

SOLEMNITY OF THE
MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST “B”
JUNE 2/3, 2018

Traveling our state’s interstate highways among the many freight hauling company trucks I see is one titled, “Covenant Transport.” Like other terms, “covenant” is used both in a secular, and particularly for our celebration this weekend, a biblical/religious context. All covenants are agreements between at least two parties; a political or military alliance between two tribes or nations, (usually a more militarily powerful one and a less powerful one) or a “neighborhood covenant” with which some of you may be familiar, drafted to ensure that those living in a designated area are required to follow certain standards in terms of building construction, vehicle parking and the like to insure the “ambience” of the area. All covenants contain stipulations binding participants containing benefits as well as consequences or penalties for violations. While using the term “covenant”, secular covenants are in fact (and in some cases in law) “contracts”—legal agreements binding under local, state, national or other governmental authority.

Jesus in giving us the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which we celebrate in his memory in accord with his command each Sunday (and by long-standing practice in our Catholic tradition, daily) designates it as the “new and everlasting covenant”.

Covenant as experienced in the Scriptures and ultimately given expression by Jesus while bearing some resemblance to secular “covenants” or “contracts” in terms of laws or regulations to assure and protect it, is not primarily a legal or business transaction, I do, or don’t do, this or that and then God fulfills God’s end of the “deal” in terms of reward, or in the case of violation, exacts punishment.

Covenant in both the Old and New Testament is an invitation to personal relationship between God and those who enter into it.

Covenant invitation is about joining our *entire selves* to God. Covenant is a matter of the heart, “heart speaking to heart”; God to us, we to God. Through covenant, especially as revealed in Jesus, we are not God’s property; we are God’s adopted sons and daughters with all that being a son or daughter entails. In Jesus we are drawn into the intimacy of his life

and love with the Father, that life and love itself the very being of God, the Holy Spirit which we celebrated last weekend on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity.

All covenants, like contracts, are ratified, sealed in a public way. For a contract it's "signing on the dotted line; dotting the "i's" and crossing the "t's" or it can be a simple handshake that "closes the deal." In the ancient world out of which our Scriptures emerged, as our first reading reminds us, covenants are sealed in blood. Like all ancient people, the ancient Israelites believed that life itself was contained in blood, blood being viewed as the river of life flowing through the body (not an inaccurate metaphor). Blood belonged to God, the origin of all life, alone (which is why even today a devout Jew will never eat meat that is not completely drained of blood.) Blood was revered as life and also as a means of purification. To signify their complete acceptance of God's covenant, offer through Moses, the people sacrifice animals (representing themselves) to God. To signify both God's acceptance of the people's full commitment to and, in turn of God's eternal commitment to the people, Moses sprinkles the people with the blood of the sacrifice. (Imagine if I did that at Mass!!!) Given blood's life giving and sustaining nature, in today's second reading Jesus through the offering of his blood, which is his divine life as God's eternal son, is proclaimed as both the one who offers the sacrifice (the priest) as well as the victim whose blood is shed, thus himself being the "new and everlasting covenant". Our eating and drinking of Jesus' Body and Blood in the Eucharist not only renews and deepens the covenant relationship between Jesus and us begun in baptism and sealed in confirmation, but also between each of us as members of his body, the Church. Simultaneously, it calls us to a covenant lifestyle—offering our body, our blood, our time, talent, financial treasure, our life, to our families, to the mission of the church and wider society.

"Covenant Transport" should not just be the name of a freight hauling trucking company. "Covenant Transport" is the identification badge we wear of our personal response to Jesus' command to "Do this in memory of me."

Fr. Jim Secora