

# The Last Supper & the Jewish Passover



**April 2012**

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At Mass on Holy Thursday night Catholics enter the journey of their Saviour who walked the path of suffering and death to resurrection. At home we may enter it also, with a Last Supper meal that draws the family into the rich symbolism of our Jewish and Christian heritage.

April 2012



## This Month...

- Su 1 **Palm Sunday**
- We 4 St Isidore
- Th 5 **Holy Thursday**
- Fr 6 **Good Friday**
- Sa 7 **Holy Saturday**
- Su 8 **Easter Sunday**
- We 11 St Stanislaus
- Su 15 **Divine Mercy Sunday**
- Mo 16 St Bernadette Soubrious
- Su 22 **Easter 3: Be my Witnesses**
- Mo 23 St George
- Th 26 St Mark
- Su 29 **Easter 4: The Good Shepherd**



The Passover Seder is the Jewish ritual feast held each year on the first night of the Passover festival. It celebrates the story of the Hebrew liberation from enslavement by the Egyptians and their coming together as a proud and beloved people of God – the Exodus.

The Passover Seder is an enormously significant event in the Jewish calendar. Passover was already celebrated for twelve centuries at the time of Jesus. It was one of three festivals for which observant Jews were required to go up to Jerusalem. Central to the Seder is the preparation of a lamb, the retelling of the Exodus story, the passing of the cup of wine and the eating of unleavened bread.

## What is the Passover?

The first Passover (Pesach in Hebrew) is documented in Chapter 12 of the book of Exodus. God promised to strike against the firstborn son in every household in Egypt, and the firstborn of their livestock, sparing the Hebrews who followed the Passover instructions. They had to take their best lamb for slaughter and use some of its blood to mark their front door with a hyssop branch. The angel of God would pass over the marked houses and leave the people inside unharmed. For the Egyptians it was the decisive stroke of misfortune and they immediately released the Hebrews from slavery. Blood, a hyssop branch, and a wooden post all featured at Jesus's death on the cross.

## The Last Supper

When Jesus met with his disciples to celebrate the Passover, he was already aware of his coming Passion. Thus the meal became infused with added meaning, as Jesus himself assumed the role of the sacrificial lamb, giving his body (bread) and shedding his blood (wine) for the salvation of all. Henceforth, followers of Jesus would make a vital link between the liberating act of God in the Exodus story and the salvation won through Christ's death and resurrection.

## Christian Traditions

As the early Church evolved and Christians came together to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, the traditions of Judaism shaped their practices of worship. This included the celebration which we know today as the Mass. Each time we celebrate Mass we connect with a history that extends to our Jewish ancestors in faith. Having a Last Supper meal at home is one way we might explore this rich heritage.



## **A Testimonial...**

***"Celebrating a Last Supper meal as a family helps us connect with the history of the Catholic Mass and is a powerful gathering point in Holy Week. We like the way that there is something for everyone to do from the youngest (asking the questions) to the oldest (leading the prayers). In sensitivity to the Jewish people for whom the Passover Seder is a sacred ritual, we don't attempt to replicate the ceremony as modern Jews practice it. Rather, we use the handout to connect with the story of Jesus' Passion recalling how he and his disciples as faithful Jews would have experienced the Passover feast."*** - Marie

### **Sources, Links & Further Reading:**

Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the secrets of the Last Supper by Brant Pitre

Pesach: Passover. Judaism 101. [www.jewfaq.org/holiday](http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday)

The Meaning of Passover. [www.chosenpeople.com](http://www.chosenpeople.com)

