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The New Covenant and the Eucharist



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The New Covenant and the Eucharist

The New Covenant Announced by the Prophets and the Typology of the Covenants

We have seen last week that the New Covenant was announced explicitly by the prophet Jeremiah in 31:31–34:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

This text is quoted in Hebrews 8:8–12, in the context of explaining how Christ is the High Priest and Mediator of a more perfect covenant. Hebrews 8:6–7 states:

Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.

Hebrews 8:6 thus sees the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the New Covenant as lying essentially in the difference of their respective promises. We have seen that the blessings and curses associated with the Mosaic covenant are essentially temporal in nature and center on temporal prosperity and possession of the land of Israel as the land in which God would be present in their midst in His sanctuary. These temporal promises are sensible figures of the full promise of God, which is realized in the world to come (in Hebrew: *olam ha-ba*).

In his commentary on Hebrews 8:6, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the New Covenant differs from the Old primarily in the supernatural and eternal quality of its promises:

For every priest is a mediator. But this mediator is of a better covenant, namely, that of man to God. For it is of the mediator to bring together extremes. But this minister carried us to divine things because through Him we are made sharers of the divine nature, as it is said in 2 Pet 1:4. He also offers us to God. And therefore, the Apostle says in 1 Tim 2:5, “There is . . . one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Then, temporal things were promised. Isaiah 1:19: “If you be willing, and will hearken to Me, you shall eat the good things of the Land.” Now, however, heavenly things

are promised, as was said above. In such a way therefore, is this New Testament better, according to that which the Lord promises to men. . . . And so the same precepts remain, but diverse promises. Likewise, the sacraments are diverse; because then there was a figure only; now, however, is the expressed truth of the figures. Therefore, in all things is the latter testament better.¹

The New Covenant has blessings and curses much more awesome than those of the Old Testament, for they are supernatural and eternal rather than temporal, the fulfillment of the figure of the temporal promises. This can be seen above all in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. In this summary of the Kingdom that He has come to inaugurate and of its New Law, Christ begins with the promise of heavenly beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5). The second beatitude promises the meek “inheritance of the land.” The context shows that does not refer to the physical land of Israel, but the heavenly homeland it prefigures.² The third beatitude promises consolation for those who mourn, referring to a heavenly and eternal reward. The fourth and fifth beatitudes promise the plenitude of justice and mercy that we shall obtain in the Kingdom of God. The sixth beatitude is more explicit, promising the vision of God to the pure in heart. This is the essence of our heavenly beatitude: to see God face to face. The peacemakers are promised the beatitude of being children of God. The eighth and last beatitude for those who suffer persecution for the sake of the Kingdom promises the same reward as is promised to the poor in spirit: “for theirs is the Kingdom of God.”

This promise of a heavenly reward is found again in the sublime teaching of our Lord to His Apostles at the Last Supper. He solemnly tells them: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you: because I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be” (Jn 14:2–3).³

The beatific vision promised to the pure in heart by Jesus is explained also by St. Paul and St. John. In 1 Corinthians 13:9–12, St. Paul writes:

For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. . . . For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then

1 St. Thomas, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ch. 8, lect. 2, §392, trans. Baer, p. 168.

2 This is drawn from Ps 37:3, 9, 10, 22, 34, in which the promise of the land also seems to refer to more than a physical possession.

3 Douay-Rheims version.

face to face. Now I know in part; *then I shall understand fully*, even as I have been fully understood.

And St. John says in 1 John 3:2: “We know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Similarly, the New Covenant has curses for infidelity which are not temporal and material, but spiritual and eternal. In fact, the curses are immeasurably more to be feared. Jesus speaks of the fires of hell on numerous occasions. He speaks of the unprofitable servants that are to be cast into the “outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:31).⁴ In the solemn representation of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25:32–46, Jesus manifests the eternal reward for the persevering practice of charity, and the eternal consequences for its grave lack:

And all nations shall be gathered together before him, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. . . . Then he shall say to them also that shall be on his left hand: Depart from me, you cursed into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me not to eat. . . . And these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just, into life everlasting.

