

Nisan 14 ~ The Last Supper

Part 2: Water in the Passover Seder, the Eyrusin Ceremony, and the Liturgy



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Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples**

Ceremonial washing was an essential element of every Jewish holyday and ceremony. In the essay, [John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus](#), I proposed that baptism was a ceremonial washing or *mikveh*, and that Jesus' baptism represented the *mikveh* of the *Shiddukhin*, or the "marriage arrangement," between the Bridegroom, Christ, and the Bride, the baptized who are the Church. The next part of the traditional Jewish wedding was the Betrothal or *Eyrusin* ceremony. This ceremony would begin with the *Eyrusin mikveh*.

The betrothal of the groom and bride in the traditional Jewish wedding during Jesus' time was very much like the actual wedding ceremony except that the betrothed couple did not live with each other nor did they have sexual relations, yet in all other respects they were considered married. Prior to the betrothal ceremony the couple would separately take a ritual immersion in water (mikveh) symbolizing spiritual purification. Sometime after the mikveh the public Eyrusin ceremony would be held. The couple would stand under the huppah or canopy which represented the future home that the groom and bride would share together. The ceremony itself consisted of both the groom and bride-to-be making vows, exchanging rings, and sealing the arrangement with a cup of wine at the betrothal feast. (an excerpt from the essay, "The Eyrusin," from a collection of my essays entitled, "[Come, Let Me Show You the Bride](#)."

What I am proposing in this essay is that the Last Supper is not only Jesus' Passover Seder with His disciples, but it is also the betrothal ceremony between Him and His nascent Church. We would expect, therefore, to find elements of both the traditional Passover Seder and the *Eyrusin* or Betrothal ceremony in the Last Supper. So where in the Last Supper is the *Eyrusin mikveh*?

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,⁴ rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel.⁵ Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. (John 13:1-5)



The interior of the Cenacle (dining room) also known as the Upper Room. The Upper Room is considered by many Christians to be the first church building in Christendom. This room has been reconstructed numerous times throughout history including the Gothic columns, which were added by Crusaders. Later, when the Ottoman Muslim took over Jerusalem, the Upper Room was turned into a mosque and then later into a madrasa, or Islamic school.

A *mikveh* would have also been practiced prior to the Passover *Seder*, but it would have been primarily the washing of hands. Jesus, however, was doing something that would surpass the *seder* meal in combining it with the *Eyrusin* ceremony. The Bridegroom and the Bride would not take separate *mikvehs*, rather the Bridegroom, the Incarnate Word, would purify and sanctify His Bride.

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:25-27)

The Last Supper *mikveh*, like the Eucharistic sacrifice, was to be carried on in perpetuity.

¹² When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:1-17)

Jesus instructed His Apostles to carry on this tradition of washing one another's feet. The heirs to the Apostles are the bishops, priests, deacons, and religious. They are God's gifts to the Church to prepare His Bride so that She will attain to the measure and the stature of the fullness of the Bridegroom:

¹¹ And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Eph 4: 11-16)

Is something like the Passover and *Eyrusin mikveh* performed during the Liturgy of the Catholic and Orthodox churches? Yes. In the Catholic Church there is the tradition of placing a holy water font near the entrance of the church. When the faithful enter the church they dip their finger into the holy water and make the Sign of the Cross. This is a ritual washing, a *mikveh*, so that we might enter into the holy place of God's presence cleansed of the world and prepared to worship and to participate in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

It is also part of both Catholic and Orthodox liturgical tradition to have regular water cleansing in a ceremony known as the Asperges. I will discuss in detail the Asperges from the Catholic Tradition; the following is an excerpt from my *The New Roman Missal* (1945) by Father Lasance:



“The Asperges or sprinkling with holy water may be performed every Sunday immediately before High Mass. This water is blessed before the ceremony. The priest who is about to celebrate high Mass enters the sanctuary vested in alb and stole of the color of the Mass, accompanied on his left by an acolyte bearing the vessel of holy water. Arriving at the foot of the altar the priest while intoning the following anthem sprinkles the altar three times, then himself, and afterward his assistants. The he sprinkles the congregation....”



Priest: “Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, O Lord, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.”

Priest: “Show us, O Lord, Thy mercy.”

Response: “And grant us Thy salvation.”

Priest: “O Lord, hear my prayer.”

Response: “And let my cry come unto Thee.”

Priest: “The Lord be with you.”

Response: “And with thy spirit.”

Priest: “Graciously hear us, O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God; and vouchsafe to send down from heaven Thy holy angel, that he may watch over, foster, safeguard, abide with and defend all who dwell in this house. Through Christ Our Lord.”

Response: “Amen.”

There is also the *mikveh* of foot washing that is performed in many Christian communities on Holy (Maudy) Thursday. In fact, the “maudy” of Holy Thursday comes from the Latin *mandatum*, or command that Jesus gave to His disciples in the Upper Room to “love one another” shortly after He had washed His disciples feet: "*Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos*" ("I give you a new commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you"). We are all charged to be servants and wash one another's feet. In this way the Church, His Bride, grows and “upbuilds itself in love.” This is the Passover and Betrothal of the Bridegroom and the Bride made present in the Mass and the Divine Liturgy.