

After the first communion mass, one of the questions I like to ask the kids is, “How did it taste?” You can imagine the response. It usually comes in two parts. “The bread was OK. But the wine was yuck.” Kids are not alone in this critique. Some people don’t receive communion under the form of wine because of its taste, even though ours is better than most. Others are squeamish about drinking from the same cup that other people use, even though the minister wipes it and turns it after each sip. Still others cannot drink alcohol, and we provide an alternative for them at the Saturday night mass. But there is something else that alarms people about the communion wine. It is the blood of Christ. The idea of drinking blood, even in its sacramental sense, can turn one’s stomach.

One of the goriest stories in the bible lies behind this practice. In the Book of Exodus, God tells Moses to have Pharaoh release the Israelites from their state of slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh doesn’t want to give up the cheap labor. So God sends a series of plagues including the Nile water turning foul; frogs swarming out of the Nile and into homes; flies on the Egyptians and their land; a sickness afflicting Egyptian cattle; thunder and hail that harm cattle; and darkness over Egypt for three days. Finally, God warns Moses that the firstborn of every household will die, except for the Israelites. God commands the people to slaughter a lamb for their household, sprinkle its blood on their door, and then eat the meat together. The angel of death passed over the doors marked with blood, and took the lives of the firstborn in the other homes. It is hard to imagine the grief that resulted from this final plague. Pharaoh immediately let Israel go. Each year after that, the Jewish people have slaughtered a lamb in remembrance of this event, which came to be known as Passover.

Jesus celebrated Passover in Jerusalem several times in his life, most notably for the Last Supper. On Easter Sunday we heard a passage from St. Paul saying “our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.” We hear a similar comment from the First Letter of Saint Peter today. He says we were ransomed from our futile conduct, “not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb.” Jesus shed his blood so that we might have forgiveness of sins and life after death. During the Easter Vigil we hear in the Exsultet: “This is our Passover feast, when Christ, the true lamb, is slain, whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.” Jesus is the lamb of God.

**Blood.** It’s hard to think about Jesus shedding blood, and hard to think about us drinking blood. But it tells us how important our faith is, how much God loves us, the privilege that is ours in sharing the eucharist, and the communion that this brings.

Individuals Catholics give a lot of reasons for not drinking from the cup. But one reason should outweigh them all: Jesus shed this blood for us to drink. Through it he consecrates our homes and sets us free from sin.