Why was heavenly beatitude not explicitly promised as the blessing of the Old Covenant, but only in figure? For two principal reasons. First, heavenly beatitude was merited for mankind by the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. Hence He says that “No one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Therefore, only the New Covenant established in the blood of Christ, by which all grace was merited, could beatitude be promised as the reward of fidelity to the covenant. This does not mean that the faithful of Israel could not have received grace and glory. However, they received grace not through the merits of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, but through the merits of the Sacrifice of Christ, after which the gates of beatific vision were open to all mankind who died in a state of grace awaiting redemption in the limbo of the just.

A second reason for the difference of the promises and curses is typological. As parents teach children virtue through sensible rewards and punishments, so the divine pedagogy has taught men about spiritual and supernatural realities in a way fitting to human nature, through the images of sensible realities. In order to teach fidelity, He wished to teach it first in a way more easily learned, through physical rewards and punishments. The Promised Land flowing with milk and honey is a sensible and material *figure* of the vision of God in the Kingdom. Exile from the land and the destruction of the Temple of God’s Indwelling is a figure of the definite loss of the divine Indwelling, and exile from His presence, for all eternity in hell. In Galatians 3–4, St. Paul speaks of the Old Covenant

under the image of a tutor or pedagogue leading to Christ and preparing for His coming in the fullness of time.

The difference between the character of the two covenants and their promises is described in Hebrews 12:18–24.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. . . . But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

The differences between the covenants outlined are threefold. First, the Old Testament—because its promises, curses, and rites are figurative or typological—has a sensible character. Thus Hebrews 12:18 says that the faithful in the New Covenant “have not come to what may be *touched*.” The New Covenant is founded on invisible promises that cannot be touched, being essentially eschatological and supernatural.

Secondly, the New Covenant is founded on the sprinkled blood of Christ that speaks “more graciously” than the blood of Abel because it has merited eternal life for all who die in the grace of the covenant through faith in its promise. The sacrifices of the Old Covenant, since they were offerings of brute animals and other created elements,⁵ could not merit grace in themselves,⁶ although they prefigured the grace that was to be merited in the “fullness of time” on Calvary.

Third, the assembly to which the faithful are gathered in the New Covenant is not limited to this earth, but includes those already made perfect, glorying God in the heavenly liturgy of the Church triumphant. All those who died in the grace of God in the Old Covenant have become recipients of the glory of the New Covenant. This is the profound sense of Christ’s Descent into the “hell” (which refers to the Limbo of the Just or Abraham’s bosom) on Holy Saturday. Christ went to bring the faithful of Israel who preceded Him into the fulfillment of all of God’s covenantal promises, merited by His Blood. Thus all of God’s covenants reach their fulfillment in the New Covenant alone.

Not only does the New Covenant have new and definitive promises and curses, it is also founded on a new and

⁵ See Gal 4:3–5: “So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

⁶ See Heb 10:4: “For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.”

⁴ See also Mt 24:51.

definitive Exodus, of which the original Exodus is but a type: Christ's Paschal mystery.⁷ Here the liberation is not from the tyranny of Pharaoh and hard labor, but from the tyranny of sin and its consequences.

The New Law of Christ

The New Covenant also has a New Law. This does not consist essentially in new precepts. Rather the moral precepts already contained in the double commandment and the Ten Commandments and other parts of the Torah, are written on the heart through grace and the sacraments, and exemplified in the life of Christ, the living Torah. In other words, the essence of the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit to live the life of Christ, which comes to us principally through sacramental channels. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1966 explains: "The New Law is the *grace of the Holy Spirit* given to the faithful through faith in Christ. It works through charity; it uses the Sermon on the Mount to teach us what must be done and makes use of the sacraments to give us the grace to do it." The New Law of Christ has a new ceremonial law, a new priesthood, and a new Sacrifice: the Eucharist—that stands at the heart of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant and the Institution of the Eucharist

Christ Himself speaks of the New Covenant in the most decisive moment of His teaching. Just before the institution of the Eucharist, in Luke 22:28–30, Jesus said to His Apostles: "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I covenant to you, as my Father covenanted to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."⁸

He then went on, in the words of consecration over the chalice, to speak directly of the New Covenant in His Blood. We have these words in four different versions. Luke 22:20 gives us Christ's words over the chalice as follows: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."⁹ Matthew and Mark transmit another tradition. Matthew 26:28 gives these words: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."¹⁰

⁷ See Luke 9:31, in which at Christ's Transfiguration, the Apostles see Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus about His "exodus which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem."

