

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS CHIRST:
Where Is My Guest Room?: Mark 14:12-26

Today we celebrate Corpus Christi — the Body and Blood of Christ. It is one of the biggest challenges Catholics have today because our culture seems not to believe something is real unless we see it for ourselves. However, with faith we can't use the motto: "seeing is believing." We have to reverse that motto to: "Believing is seeing," for if we take on faith what Jesus said, we will someday see it to be true. In Dostoevski's masterpiece *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* there is a scene in a courtroom after Dmitri has been sentenced to imprisonment in Siberia. He is so exhausted that he falls asleep on a bench. When he awakens, he finds that someone has placed a pillow under his head. He doesn't know who has done the kind deed, but he is overjoyed. It is a sign of the goodness of life. He will go to prison, he says, and keep God's name alive there, because he knows that God is alive in the world. The nameless, anonymous, selfless act of someone who did him that small kindness is a guarantee of that. During Jesus' last days, someone did him an anonymous kindness, also. Someone gave Him a room in which to celebrate the Last Supper with His friends. "Say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, where is my guest room?....'" (Mark 14:14) In the Interpreter's Bible, Halford Luccock says: "This householder deserves more recognition and honor than he has ever received. He played a large part in keeping furnished and ready the place where the Last Supper was held. He was not a part of that spiritual event; but he made it possible in a physical sense. He made a real and great contribution to all that it meant in the last days of Jesus and in all the days and years of subsequent history."—*Halford Luccock, (THE INTERPRETER'S BIBLE, New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951, p. 873)*

Note the striking similarity between this passage and the one we read on Palm Sunday, just before Easter, where Jesus sends someone ahead to get a donkey at Bethphage, instructing them only to tell the owner that "**the Lord has need**" of it. And immediately the donkey was given to the disciples for Jesus' use. (Mark 11:1-10) Evidently, Jesus had a secret "underground" - friends and followers who lived in Bethphage and in Jerusalem, men and women upon whom he could count when there was need. During time of war the "*underground*" is the name given to freedom fighters who live under a foreign tyranny, a foreign occupying power, but who all along maintain their firm loyalty to their own country, and work diligently to undermine the current regime in power. In some sense, that is exactly what the early Christians were, living in the Roman Empire. For the most part they were decent, law-abiding citizens of the Roman Empire - indeed, St. Paul seems to have traded on his Roman citizenship to get himself out of several scrapes!

The earliest Christians were good citizens of the State - unless their loyalty to Christ put them in conflict with their loyalty to Caesar. Then they knew exactly what must be done. As Peter said on one occasion. "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) There is a fascinating letter which was written within fifty years of the New Testament period called "*The Epistle of Diognetus.*" In it, the writer says: "Christians...dwell in cities of Greeks and barbarians as the lot of each is cast, and follow the native customs in dress and food and other arrangements of life, yet the constitution of their citizenship which they set forth, is marvelous, and confessedly contradicts expectation. They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers.

Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign... Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven." In other words, they are members of a "Christian underground," who know that while they live as citizens of this world, their primary loyalty is to that realm of which Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords...and their primary purpose is to try to make this world conform to that heavenly one; And so they pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN." Which, when you think about it, is a rather revolutionary prayer!! According to Jewish law, Passover pilgrims might ask any homeowner for the use of a room for celebration of the Feast. But there is something more at work here. The whole thing seems to have been

pre-arranged, set up in advance. Jesus evidently had a group of friends in the city upon whom He could count in time of need. I wonder: **Does Jesus Christ have an “underground” at work here in our community of Lansing? Men and women upon whom He can count? Men and women, who, when the chips are down, are willing to do what the old Gospel hymn says: “Stand up, stand up for Jesus?”**

What a beautiful story St. Mark gives us in these few verses in Chapter 14. The story of a man who made sure that Jesus had a place to celebrate the Passover meal. It may have been in a private home, or it may have been in an institution such as an Essene monastery. Jesus was not an Essene, but He knew that they would have a room ready for the Passover celebration because they followed a different calendar from the mainstream Jews of Jerusalem. There is a hint that this man in the city was a monk because he was carrying a water-jar. In those days before women’s liberation, that was strictly women’s work. And what strong women they must have been—balancing huge jars filled with water on their heads! They can be seen in the Middle East even today—carrying burdens with seeming effortless ease, burdens that would make the hardest man cringe with the effort.

