

Prayer in connection with the Jewish people
Thursday, April 7, 2022

TAKE & EAT: THIS IS MY BODY

Raniero Cantalamessa.

From a ritual and liturgical point of view, today we have a new resource that the Fathers of the Church and medieval doctors did not have. The new resource we have is the rapprochement between Christians and Jews. From the earliest days of the Church, various historical factors led to accentuate the difference between Christianity and Judaism, to the point of contrasting them with each other, as Ignatius of Antioch already does. Distinguishing oneself from the Jews – on the date of Easter, on fasting days, and in many other things – becomes a kind of password. An accusation often leveled against one's adversaries and heretics is that of "Judaizing". The tragedy of the Jewish people, and the new climate of dialogue with Judaism, initiated by the Second Vatican Council, have made possible a better understanding of the Jewish matrix of the Eucharist. Just as the Christian Passover cannot be understood if it is not considered as the fulfillment of what the Jewish Passover foretold, so the Eucharist is not fully understood if it is not seen as the fulfillment of what the Jews did and said in the course of their ritual meal.

The first name with which the Eucharist is designated in the New Testament by Paul is that of "meal of the Lord" (*kuriakon deipnon*) (1 Cor 11:20), with evident reference to the Jewish meal from which it now differs for the faith in Jesus. The Eucharist is the sacrament of continuity – not of the opposition – between the Old and New Testaments, between Judaism and Christianity.

At the beginning of the meal, each in turn took a cup of wine in his hand and, before bringing it to his lips, repeated a blessing that the current liturgy makes us repeat almost verbatim at the moment of the offertory: "Blessed be you, Lord, our God, King of the ages, you have given us this fruit of the vine...".

But the meal officially began only when the father of the family, or the head of the community, had broken the bread that was to be distributed among the diners. And, in fact, Jesus takes the bread, recites the blessing, breaks it and distributes it saying: "This is my body which will be given up for you." And here the rite – which was only a preparation – becomes reality. The figure becomes the event.

Second sermon of Lent from Father Raniero Cantalamessa Roma 2022