

Special points of interest:

- **Recommended Reading** - Suggestions for great reading materials.
- **Thoughtful Questions** - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

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THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT

Jerry Johnson

“Take this all of you and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.”

With these words, the consecration is completed. The bread and wine have become the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We've heard these words so many times before, but just what is this everlasting covenant that Jesus is speaking of? To begin with, the term itself can have different meanings depending on whom you ask. For some, especially in modern secular culture, a covenant is the same as a contract. But in scriptural terms the covenant is much, much more. As Dr. Scott Hahn explains in his book *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, a contract is based on a promise which is made binding by your signature, your name. It is an exchange of goods or services. A covenant, however, goes beyond a promise. It is made binding by an oath, a much stronger and more sacred form of commitment that invokes God's holy name for assistance or blessing. It also goes beyond an exchange of goods to an exchange of persons, of our very lives. This is why we consider marriage a covenant, rather than a contract. It is a total exchange of lives bound by a sacred oath invoking God's blessing. Dr. Hahn goes on to explain that our understanding of "covenant" is the key to understanding all of scripture and God's entire plan of salvation. The covenant relationship between God and his people is the common tie uniting all of salvation history. He has used these covenants to form

family bonds and to expand that family with each succeeding age. To go into the details of each of the covenants is beyond the scope of this article, so we will just give a quick overview. Each covenant had a mediator who took on a particular role and a sign by which the covenant was renewed and remembered. God made the first covenant with Adam in the form of a marital bond, under the sign of the Sabbath. With

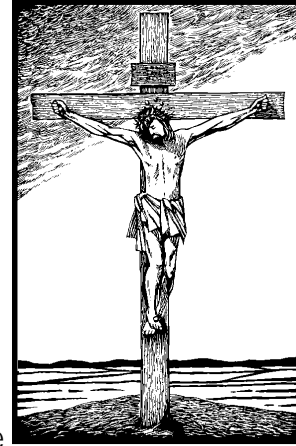
Noah in the role of a father, the next covenant expanded to a household with the rainbow as a sign. Next, the covenant with Abram, the chieftain, grew to a tribe with the sign of circumcision. This was followed by the Mosaic covenant with Moses as judge. God's people were now a nation and held the Passover as a sign. The fifth covenant was with David in the role of king. There was now a national kingdom and the throne of David was the sign. Through this progression of covenants God gradually prepared his people to receive the Messiah.

This brings us to the sixth and final covenant. This is the new and everlasting covenant, which completes and fulfills all of the previous covenants. This final covenant is the key to unlocking all of Sacred Scripture. As Mark Shea describes in his book *Making Senses Out of Scripture*, this covenant shines a light of understanding on each of the previous covenants. The mediator

of this covenant is Jesus himself, the God-Man and Royal High Priest who opened up the covenant to all people through his Catholic (universal) Church. Jesus sealed this covenant with his self sacrifice which began in the upper room at the last supper and was completed with his final words "it is finished" as he died on the cross. We enter into this covenant by our sacred oath at Baptism. As we commit by faith and offer our lives totally to Jesus, he offers us

forgiveness of sins and his life for eternity. He renews that gift, that covenant, each time we celebrate the Mass and receive his body, blood, soul and divinity in the Holy Eucharist. Through Christ and in his body, we are now in communion with the family of all believers in this new and everlasting covenant! This is not just a contract, not just an agreement! It goes far beyond that. It is holy, sacred and eternal. Thanks be to God!

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MARRIAGE IN THE NEW COVENANT



The covenant of marriage is to image the New Covenant between God and his people. This is why the traits of fidelity, permanence and total exchange of lives are to be exemplified in the Sacrament of Matrimony and in the marital act that seals the covenant.

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church...

1601 "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the

spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament."

1611 "Seeing God's covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People's conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage "

1612 The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way

all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for "the wedding-feast of the Lamb."

1639 The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . . even in the eyes of society." The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."

Sins against the marriage covenant are actions which intentionally impede or block the fidelity, permanence and total self-giving, such as adultery, divorce and contraception. (see CCC 1643-1654, 2370)

Thoughtful Questions

God is faithful and will always abide by the covenants he has made with his people. In response, are we living lives of faithful obedience in accord with the New Covenant?

If we are married, do we seek to build a covenant relationship that shows forth the fidelity, permanence and total self-giving that we promised in our vows to one another?

God, in the Trinity, is covenant. That perfect covenant family described by St. Augustine as the lover, the loved and love itself; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Do our families and our faith community express the covenant unity and love of the Trinity?

THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK

"This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds,'" -Hebrews 10:16

"Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God, who has indeed qualified us as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life." -2 Corinthians :5-6

"May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our Lord, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever (and ever). Amen." -Hebrews 13:20-21

Recommended Reading

For the Beginner...

A Father Who Keeps His Promises
by Scott Hahn

Making Senses out of Scripture
by Mark P. Shea

Rome Sweet Home
by Scott and Kimberly Hahn