

**Homily for the 200th Jubilee
Of the Foundation
Of the Congregation of Missionaries
Of the Blood of Christ**

Basilica of Saint John Lateran, July 1, 2015

My sisters and brothers, brothers and sisters of our Congregation.

On the varied occasions in which I have the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist or participate in meetings, I introduce myself as a Missionary of the Blood of Christ. When the participants learn that I belong to that Congregation, they invariably ask me the meaning of and the reason for the name of our community. In the world in which we live, the word *blood* stirs up unpleasant associations. Blood recalls scenes of violence and horror, wars and conflicts, disasters and catastrophes. When there are automobile accidents with fatalities, one of the first concerns is to leave no trace of blood on the road. Pools of blood cause disgust. Blood is frightening.

Given these associations, how is one to explain to the contemporary world the message and meaning of the Blood of Christ? How does one understand a spirituality that is nourished in contemplating the blood shed by the Lord? How does one interpret the words of the First Letter of Peter: “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the Precious Blood of Christ (1 Pt 1: 18-19)? What motivated Saint Gaspar, the apostle of the Precious Blood, never to grow tired of exclaiming: “I would like to have a thousand tongues to draw every heart tenderly to the Precious Blood of Jesus?”

Saint Gaspar himself explains the reason that he made his life an ongoing sermon on the Blood of Christ in a letter to Pope Leo XII: “The devotion to the Precious Blood belongs to the essence of Christian faith...The Divine Blood purifies our hearts, inebriates us with the love of Jesus, ‘who loved us and has washed us in his Blood’ (Rv 1:5).¹ “The insight of Saint Gaspar is that the Blood of Christ is the

¹ Cf. *Generalis operis adumbratio Leoni XII Pontifici Exhibita*: vol XII, ff 38-49 – *Lectio Altera, Officium lectionis, Sollemnitatis S. Gasparis Del Bufalo, presbyteri, Fundatoris Congregationis*.

sign and reality of the covenant that God in his merciful love has made with us. At the same time, the Blood of Christ is the most convincing witness of the radical nature of his love, carried to the extreme: 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end' (Jn 13:1), even to his last breath (Jn 19:30).²

When Saint Gaspar, the apostle of the Precious Blood, exclaims: "I would like to have a thousand tongues to draw every heart tenderly to the Precious Blood of Jesus," this is precisely the difference: blood in this case does not provoke disgust, but rather makes us bow deeply before the radically given love which the blood represents and is in reality.

The Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ (*Congregatio Missionariorum Pretiosissimi Sanguinis Domini Nostri Jesus Christi – C.P.P.S.*) was born in the Abbey of San Felice in Giano dell'Umbria, with the support of Pope Pius VII. Saint Gaspar's passion for the Blood of Christ convinced other priests to live as an apostolic community and to announce to the whole world the "Gospel of God" (Mk 1:14; Rom 1:1) based on the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. Divine Providence wanted this marvelous work to begin in Umbria, the cradle of holy women and men who made history, and whose message overcame the time and space of that region and remains fresh even today.³

And what is the message of the Blood of Christ today? We have spoken with ever greater emphasis on and admiration for the blood shed by our martyrs, linking that blood to the death of Jesus on the cross. They are sisters and brothers murdered because they are Christian, massacred because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Some were assassinated because they were defending the dignity of their neighbors, because they fought for human rights against the aggressions of an evil and oppressive system. They had the courage to denounce with prophetic vigor those persons and organizations that

² "He loved them till the end" (Jn 12:1) in the original Greek is "εις τέλος ηγάπησεν αυτούς," is the root of the last words of Jesus: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30): "Τετέλεσται"= "brought to an end."

³ For example, Saint Benedict of Norcia (480-547), Saint Francis of Assisi (1192-1226), Saint Clare of Assisi (1193-1253), and Saint Rita of Cascia (1381-1457).

commit injustices against the poor and ethnic minorities, and because of their criticisms they were assassinated. They took on the mission of defending those whom society excludes and considers “surplus” or “disposable,” in a system in which only a person who produces or consumes has value (cf. the *Aparecida Document*, 65).