⁸ Translation from Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2009), 217. The Greek of Luke 28:29 twice uses the verb (διατίθημι) associated with "covenant" (διαθήκη): *καὶ γὰρ διατίθημαι ὑμῖν, καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν.*

⁹ See also 1 Cor 11:25: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

¹⁰ See Mark 14:24: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Jesus clearly meant His words to bring to mind two decisive texts from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:31, which uses the expression "new covenant," and Exodus 24:8, which speaks of the "blood of the covenant" sealed on Mt. Sinai. As we have seen in the ninth talk, the Mosaic Covenant was sealed at the foot of Mt. Sinai with the blood of many oxen. In Exodus 24:5–8, burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen were offered, and the blood was gathered in basins. Half of the blood was poured out on the altar, and the other half "poured out" or sprinkled on the people after they promised to be faithful to the covenant: "And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Ex 24:8).

Just as the Old Covenant was sealed with sacrificial blood poured out and sprinkled on the people, so too the New Covenant is sealed with blood which is then given to the people. The difference lies in the victim whose blood is poured out. The victim in the New Covenant is not a multitude of irrational beasts, but the Messiah, the Son of God made man, who, in the words of St. Paul, "loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The Eucharist and the Indwelling of God

At the heart of the Mosaic Covenant was the magnificent promise of God's indwelling with His people in the Tent of Meeting, and then in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This overshadowing presence of God in His sanctuary is referred to by Jews as the *shekinah*, which is derived from the Hebrew verb *shachan*: "to dwell or abide." The *shekinah* was manifested first on Mt. Sinai in a cloud of glory and a devouring fire, from which God spoke to Moses.¹¹ The cloud of glory marking God's "dwelling" with Israel later covered the Tent of Meeting that housed the Ark of the Covenant.¹² Through the presence of the sanctuary, the whole of Israel was sanctified with God's indwelling presence. In Numbers 35:34, God says: "You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel." The loss of this divine indwelling was the greatest tragedy of Exile. As Abraham Heschel writes: "In joy and in grief Zion is never absent from our thoughts."¹³

In the New Covenant, the divine Indwelling of the Lord in His Church immeasurably surpasses even that of the

¹¹ See Ex 24:16–17: "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."

¹² See Deuteronomy 4:7: "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?"

¹³ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 62.

glory of the Mosaic covenant. God’s mysterious indwelling in the Tent of Meeting and in the Holy of Holies in the Temple was a figure of the supreme indwelling that is totally unique: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14). It is not by accident that John chose the word “dwell” (from the root σκηνη), which literally means to “dwell as in a tent.” This term recalls the dwelling of God with His people through the *shekinah* in the tabernacle (translated into Greek by the term σκηνη) that housed the Ark.¹⁴

Joseph Ratzinger, in *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, comments on John 1:14:

The man Jesus is the dwelling-place of the Word, the eternal divine Word, in this world. Jesus’ “flesh,” his human existence, is the “dwelling” or “tent” of the Word: the reference to the sacred tent of Israel in the wilderness is unmistakable. Jesus is, so to speak, the tent of meeting—he is the reality for which the tent and the later Temple could only serve as signs.¹⁵

And since the humanity of Jesus is truly and substantially contained in the Blessed Sacrament, the Tent of Meeting is a sign prefiguring not only the Incarnation, but also the Eucharist and every church housing the Blessed Sacrament through which Christ “dwells” with the entire Church militant. Whereas the *shekinah* was present in Israel only in the Temple, the Real Presence of the Incarnate God is available to us in the New Covenant in every tabernacle in every parish throughout the whole world. But this very glory of the New Covenant is also our shame if we neglect to honor this divine madness of love by frequently visiting the God who dwells in our midst with such divine liberality.¹⁶

Part II. Christ and the New Covenant Fulfills God’s Purpose in Creation and All Prior Covenants

All of the principles that govern creation and covenant that we have examined in the course of this lecture series are completely fulfilled in Christ, His Paschal mystery, and the New Covenant He established in His Blood. In 2 Corinthians 1:20, St. Paul says of Christ that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him.” Similarly, in Ephesians 1:9–10, St. Paul writes: “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

¹⁴ Jn 1:14 also recalls Sir 24:8: “Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’”

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), 11.

