

DID JESUS EAT THE PASSOVER ON HOLY THURSDAY?

Dear Father:

A few days ago, Father Johannes and my weakness were visiting some people, when a discussion arose about whether-in the Last supper- Jesus used leavened bread (as we say,) or unleavened bread (as the Catholics say.) Father Johannes asked me to write down what was said and send it to our fathers the priests by Fax. I am sending this along out of obedience to Father Johannes.

The argument arises from the Catholics' contention that Covenant Thursday was the Preparation day and that Good Friday was the Passover day. The Orthodox, based on sound interpretation of the Scriptures, believe that Good Friday was the Preparation day and that Saturday was the Passover day.

The Preparation day, i.e. the day before Passover, was the day in which the Jews consumed all leavened bread and burned the left overs, so that, come 6 p.m., when Passover starts, there would be no leavened bread in the house. It was also the day on which the Passover lamb is slain and roasted so that it would be eaten in the evening, i.e. when Passover starts (at 6:01 p.m.)

According to the Catholics, since Covenant Thursday was the Preparation day, then at the Last Supper which took place on the evening i.e. at the start of the Passover, there would be no leavened bread in any Jewish house. The Last Supper would thus be a Passover meal, followed by the Institution of the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Orthodox teach that Good Friday was the Preparation day, that the Passover started on 6:01 p.m. on Good Friday, that Christ died on the Cross at the same hour the Jews slew their Passover lamb, and thus Christ became our Passover. (ICO 5:7) Because the Passover coincided with the Sabbath day (Saturday,) it was called a "High Sabbath." It follows then, that the Last supper was an ordinary meal, where ordinary leavened bread was consumed, and not a Passover meal when only unleavened bread would be used. Here are the proofs:

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat ... and it was the **preparation of the Passover** ... then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified." (John 19:13-16)

"The Jews therefore, because it was the **preparation**, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." (John 19:31)

"There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' **Preparation day** for the sepulchre was nigh at hand." (John 19:42)

"And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in the stone, wherein never man before was laid. **And that day was the preparation** and the sabbath drew on." (Luke 23: 53-54)

It is obvious that the trial of Jesus before Pilate, His crucifixion, the breaking of the legs of the two thieves, the and the burial of Jesus happened on the preparation day. Proof that Good Friday was the preparation day.

"Now **the next day, that followed the day of the preparation**, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." (Mat 27:62-64)

The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate the next day, after the burial, which is the day after the preparation, another proof that Good Friday was the day of preparation.

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

And they took counsel, **and bought with them the potter's field**, to bury strangers in.” (Mat 27:3-7)

“And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, **coming out of the country (literally, coming back from the field)**, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.” (Mark 15:21)

“And **he bought** fine linen, and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre.” (Mark 15:46)

If Good Friday was the Passover day, the chief priests could not have bought the potters field, nor could Joseph of Arimathea buy linen, nor would Simon the Cyrenian be working in the field, for it was unlawful to buy, sell or work during the Passover.

Now **before the feast of the passover**, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. **And supper being ended**, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

The Last supper and the washing of the feet of the disciples on Covenant Thursday happened BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER. So, the Last Supper could not have been the Passover meal.

“And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, **Buy those things that we have need of against the feast.**”(John 13:27-29)

If the Last Supper was the Passover meal, why would the disciples think that Jesus was telling Judas to buy the things needed for the feast?

“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but **that they might eat the Passover.**” (John 18:28)

On Good Friday, when Jesus was taken to Pilate. The Jews had not yet eaten the Passover, so, the Last Supper of Covenant Thursday could not have been a Passover meal.

“Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover.” (Exo 12:9-11)

The Passover meal had to be eaten in haste while they stood, during the Last Supper Jesus and the disciples were reclining. Also it was not lawful to kook it in water, but to eat it roasted, while in the Last supper Jesus dipped the bread in the plate, implying a meal cooked with water, which was forbidden.

Father Athanasius Iskander

Summarized from: Habib Guirguis: The Seven Sacraments of the Church.