The means of social communication report to us nearly every day that in many countries there is an increasingly harsh persecution of those who profess the Christian faith. Women and men, young people and children are hated, driven from their homes and lands, tortured, and massacred because of their Christian faith. This blood shed by the martyrs of today cannot leave us indifferent. At the end of the Via Crucis in the Coliseum this year, Pope Francis denounced the “complicit silence” of those who look on with indifference on the massacre of Christians, who are “persecuted, beheaded, and crucified” because of their faith.⁴ “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rv 7:14).

Especially in Latin America blood is shed in other contexts. There is a form of martyrdom that some groups in our Church do not want to accept as martyrdom because they think that these brothers and sister were killed because of the “political” commitment. In Latin America we understand politics exactly as the memorable Blessed Paul VI understood it: “Politics are a demanding manner ... of living the Christian commitment to the service of others.”⁵ In decades past and even today our brothers and sisters have lived and are living this Christian commitment to the service of others, because they stopped along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho and have become neighbors to the one who fell into the hands of robbers (cf. Lk 10:25-37). When he beatified the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, a few weeks ago,⁶ Pope Francis recognized him as a martyr for the sake of his prophetic mission of denouncing the evil of a despotic government that murdered people and wanted

⁴ This took place in the evening of Good Friday, April 3, 2015.

⁵ *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46.

⁶ The former archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero, was assassinated on March 24, 1980, by death squads, and was beatified on May 23, 2015.

to stay in power at all costs. Romero was threatened but he did not run away. Cursed by the authoritarian government, he continued to bless and confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith. Persecuted day and night, he endured the agony of his Calvary; slandered by his enemies, he never ceased comforting his people (cf. 1 Cor 4:12-13), giving them a “reason for hope” (1 Pt 3:15).

Today we could recall the great deeds of our Saint Gaspar in his day, as well as those of his Missionaries in the course of two centuries. We could reflect on the letters and homilies of the Saint or dwell on the biography of this man who so completely committed himself to the Reign of God that he exhausted his physical strength, leading to his premature death at only fifty-one years of age. But I am convinced that each of us can personally deepen our knowledge of the stirring biography of Saint Gaspar by reading and meditating on the splendid heritage that he has left us in his letters and other writings.

In the homily on the occasion of the celebrations of the second centenary of the founding of our congregation, I believe that it would be good to think about those to whom Saint Gaspar would direct our attention were he alive in our time. What would be his message to us who are living two hundred years after the foundation of the congregation?

First, Saint Gaspar would undoubtedly repeat to his congregation the insight the pope of the Precious Blood, Saint John XXIII, summed up in the key word *aggiornamento*. He would recommend accepting without “but” and without “why?” the spirit and the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Saint Gaspar would repeat to his congregation today the words of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”

Second, Saint Gaspar would say that the missionary spirit of our Congregation presupposes a *kenosis* like that of Christ, as described to us in the hymn of the Letter to the Philippians: “He emptied

himself, taking the form of a slave” (Phil 2:7). We are at the same time servants of Christ Jesus and servants of our brothers and sisters, moving beyond all boundaries and borders, given that we profess that “with your Blood you purchased for God men and women from every tribe and language and people and nation”(Rev 5:9). Today Saint Gaspar would ask his missionaries to immerse themselves in the human situation without reservation and fear.

Third, Saint Gaspar would tell his missionaries that from the contemplation of Jesus Christ and from the adoration of his Precious Blood they are to come out of themselves in order to go to the existential peripheries, in the words of Pope Francis spoken prior to the conclave, when he was still Cardinal Bergoglio. It was certainly those prophetic words that convinced the cardinals to choose the cardinal of Buenos Aires to be the future pope: “Evangelizing presupposes a desire in the Church to come out of herself. The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.”

Today in the venerable Patriarchal Basilica of Saint John Lateran, we celebrate the passion, death and resurrection, the Body offered, and the shed Blood of the Lord. We ask the intercession of our great Saint, the apostle of the Precious Blood, that each of his sons may renew his intention to follow his example, which we praise in the words of the preface of the Mass of his feast. May each become like him a “zealous preacher of the Gospel and an untiring minister of the Blood of the Lord; (who) in imitation of Christ heard the cry of the poor and oppressed, making himself their brother, friend, and defender.”

Saint Gaspar, pray for us! Amen.

Erwin Krätler, C.P.P.s.
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