**Holy Week: Day 5, The Last Supper**

I know weeks in advance where I'm going to have Christmas dinner, who I'm going to share it with, at what time we'll eat it, and even what will be on the menu.

Christmas dinner holds the same importance for us as the Passover dinner held for Jesus and his disciples, not something planned at the last minute, being the high point of the Jewish calendar. The Israelites ate their Passover meal quickly because it was their last meal before escaping from Egypt. If there was such a thing as "fast food" in Moses' day, the Israelites had it!  They ate their meal "on the run."

In the Last Supper we see the parallels with the first Passover feast, but Jesus provides a new interpretation on its meaning. During the meal, as was the custom, Jesus picked up the unleavened bread but gave the ceremony a new meaning.  Unleavened bread for any Jew represents two things:  First, the bread was made quickly.  In the story in Exodus God gave instructions to the Israelites concerning the night they were going to leave Egypt. They were not to put yeast in their bread because there wouldn't be time to let it rise; they would be leaving quickly and needed to eat it "on the run" as they escaped.   Secondly, bread without yeast became a symbol of purity; untainted bread.  Even today, in the Passover Festival celebrations, yeast is not found in a Jewish homes.

When Jesus took the bread at the Passover meal and said, "Take and eat, this is my body" he was reinterpreting the original meal’s significance.  Jesus may have been saying "Just like the Israelites of old, we are 'on the run', and you will be facing opposition.  You will need nourishment and I, the pure untainted bread, am your food.  I will subject my pure body to the flame of execution for you, in the same way the unleavened bread was baked over the fire.  All you need to do is take my life into your being.  But do it quickly, with haste, or the enemy may catch up with you."

*Reflection:  "In what ways do I 'add yeast' to Jesus?  In what ways do I taint the pure bread of life?  Do I really realize my urgent need for Jesus?"
Prayer:  "Lord Jesus, I desperately need you.  You are more than enough for me."*

Then Jesus took the cup which was another symbol of significance in the Passover meal: the blood.  In the original Passover, the Jewish people were spared their lives because of the blood of a lamb.  You probably remember that God sent Moses as a prophet to tell the king of Egypt, who was holding the Israelites in slavery, "Let my people go!"   When he refused, God sent various plagues upon the Egyptians, but he made ways of sparing the Israelites.  The final plague was the worst:  God sent an angel of death to take the life of every firstborn male in Egypt.  God told the Israelites that if they wanted their lives to be spared, they were to paint the doorframes of their houses with the blood of a lamb.  When the angel of death came, if he saw blood on the doorposts, that household would be spared.  It was the Israelite's way of saying "I belong to God."  Then, the Israelites were to eat the slaughtered lamb quickly with the unleavened bread.  They were literally "passed over", by the angel of death who saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses: hence the Passover.

At the last supper Jesus takes the cup as was the custom at the end of the meal containing the symbolic wine representing the blood of the lamb, and says, "Drink: this is my blood spilled out for you."  Later the disciples understood this as "I am the sacrificial lamb”. Some Christians have understood this as ‘If you want to be passed over by the angel of death, you spread some of this on the doorposts of your heart.’  Jesus’ blood will save you, if you apply it to your life.

*Reflection:  "Am I ready to accept Jesus' offer?"
Prayer:  "Lord Jesus, I accept your offer.  You are the bread and wine of my life.  Protect me from the enemy and save me from eternal death.  Thank you for your willingness to face persecution and death.  Thank you for your sacrifice, perfect Lamb of God."*

**Digging Deeper**
Read Mark's gospel account of the last supper: Mark 14 : 12-26