

# 1 The Four Cups, the Last Supper, and the Cup of Consummation

2 BYTOM PERNAON APRIL 2, 2015

3 When I taught theology at St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School in Austin, Texas, one of my most  
4 favorite lessons of the entire school year was when I taught the students about the Four Cups of the  
5 Passover meal. After studying the Passover meal in some classes at Franciscan University of Steubenville  
6 and combined with reading Brant Pitre's fantastic book, ***Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist***, my  
7 desire to explain to my students the importance of the Four Cups, the Last Supper, and the Cup of  
8 Consummation was of utmost importance, even though it wasn't technically prescribed in the  
9 curriculum.

10 At the time of Jesus, there was the sacrifice of the lambs in the Temple, but also the Passover (pasch)  
11 meal. The Passover *Seder* or "order" featured in the meal four cups of wine. Within the Passover meal,  
12 there were two regulations that had to be followed –

- 13 1. Before the lamb was to be eaten, several hours of fasting were required, beginning around  
14 3:00pm. (The fasting we do as Catholics before we receive the Holy Eucharist in Mass is a similar  
15 function to the fasting in the Passover meal).
- 16 2. Drinking of the four cups of wine was deemed mandatory.

17 One might ask why the wine was so important, but the answer is unclear since the traditional Jewish  
18 sources don't really say. In *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, Pitre states, "One reason may be  
19 that the overall structure of the Passover meal seems to have revolved around the drinking of the four  
20 cups of wine." Now let's examine one by one.

## 21 1.) First Cup: The Cup of Sanctification (the kiddish cup) –

22 The first cup was the "introductory rites" to the Passover meal. The Passover meal begins in the evening,  
23 sometime around "nightfall." The father gathers with his family at a large table and reclines to celebrate  
24 the freedom won by God in Egypt. The first cup is mixed with water and wine. After the mixing occurred,  
25 the father begins with the formal blessing over the cup. After the blessing, the food is then brought out,  
26 which includes unleavened bread, bitter herbs, a bowl of sauce, and the roasted lamb, which is known  
27 as "the body" in traditional Jewish sources. Appetizers were also brought out, however, the actual meal  
28 had not yet started.

## 29 2.) Second Cup: The Cup of Proclamation (the haggadah cup) –

30 The second cup would be mixed, but not drunk. The father would "proclaim" what the Lord did for Israel  
31 in Egypt. The son then asks the question – *why is this night different from other nights?* The son's  
32 question is connected to the drinking of the second cup. The father would then answer by quoting a  
33 specific section from the Scriptures (read Deuteronomy 26:5-11). This exchange between the father and  
34 the son displays how the Passover meal looks back to the exodus and redemption the Israelites received  
35 by God in Egypt. The father then explains the parts of the meal – unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and  
36 the lamb. Explaining the significance of the meal was essentially the center of this part of the meal. To  
37 express their thanksgiving to God, the family would then sing the Hallel ("praise") **Psalms 113 and 114**.

## 38 3.) Third Cup: The Cup of Blessing (the berakah cup) –

39 The third cup would be mixed and this is where the *supper officially begins*. The family would finally eat  
40 the lamb and the unleavened bread. Because customs change over time, it's hard to figure how this  
41 actually was staged, but it seems that there was a blessing over the bread, there was a serving of a hors  
42 d'oeuvre, which consisted of a small morsel of bread, and at the end the main course was eaten. Once  
43 the meal was completed, the father recited another blessing over the third cup and it was consumed.

## 44 4.) Fourth Cup: The Cup of Praise (the hallel cup) –

45 The remainder of the Hallel Psalms (115-118) would be sung. Psalms 115-118 are known as the Great  
46 Hallel. These psalms may not mean much to us today, although it is important to learn their significance,  
47 they were well known to Jesus and his Apostles since they would sing them each year for the Passover.  
48 The Hallel Psalms were a "script" for the one offering the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 116). Once  
49 Psalm 118 was sung, the fourth cup was drunk. At this point, the meal was finished. NOTE: Jesus would  
50 have seen His own fate in these hymns.

51 In context of the Last Supper, we must ask the question – Did Jesus finish the meal and how many cups  
52 did they drink?

53 1.) First, Jesus vowed not to drink of “fruit of the vine” until the coming of the kingdom of God.  
54 Here He is speaking of the fourth cup.

55 2.) Second, after the third cup, Jesus and Apostles *“sing a hymn”* (Hallel Psalms) and then *“went*  
56 *out.”* however nothing was drank. Both Matthew and Mark speak of this in their Gospels. In the  
57 end, Jesus makes reference to the fourth cup, but possibly refuses to drink it at the Last Supper.  
58 He does not finish the meal...yet!

59 At this point, Jesus and his Apostles make their way to the Garden of Gethsemani (read **Matthew 26:36-**  
60 **46**). Here we read that Jesus prays three times for the cup that He must drink. The cup (or chalice in  
61 some translations) is the fourth cup, the final cup of the Passover meal. Between the giving of His body  
62 at the Last Supper as the sacrifice and one of the cups as His own blood, ***Jesus classifies His body as the***  
63 ***New Passover.*** Once the meal is over, His blood will be poured out, and Jesus will be dead. He does not  
64 finish the meal in the Upper Room because it will finish with His death on the cross.

65 The fourth cup in relation to Jesus’ death on the cross is also known as the Cup of Consummation.  
66 Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that Jesus drinks the final cup on the way to the cross. But when  
67 we look at the final moments of the life of Christ on the cross, we notice that He does drink of *“the fruit*  
68 *of the vine.”* However, in **Mark 15:23**, He does drink since the wine is filled myrrh, which would have  
69 dulled his sufferings. In **Matthew 27:48**, it states, *“a sponge...filled it with vinegar”* is lifted up for Him to  
70 drink. The most overt explanation of this comes from **John 19:28**, which states that Jesus requests a  
71 drink and says, *“I thirst.”* After drinking of the vinegar given to him, in **John 19:30**, Jesus says, *“It is*  
72 *finished.”* **When Our Lord speaks these words, He is not referring to His life or His mission, but He is**  
73 **referencing the meal started at the Last Supper.** Here on the cross, Jesus finishes the Passover meal,  
74 and drinks the fourth cup.

75 Focusing on the new and sacrificial Passover, in his book mentioned previously, Brant Pitre says, *“In*  
76 *short, by means of the Last Supper, Jesus transformed the Cross into a Passover, and by means of the*  
77 *Cross, he transformed the Last Supper into a sacrifice.”*

78 SOURCES:

79 Hahn, Scott, and James Socías. “The Cup of Consummation.” *Understanding the Scriptures: A Complete*  
80 *Course on Bible Study*. Woodridge, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2005. Print.

81 Pitre, Brant James. *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*

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