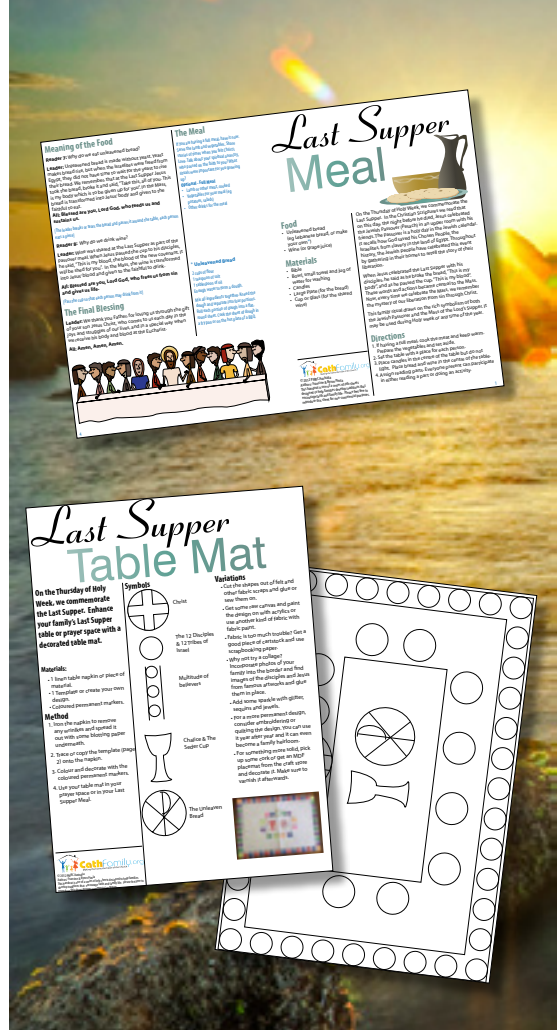
## Last Supper Meal

Connect with our Jewish heritage and celebrate Holy Thursday in a special way.

## Last Supper Table Mat

On the Thursday of Holy Week, we commemorate the Last Supper. Enhance your family's Last Supper table or prayer space with a decorated table mat.

On the Thursday of Holy Week, we commemorate the Last Supper. Make your family's last supper table or prayer space a little bit more special with a decorated table mat to sit under the bread and wine.



Print version

# No Time to Rise!

During the Passover, the Israelites did not have time to wait for their bread to rise as they had to escape from Egypt. Try your hand at making unleavened bread for your Last Supper meal.

## Unleavened Bread

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups of Flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- water

### Method:

1. Combine all ingredients in a bowl. Add just enough water to make a dough.
2. Knead the dough on a floured surface and separate it into four portions.
3. Roll the dough out into a flat disc about 5 mm thick.
4. Cook each disc either in a fry pan or on the hotplate of a BBQ.



# Washing of Feet

Francine & Byron Pirola

In the time of Jesus, washing was part of Jewish custom as a symbol of ritual purification. Washing is also part of the celebration of Catholic Mass today, when the priest's hands are washed and he prays:

*"Lord wash away my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."* (Ps 51:2)

The Gospel of John also recounts how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. We can assume that the disciples' feet were rather dusty and dirty from walking in open sandals, and that they understood the gesture by Jesus as one of radical humility. He thus demonstrated that in God's kingdom, leadership and greatness is determined by service to others, rather than by status, wealth or power. (see John 13:1-15)







This idea of servant leadership was also appreciated by St Paul, a devout Jew, who wrote in his letter to the Ephesians;

*"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her in order to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the Church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes so that she may be holy and without blemish."* (Eph 5: 25-27)

In an earlier verse he implored spouses to

*"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."*  
(Eph 5:21)

Thus, husbands and wives are called to mutual self-donation in imitation of Christ; to give of themselves in love to one another, just as Christ did for them; to purify themselves by addressing the sin and woundedness that separates them from each other and from God.

In practical terms, this means practising repentance as a daily discipline. Criticism, misunderstanding, superiority, teasing, selfishness, irritability... these are just some of the many ways that spouses wound each other. This month, commit to an end-of-day examination of conscience. Ask yourself: How have I failed to love and serve my spouse today? Lay your sins at Jesus' feet, and ask for forgiveness. Even if you never directly discuss this with your spouse, this practice will strengthen you to love with the servant heart of Jesus, drawing you and your spouse closer to God.

### **Daily Repentance:**

**How have I failed to love and serve my spouse today?**

**Pray: Lord Jesus, wash away my iniquity and cleanse me of my sin.**



### **Smartloving.org**

Resources and seminars for couples to enrich and energise their relationship.

# For More Resources

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Month of Mary**



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