

Feast of the Precious Blood- Homily
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Blood Brothers and Sisters

After an especially bloody terrorist attack in Tel Aviv a few years ago, three hundred college students waited patiently for six hours on a Friday in the library building at the Max Elias College in the Palestinian town of Ibillin to donate blood. On the surface, this is powerful witness that these students would be willing to share the gift of life with others. But scratch beneath the surface, and this donation of blood was a profound and powerful statement against the evil of war and terrorism.

These 300 students were Palestinians who were donating their blood for use in Jewish hospitals for victims of the terrorist attack. Fr. Elias Chacour, a Melkite priest, organized the effort of the students. "We wanted to do something," he said, "to sweep away some tears from the eyes of broken hearts...with our blood we decided to deny terror."

On this feast of the Precious Blood, we gather to remember how blood is life and through the precious blood of Jesus, we are renewed and refreshed, reconciled and redeemed. Most especially, we gather to celebrate these jubilarians who in their blood, sweat, and tears poured out through these many years have given the congregation, the church, and the world a witness to remember.

My brothers in the blood of Christ, with your blood you have celebrated the sacraments that give life and nourishment to the people of faith; you have stood as brothers with the poor and abandoned; you have shared your life of service with more people than we can count.

With your blood, you have tilled the soil, planting seeds of hope that have grown to produce an abundant harvest of justice and love.

With your blood, you have studied and preached, taught and rendered God's tender mercy. With your blood, you have shouted against injustice and oppression and been instruments of peace in a war-scarred world. With your blood, you have held the hands of the dying, creased the foreheads of infants with the oil of chrism, witnessed the commitments of countless couples as you pronounced them husband and wife.

With your blood, you have walked with the wounded, healed the brokenhearted, reconciled the estranged, and comforted the sick. With your blood, you have been a transfusion of life, of energy, of love.

We are most grateful.

The Blood of the Covenant

With your blood, you have celebrated at so many altars, in so many places, where the sacrifice we heard about in today's first reading from the book of Exodus is prayed out every day. While not as messy as the ritual Moses performed, taking "half the blood and putting it in large bowls"; and with the other half "he splashed on the altar," you have prayed at the table of Eucharist and shared the blood of Christ with all who are thirsty for redemption.

As Moses sprinkled the blood on the people to seal the covenant God made with them, so you have sprinkled the people you served and continue to serve with the refreshing waters of baptism that beckon us to believe how we belong to one another and to God. You sprinkle us with stories of the characters you have met, the consolation you have found, and the compassion you experienced. Your lives are indeed a sign of the covenant of God's love for your commitment to your call and your service to the congregation inspires us all.

Precious Blood spirituality is about living this covenant in the blood of Christ and your fidelity to the covenant reflects the quality of relationship the covenant symbolizes—the depth and width and height of God’s gracious love for the people.

The Blood of the Cross

As Paul reminds us in today’s second reading, Precious Blood spirituality speaks not only of covenant but of the cross. The relationship we share with one another is not only with those who are close to us, those we love, those who admire us and affirm us. This blood of the cross draws all people near, those “who were far off,” those we find difficult to love, those who ridicule and reject us, those who are on the fringes of life.

As ministers of reconciliation, the spirituality of the Blood calls us to claim Christ as our peace “who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity.” Because of the blood stained cross, because of the blood pouring from the body of Christ as a result of his torture, because of this blood that seeps into the ground of our being making us holy, we are “no longer strangers and sojourners,” wandering aimlessly and listlessly. No, now we have a purpose, a passion. We are now “fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God.” With Gaspar as our inspiration, and all those who have gone before us serving as a foundation, we continue to build out of the crosses and losses of our lives the kingdom of God.

With your blood, brothers, you have preached and lived the reconciliation that is won for us in the blood of the cross. You have sought to live an inclusive vision of God’s gracious love where the cross is the bridge and the Christ’s blood pays the toll.

The Blood of the Cup

And so now we gather around this table of Eucharist to remember and relive what Jesus did on that night he was betrayed when he “took his place at table with the apostles” and taking a cup, “gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’”

Look into this cup today, my friends, and see all that we are as precious blood people. Here in this cup are the stories of our lives for this cup “is the new covenant in the blood of Christ.” See in this cup our loves and our losses, our joys and our sorrows, our hopes and dreams along with our fears and tears. Mingled in this cup are all the memories of those with whom we have shared this wondrous life. As we drink from this cup today, we do so with gratitude for these men who have given so much to the congregation, the church, and the world.

But, as we drink from this cup today, we will also find the courage we need to live in such a way that the world—and our church—so badly in need of a transfusion of tender mercy and compassion, of peace and reconciliation, will be given new life through our witness. As those Palestinian students did for their Jewish brothers and sisters following the terrorist attack in Tel Aviv, so we will do for one another. Whether it is stranger or friend, enemy or kin, with our blood we will be willing to pour out of lives in loving service. With our blood, we will proclaim all are brought near through the blood of Christ. With our blood, we shall resist evil and reveal God’s redeeming love.

With our blood, we will live lives worthy of our calling—priest, brother, sister, companion, mother, father—missionaries all, who will live in relationship, deepen our commitment, and continue our struggle to give voice to peace we have found in the blood of Christ.