¹⁶

The Greek word in Ephesians 1:10 that the RSV translates as “unite” is literally “recapitulate.” This means “to bring things back to their head.” Christ recapitulates all things in Himself by being the Goal for all of salvation history. Everything before the Incarnation was a preparation for and prefigurement of Christ, and everything after Him is to be conformed to His image in the Church, which shall finally be brought into the splendor of His glory. Christ can be the recapitulation of everything because in His Person He unites two natures: human and divine. Through His humanity He recapitulates human history, especially the history of Israel, and gives it a divine dignity of which we are invited to become partakers in the Church.

St. Irenaeus put great emphasis on this notion of “recapitulation” in *Against the Heresies*, and it becomes perhaps the key element of his theological synthesis. He stresses that Christ recapitulates salvation history, for it is all modeled on Him as the Exemplar:

But when He became flesh and was made man, He recapitulated the long history of men in Himself, granting us salvation in brief compass, so that what we had lost in Adam, i.e., to be, according to the image and likeness of God, this we might recover in Christ Jesus.¹⁷

And again:

There is, then, one God, the Father, . . . and there is one Christ Jesus our Lord, who came throughout the entire dispensation and who recapitulated in Himself all things. Among these “all things” is also man, the moulded figure of God. So, He has recapitulated man also in Himself, the Invisible become visible, the Incomprehensible, comprehensible, the Impassible, capable of suffering, the Word, man, recapitulating all things in Himself so that, just as the Word of God has the primacy among supercelestial and spiritual and invisible beings, so also He should be first among visible and corporeal beings and, taking into Himself this primacy and also giving Himself as head to the Church, He might draw all things to Himself at a suitable season.¹⁸

Maximum Manifestation of God’s Goodness

In the first part of this lecture series we looked at the principles that underlie God’s creation of the world. First, we saw that God’s purpose in creation is to maximally manifest and communicate Himself outside of Himself. All of creation manifests some similarity with God, but, outside of Christ, it also falls infinitely short of fully manifesting who God is.

The Incarnation allows God to perfectly and infinitely manifest and communicate Himself. In the Incarnation, God does not merely give a limited and finite participation, but He gives and communicates His very self as the Emmanuel—God personally entering into His creation by

¹⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.18.1, translation in Paul Quay, *Mystery Hidden for Ages in God* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 193.

¹⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.16.16-17, in Quay, *Mystery Hidden for Ages in God*, 191-192

assuming a created human nature so as to dwell personally among us, and then give Himself to us by dying for us on the Cross. Nothing else that God could do could so manifest the divine goodness, nor so communicate it.

Furthermore, in the Incarnation and the New Covenant, God gives Himself to us in such a way that we are able to be incorporated into His Body in the Church. The Incarnation is not only the maximum communication of God, but it is a communication that is maximally open to incorporating other subjects—potentially all men—into the life of the Son of the God in the Church.

Headship

In the second talk we looked at headship and hierarchy in creation. We saw that God created the world in a hierarchical way, with various levels of participated headship, each of which is given a mission of mediating God's blessings to others. Man is head over the rest of material creation. Adam was given a primordial headship and responsibility of mediation over mankind as a whole, which was the mission of passing on the state of divine friendship to future generations, and he failed in that mission. Every level of society also has a form of headship.

The rest of human history is the longing for the restoration of a new headship that would restore and redeem the failed headship of Adam. Already Genesis 3:15 gave our first parents and their descendants hope in that future restoration of headship. The covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David all pointed to that future restoration, but did not yet accomplish it. In Israel, the patriarchs, Moses, priests, prophets, and kings all exercised a form of headship and mediation that prefigured Christ in different ways. Only the Incarnation, however, is capable of giving mankind a new Head—a new Adam—infinately greater than the first, who is capable not merely of restoring what was lost, but in the process, of giving us an immeasurably greater glory than that possessed by our first parents. He alone who is King of all men—by nature and by conquest on the Cross—is capable of instituting a human society with a perfect headship, in which all are enabled to participate. He proclaimed this society as the Kingdom of God, which is also called the Church. In this kingdom all the faithful participate in Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly headship.

Complementarity

Another principle that we examined in understanding creation is complementarity. One of the beauties of God's work is the complementarity of different levels of creation and different created gifts. Christ's perfect headship does not take away the complementarity of creation, but perfects it by elevating that complementarity of created gifts into relationship with Himself. All of the saints, starting with His mother, manifest vastly different realizations of configuration with or imitation of Christ, and of bridal

union with Him. There are as many ways of being a bride of Christ as there are created persons.