This man with the water jar took the disciples to the householder who made it possible for Jesus to have a quiet place for His last meal with His friends. What were these men’s names? We do not know. Jesus, like every great leader had His public followers...persons whom He called to be apostles, preachers, and teachers. But as you read the Gospels, other shadowy figures emerge, unnamed persons, persons who come upon the scene for a brief moment, and are then heard of no more. Persons whose lives come into contact with Jesus for but a brief instant, and then vanish into the vast darkness of history. There was the woman who anointed Jesus’ head with precious oil. (Mark 14:3-9). Then there was a man who was conscripted into carrying Jesus’ cross on the way to Calvary. (Mark 14:21). And there was the soldier who pressed a sponge to Jesus’ lips on the cross, over the objections of his fellow soldiers. (Mark 15:36) Like a shooting star, each comes upon the scene for a brief instant, and then is heard of no more. To this group of people this “householder,” “keeper of the household,” belongs. This man shared his home with Jesus. And we don’t even know his name! He was an “anonymous” donor.

Have you ever stopped to think how much we owe to “brother and sister anonymous?” We do not know the name of this householder, so we call him “Anonymous.” How much “Anonymous” has done for the Church over the centuries! Often we see that word at the bottom of a poem or a piece of music. We even have books in our Bible written by Anonymous. Scholars tell us that the very last verses of Mark’s Gospel were lost, and that an unknown disciple finished the work by adding his own ending to it. We do not know for sure who wrote the Letter to the Hebrews or the Letter to the Ephesians. In the Hebrew Bible, there are at least three authors at work in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. They were undoubtedly students of the original prophet, but we have no record of their names. They were anonymous.

So—Brother Anonymous has given us a lot. Somebody (Anonymous, perhaps), once said that there is no limit to the good a person can do, if that person cares not who gets the credit. And it is true. We wish we knew more about this unknown “householder” of whom Mark speaks. Just when and where he first came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth we do not know. We are not even sure that He ever became a true follower of Rabbi Jesus. But this much we do know: when Jesus had a need, he met that need. It doesn’t matter that we do not know the man’s name. God knows.

“Where is my guest room?” The Greek word here is the same as was used in Luke’s Christmas story. That is why we surmise that it was an “institutional” room. But there may be another parallel as well. There was no room at the inn at Bethlehem—No room!?? **“Where is my guest room?” The question comes down the centuries to haunt us. Is there room in our hearts, homes, lives for Jesus of Nazareth?** Not only during the high holy seasons of Advent and Lent, but throughout the year? Is there room - or are we already overcrowded? Too busy and too preoccupied to make room for Jesus in our lives?

Some folks make it a practice to keep a guest book in their homes. They ask their guests to write their names in a guest register. If this householder had kept such a record, in his later years, he might have

looked back in it and discovered that on Thursday night, June 6th, in the year 30 AD, Jesus Christ was his guest. And Jesus asks to be our guest, as well.

I came across an old story the other day. I heard it years before, but had forgotten the details. It seems that a pastor was making house calls, and knocked on the door of the home of a new family of prospective members. He heard some rustling about inside, but no one answered the door. So he left his card in the door, but first he wrote on it: "Revelation 3:20." That verse says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." The following Sunday, as he was shaking hands, the woman whose house he had visited the previous week returned his card to him with the notation: "Genesis 3:10." Hurriedly, he went into his study and opened his Bible, and read Genesis 3:10: Do you know what it says? "I heard thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." So goes the perils of pastoral calling! "Revelation"—that strange book at the end of the Bible, gives us the promise that God is standing at the door of our hearts. He is knocking on the door, but He will not knock down the door. Most of us have seen a copy of Holman Hunt's famous painting of "Christ knocking at heart's door." If we look carefully, we note that there is no handle on that door. When asked why he did not put a handle on the door, the artist is reported to have said: "**It is the door to the human heart. It can only be opened from the inside.**" But to those who open, a grand and glorious fellowship awaits! Amen.