

The Cup of Love

By Santiago Lange



In the first century, when a young Jewish man reached marrying age and his family selected an appropriate wife for him, the young man and his father would meet the young woman and her father to negotiate the "bride price", the figurative cost of replacing a daughter. The price was usually very high. With negotiations complete, the custom was for the young man's father to pour a cup of wine and hand it to his son. His son would turn to the young woman, lift the cup and hold it out to her, saying, "This cup is a new covenant in my blood, which I offer to you." In other words, "I love you, and I'll give you my life. Will you marry me?" The young woman had a choice. She could take the cup and return it and say no. Or she could answer without saying a word--by drinking the cup, her way of saying, "I accept your offer, and I give you my life in response."

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus and His disciples sat together celebrating Passover. The disciples knew the liturgy very well, they had celebrated Passover all their lives. When it came time to drink the third cup of wine, the cup of redemption, Jesus lifted the cup as the disciples would expect and offered traditional Sedar thanks, which are used to this day, "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, for giving us the fruit of the vine." And then He offered it to them but said something they probably did not expect: "This cup is a new covenant which I offer to you."

There are many meanings to that statement, but one of them, in common, ordinary language, was, "I love you, and the only picture I can think of that will describe the power of my love for you is the pure love of a husband for his wife." It is hard to know what those disciples thought that night. Maybe a few chuckled a bit at the picture of Jesus making a marriage proposal, which must have seemed totally out of place in a Passover Seder. And yet, they may have understood Jesus' willingness to die, be buried and eventually raised to say, "I love you, and as my Father promised your fathers, I'll pay the price for you."

In our daily battles, as we face our many pains and challenges, it is very encouraging to know that the resurrected Jesus loves us. He has paid a very high price for our relationship with Him. Whenever Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, we should be mindful of Jesus' offer. He still says, "I love you." He still says, "I offer you my life. Will you be my bride?" The "taking of the cup" is a deeply meaningful moment, for it is in that moment that one looks to the Heavenly Father and says, "Yes, I accept your love, and I give you my life in response."

May our life be a shining reflection of Christ's love for and in us.