relate to the original problem he was addressing in vv. 17-22?
9. How does St. Paul's warning relate to Armenians who receive Holy Communion in the *Badarak*? What are some ways that some people receive Holy Communion "in an unworthy manner" [v. 27]? How should an Armenian Christian "examine himself" [v. 28] before he receives Holy Communion? What does it mean to "discern the body"?

The Eucharist III

1 Corinthians 10: 14-21

Introduction:

One of the issues that plagued the church of Corinth was a disagreement about whether Christians could eat meat that had been used in ritual sacrifices to pagan deities. Some thought that this presented no problem for Christians, who believe in one God, and who know that there are no others beside him. Others considered eating this meat as an implicit endorsement of the pagan gods.

1. In v. 16, St. Paul uses the word "participation" to describe the relationship between the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and Jesus' body and blood. What does this mean? What happens to a Christian when she receives Holy Communion?
2. What is St. Paul saying in v. 18?
3. So how does St. Paul use the examples of the Lord's Supper as well as the Jewish sacrifice to solve the original dispute? How does St. Paul solve the problem/
4. So what does all this tell us about Holy Communion?
5. Most Protestant churches offer Holy Communion only once per month. They believe that it is simply a way of remembering Jesus' last supper before his crucifixion. If a Protestant friend of yours asked you how you can possibly believe that the bread and wine of our *Badarak* put you in contact with God, how would you answer?
6. In the Roman Catholic Church, individual bite-sized wafers of bread are blessed and distributed in the Eucharist, as opposed to one loaf of bread blessed, broken, and distributed. How is this contrary to the image St. Paul depicts in v. 17? Why is it important that there be one loaf broken and distributed among the people?
7. Based on all St. Paul teaches concerning Holy Communion, how often should a Christian receive Holy Communion?

The Eucharist IV

Luke 22: 15-20

Luke 24: 13-35

1. Read Lk 22: 15-20 first. Compare this account of the Last Supper with those in Mt 26: 26-29 and 1Cor 11: 23-26. What elements of the story does Luke's version have in common with the others? What elements are unique to Luke? How can we explain these discrepancies?
2. Luke refers twice to "the kingdom of God" in connection with the Lord's Supper [vv. 16, 18]. What do you think this means? Why does Luke emphasize this point?
3. Now read Lk 24: 13-36. As an introduction, read together or summarize Luke's account of the resurrection, Lk 24: 1-12. Ask someone in the group to retell the story in his/her own words.
4. Why were "their eyes kept from recognizing" Jesus? Why were the two anonymous disciples, who had spent so much time with Jesus, unable to recognize him?
5. What was the mood of the two disciples as they were walking and talking together?
6. What finally "clicked" in the minds of the two disciples, and helped them recognize the risen Lord? What clue has St. Luke the evangelist cleverly placed in the story to remind us of the Lord's Supper? Why did Luke do this?
7. Describe a time when something "clicked" in your mind and heart suggesting that the risen Lord had appeared to you or was with you.
8. What can we conclude about how Luke and the Christians living during his time understood the meaning of Christ's Last Supper?

The Eucharist V

Exodus 16: 1-21, 31-36

Introduction:

When Jesus announced at the Last Supper that the bread he had given his disciples to eat was his body, it was not the first time that God provided a miraculous bread to sustain his people. After the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, they found liberation from slavery, but also desolate wilderness.

1. Why are the people of Israel upset? What word does the story use to express how the people complained to Moses? How many times is the word used?
2. What does God promise to provide to pacify the people? How does Moses explain to the people the reason why the Lord will provide the bread from heaven?
3. What is the reason for the strange instructions about how much of the bread the people are permitted to gather, and what happens to the remainder [vv. 16-21]?
4. Why does Moses command the people to keep a jar of manna forever [vv. 31-36]?
5. The following is an excerpt from one of the prayers that the priest recites silently at the beginning of the *Badarak*, when the curtain is closed and the gifts of bread and wine are being prepared.

"Receive our prayers and prepare us to be honorable dwelling-places of the heavenly Lamb; and without the punishment of condemnation to receive this immortalizing manna of the new life of salvation."

- a. What do the words "immortalizing manna" refer to?
- b. What is the "new life of salvation"? How does one receive it?
- c. Why does this prayer ask God to make us "honorable dwelling places?" What is going to dwell in us?
- d. Describe your own experience of receiving Holy Communion. In what ways does it reflect to you a "new life of salvation"?

The Eucharist VI

John 6: 1-14

1. Why does St. John the Evangelist add the seemingly insignificant reference to "Passover, the feast of the Jews" [v. 4]? Does the story of Jesus feeding the five hundred have anything to do with the Passover story?
2. John is the only one of the four Gospels that does not include an account of Jesus' Last Supper. Does St. John's way of narrating Jesus' multiplication of the fish and the loaves remind you of the Last Supper? How?
3. What is significant about the detail about leftovers gathered into twelve baskets [vv. 12-13]? What does Jesus' miracle demonstrate to the people? What does it demonstrate to us?
4. Does this remind you of anything in the story of the manna in Ex 16?
5. What do you think St. John may be trying to communicate to us about the Eucharist through his special version of the feeding of the five thousand?
6. St. John's account of the feeding of the five thousand uses theological terms and images to hint at the meaning of Holy Communion. What does this mean to you? What is the value of Holy Communion? What do you "get" when you receive Holy Communion? How do you change as a result of regularly participating in the *Badarak* and receiving Holy Communion?

The Eucharist I

John 6: 25

Introduction:

Reread Jn 6: 1-24, or review the stories of the multiplication of the loaves and fish and of Jesus walking on the water.

1. Why were the disciples looking for Jesus? Why does he admonish them in vv. 25-27.
2. Why do the disciples refer to the manna [v. 31]. What do they want from Jesus?
3. What is the bread from heaven that Jesus is talking about? How is it different from the manna that God gave their fathers?
4. How do the disciples respond when Jesus tells them "I am the bread of life." With what exact words does St. John the Evangelist express their behavior? What does this remind you of?
5. How many times in vv. 35-58 does Jesus repeat "I am the bread of life" or something similar? What do *you* think he means? Do you think he is speaking allegorically or metaphorically (in other words, he does or does not mean that he is *literally* the bread of life). Why or why not?
6. When the disciples say, "How does this man give us his flesh to eat?", what is Jesus' response?
7. What will happen to those who eat Jesus' flesh and blood? How is this possible? How does this relate to Holy Communion?
8. At the end of the story, are the disciples convinced about what Jesus said? What did Jesus do about those who "drew back and no longer went about with him" [v. 66]? Was Peter convinced?
9. What do you think about Holy Communion after reading these words of Jesus?