

## Catholics Doing Seder Meals<sup>1</sup>

As we approach Holy Week, it is not unusual to see Catholic parishes, often the religious education programs, hosting a Seder Meal – the ritual meal that Jews celebrate to mark Passover. The intention, it would seem, is to show the connection between Eucharist and Passover.

It is true that there is an intimate connection between the Eucharist and the Passover. I would venture to say that one cannot fully grasp the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist without a basic understanding of the Exodus/Passover experience. It is no accident that on Holy Thursday, when we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, the first reading is about the Exodus/Passover event. It is also no coincidence that on Holy Saturday, in the Easter Proclamation (The Exsultet), we hear the words, "THIS is our Passover feast!"

Having said all that, however, there are some serious concerns about Catholics re-enacting the Seder Meal.

First and foremost, the **Seder Meal** is a sacred Jewish ritual. For Catholics to re-enact this sacred ritual is **disrespectful of the Jewish tradition**. (imagine Jewish or Muslim children re-enacting a Catholic Mass, complete with the giggling and awkward moments that are part of any childrens' production). The Seder Meal is a Jewish tradition that Catholics should enjoy only if we are privileged to be welcomed to a Jewish Passover table.

Second, we do not know for sure that Jesus was celebrating a Seder Meal with his disciples on the night before he died. The synoptic Gospels indicate that Jesus was celebrating Passover with his disciples, but we do not know for sure how Jews celebrated Passover in the First Century. To teach that Jesus ate a Seder Meal at the Last Supper can be misleading.

Third, hosting a Seder meal on Church property can be tricky. The Catholic Church has not approved of Seder meals as a public ritual or devotion. For a parish to host a Seder Meal may give the impression that Church approval exists for such functions where it does not.

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Paprocki's *Catechist's Journey*, <https://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2008/03/catholics-doing-seder-meals/>

If Catholics wish to learn more about the Seder Meal or participate in one, I recommend the following:

- Catholics can work with the Jewish community to invite speakers to come and explain the Seder Meal to a group of Catholics at the parish
- Catholics can arrange to join members of the Jewish community as they celebrate the Seder Meal.
- Since the Church has not expressly forbidden Catholic reenactments of the Seder Meal, Catholics are free to use their judgment as to whether it is appropriate to take part in a Seder Meal and, if they choose to do so, it would be more appropriate to do so in the privacy of their own homes with several families attending.

Here's a link to what the U.S. bishops have to say on the matter: **[God's Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching](#)** (1988)

Closing thought: It is encouraging that Catholics wish to learn more about our Jewish roots and such education will continue to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. I affirm this desire in all those who have been seeking to do Seder Meals. I encourage you to move forward, however, in a manner that is most deeply respectful to our Jewish brothers and sisters.