Christ likewise does not annul the different cultural gifts of the various nations, but enables them all—insofar as they are not intrinsically disordered—to be elevated and incorporated into the life of the Church, enriching her. The Church is “catholic” precisely because she is called to receive all nations and cultures into herself without losing her own essence and identity. On the contrary, her identity is rather enriched by the complementarity of cultural gifts put in her service to build up the heavenly Jerusalem.

Christ and the Problem of Evil

We have also seen that a necessary consequence of the masterpieces of creation—rational creatures endowed with fallible created freedom—is the possibility of moral evil. God does not refrain from the work of creation because His free creatures may misuse their created freedom. He remains faithful even if we are unfaithful. However, God has a perfect plan to conquer sin and its effects, and that plan is the Incarnation and the New Covenant in Christ's Blood that is realized in the Church.

The Transcendental Properties of Being

In the fifth talk we looked at the transcendental properties of all being, among which are unity, truth, goodness, and beauty. We saw that all creation is marked by some share in these properties, but in a hierarchical way. The higher the level of creation, the greater the possibility of unity, truth, goodness, and beauty. However, a failure of correspondence with God's plan also means that the higher levels of creation have a greater possibility of the anti-transcendentals: disunity, falsity, evil, and ugliness.

Christ's mission is to conquer these four anti-transcendentals and establish a supernatural unity, truth, goodness, and beauty in His kingdom. He Himself as the Word Incarnate embodies these qualities such that He is not merely another finite grade of perfection, truth, goodness, and beauty, but, as He said to Thomas at the Last Supper, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Similarly, He is Beauty itself. If the whole of creation is marked by beauty, that beauty culminates in the Word Incarnate. In his discussion of the Persons of the Trinity, St. Thomas Aquinas remarks that beauty, although proper to the whole Trinity, is appropriated in a special way to Christ, as power is appropriated to the Father, and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. The Son of God is associated with beauty, both in His divinity and His humanity, because He is the perfect image of the Father—“the image of the invisible God”—in which nothing is lacking. Similarly, Christ is not merely one who participates in being. He alone in the world can say properly: I AM.

Christ Fulfills the Essence of All Covenants Between God and Man

In the second part of this lecture series we looked at the covenants between God and man. One scholar characterizes the notion of covenant in the ancient world as “an extension of family relations across family lines.”¹⁹ Applying this idea of extended family relations to God’s covenants with man, we can understand God’s covenants as the extension of inter-Trinitarian “family” relations (sonship and self-giving spousal love) outside of God by a supernatural adoption of man to share in divine sonship, and to have a bridal relationship with God, and thus to have a place in the Trinitarian life and communion. The Church is the gathering of mankind into communion with the Son of God through the Holy Spirit, establishing us as sons of the Father, and brides of the Son in the Spirit. All the covenants prefigured and promised this reality, but could not yet realize it, for its realization required the Incarnation of the Son of God and His paschal mystery.

Christ Superabundantly Restores Eden

The brief picture of God’s original covenant with man in Eden shows man in a state of primordial friendship with God—walking with Him in the Garden in the cool of the day. We saw that this covenant had an essential condition, which can be summarized as not seeking dominion over good and evil, but receiving the moral law as God’s gift. Fidelity to that condition would give man abiding access to the Tree of life. This could be understood as the preternatural gift of immortality. However, it is better to see it as signifying the gift of participation in the divine life given by sanctifying grace. Infidelity to the covenant meant the loss of that access.

The New Covenant and the seven sacraments of the Covenant, particularly the Eucharist, restore that access to the Tree of Life in Christ.

Christ Fulfills the Promises Given to Abraham

The covenant with Abraham was essentially a covenant of promise. The promise had three objects: his descendants would become a great nation; they would be given the land, and from them would come a blessing for all nations. The first two promises are realized in Israel. The final promise, however, is realized only in the Incarnation of the Son of God, His Paschal mystery, and the founding of His Church in which all nations are incorporated into communion with God in Christ. The principal promise of the covenant with Abraham is thus entirely ordered to the New Covenant.²⁰

19 M. S. Smith (“Your People Shall Be My People”: Family and Covenant in Ruth 1:16–17,” *CBQ* 69 [2007] 252, quoted in Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 28n127.

