



Ask, Father James:

What do we know about the Chalice that Jesus Christ drank from at the Last Supper?

This Holy Chalice, also known as the Holy Grail in some quarters has been the subject of great interest. It is seen as the cup that parted ways between the Jewish Passover and the Catholic Eucharist. The Jewish Passover was a ritual meal celebrated with four small cups of sacramental wine drunk by each member of the family at different stages of the ritual meal celebration - The Kiddush cup, the Haggadic cup, the Berakoth cup and the Consummation cup are shared. The question that is asked in Biblical research circles is whether at the Last Supper, there were four cups or thirteen cups (one for each participant as the paintings of the Last Supper by Leonardo Da Vinci indicates) or just the one cup that Jesus took, blessed and drank from and then gave to his disciples to drink. Evidence from scriptures says: "Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you." (Matthew 26:27).

Saint Paul clarifies this question thus; "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). What this means is that there was this one cup which Jesus gave the blessing over and gave to them saying; "This is my blood" (Mk 14:24a). Jesus then commands his apostles to "do this [ritual] in his memorial" (Luke 22:19b). This Eucharistic interpretation was a profound new level of meaning which pushed Jewish believers away from the Passover understanding allowing them to grow apart from its Jewish roots and to celebrate the Eucharist as the memorial of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection and not as a Passover.

Biblical legend suggested that the Last Supper was held in the house of Mary, the mother of St. Mark (a translator for Peter who wrote the Gospel according to Mark) and that St. Mark kept the cup. He took it with him when he accompanied St. Peter to Rome, where he continued to function as the apostle's secretary. Remember that it was to Mary's home that Peter found his way after his miraculous escape, for he knew that a company of believers had gathered there to pray for his release. Peter had a peculiar affection for the godly home. He called Mark, "his son" (see Acts 12:12; 1Peter 5:13). There was another legend that says that Joseph of Arimathea used this cup to collect Jesus' blood at his crucifixion. This was the man who went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid (Luke 23:50-53). The chalice or cup which Joseph used to collect the fluids is reported to be the same one used during the last supper. Joseph took the cup with him on his voyage to England and is said to have hidden it on the site at Glastonbury, at the bottom of a deep well, called the 'Chalice Well', or the 'Blood Well.'

The legend that the Vatican follows is that the chalice was supposedly sent by St. Lawrence

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from Jerusalem to Rome at the time of St. Peter and was used by the early popes. It arrived in Spain in 258 AD, to preserve it from pillaging during the persecutions under Valerian. It was hidden away during the Muslim invasions, reappearing in the eleventh century and was sent to the Monastery of Saint John of the Rock in 1071, where it stayed for three centuries and then went to Valencia. Two Popes, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, have held mass in Valencia with the chalice. Pope St. John Paul II celebrated Mass with it on November 8, 1985 and on July 8, 2006 Pope Benedict XVI venerated this Chalice in the cathedral of Valencia, Spain. This is the reason why, along with Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela, the Vatican designated Valencia as one of the world's 'Eight Holy Cities' and as a 'City of the Holy Grail'. *(St Lawrence was originally from Valencia. Pope Sixtus II ordained him a deacon in 257 AD and entrusted him with a position of trust - the care of the treasury and riches of the Church and the distribution of alms to the indigent. At the beginning of August 258, the Emperor Valerian issued an edict that all Bishops, priests and deacons be put to death - Pope Sixtus was captured and executed; the prefect of Rome of Rome demanded that Lawrence turn over the riches of the Church to the state. He asked for three days to gather the wealth and within those days he arranged for the chalice to be shipped off to Valencia. On the third day, he presented the indigent, the crippled, the blind, and the suffering, and declared that these were the true treasures of the Church).*