20 The promise of the great multitude of descendants is also far more abundantly fulfilled in the New Covenant, in which all the faithful

Christ as the Living Torah Fulfills the Mosaic Covenant

In the talk on the Mosaic covenant, we saw that it has a different character than the Abrahamic covenant. The focus here is not principally a future promise of blessing, but the constitution of the people of God in the present with a Law received from above through the hands of Moses. Fidelity to the Torah is the condition of the covenant, which is accompanied with a graphic series of blessings for fidelity and curses for infidelity.

Christ fulfills the Mosaic covenant in several fundamental ways. First of all, He is the living Torah who shows in His own Person and in all of His acts what fidelity to the double commandment of love means in practice. Secondly, He sends the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and in the sacraments of the Church He founded so that the Torah is engraved upon the heart. Third, in the sacrifice of His life on Calvary, perpetuated in the Eucharist, He is the one true sacrifice prefigured in all the sacrifices of Israel.

Fourth, He is the new Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18, and all His oral teaching completes and puts a capstone on all God’s Revelation. Other prophets speak God’s words as coming from another Person—God. Christ alone speaks in His own name as the Lord incarnate. In this way, God’s Revelation to mankind is given the most perfect consummation. Here God speaks not through another, but through Himself through the assumption of a human nature as His own.

Christ Fulfills the Davidic Covenant

Finally, Christ fulfills the Davidic covenant because He is the Son promised to David who would call on God as His Father, receive an eternal kingdom, build the definitive Temple of God’s dwelling with mankind in His humanity, and receive the Gentiles as His inheritance.

The New Covenant, the Family, and the Eucharist

We have also seen that of all created realities, marriage and the family most perfectly manifest the Trinity and the divine love. Christ came to establish in each of us a supernatural spousal relationship with respect to Himself, and a filial relationship with respect to His Father. The supernatural order is precisely the order in which mankind enters into a relationship with God that is not merely creature to Creator, but son to Father, and bride to Bridegroom. This new relationship is only possible on the basis of sanctifying grace and charity. Sanctifying grace gives us a most mysterious participation in the divine nature such that we can truly be called adopted sons of God, through sharing in His nature. Likewise, sharing in the divine nature enables us to have a sharing of life with God that makes possible

become sons and daughters of Abraham according to faith.

a true friendship with Him, a friendship that is so total that it must be spousal union.

This nuptial union is the heart of the New Covenant. Christ spoke of this mystical wedding in parables. How is the wedding to be realized? We can say that its realization has two moments. There is the final culmination in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the beatific vision in which we shall see the glory of the Lamb and be united to Him forever in a celestial eternal embrace. This is the goal of all of our hope, described enigmatically in the last chapters of Revelation.

However, that heavenly embrace was not to be entirely deferred for heaven. Our divine Spouse chose to consummate His nuptials with His Church even in the course of this life so that we would not faint from longing and weakness. But how was He to accomplish this mystical union with frail sinning men in this valley of tears, in which we walk by faith and not by vision? He did not wish to consummate His nuptials with us in such a way that would take away the merit of faith, or remove the essential conditions of our exile in the world in which we must fight the good fight of faith. The wisdom of God devised a wedding feast fit for her exiled bride that would not be inappropriate to her state of trial. And that feast, of course, is the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we receive the divine Bridegroom of our souls in the most intimate embrace that can be conceived, for we take Him into us as our spiritual nourishment and repast. However, instead of changing our divine food into ourselves, as we do with other food, here we become gradually transformed into the likeness of the Bread of Life, our Eucharistic Lord.

The Eucharist is a consummation of union of ourselves with our divine bridegroom. It is perfectly fitting to our present state of trial, for it is a union entirely realized in the plane of faith, a union that we cannot grasp with our external senses, conceive with our intellect, or demonstrate by any empirical means. It is a union that we believe, because it was taught to us and enjoined on us by the Word of Truth.

A rich analogy can be drawn between the Eucharist as the consummation of the New Covenant, and the act proper to the marital covenant by which the spouses unite themselves in one body. As the conjugal act has two meanings: unitive and procreative, so the Eucharist can be said to have these two meanings. It unites us with the Bridegroom in the most intimate way, and nourishes us with an infusion of charity to enable us to exercise spiritual maternity/paternity in the world, until the Bridegroom returns.