

The Sprinkling of the Blood

The people sprinkled (with the blood) is the people of the New and Eternal Covenant; it is the Church: called to give testimony to the newness of life.

Here is the reason why the voice of the blood of Christ, of whom Abel in his innocence is a prophetic figure, cries to God "in an absolutely singular way." The uniqueness resides in the excellence of the same blood and in the content of the cry. Regarding this second point the Pope explains the significance of the cry: it is the blood that redeems, purifies, saves and that establishes the New Covenant; it is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). "This blood", the Pope writes textually, "which flows from the pierced side of Christ on the cross (cf. Jn 19:34) speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel; indeed it expresses and requires a more radical justice, and above all it implores mercy, it makes intercession for the brethren before the Father (cf. Heb: 7:25) and is the source of perfect redemption and the gift of new life".

And so the Pope writes: "The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father's love, shows how precious man is in God's eyes and how priceless the value of his life." He goes on to say: "Furthermore, Christ's blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in the sincere gift of self. Precisely because it is poured out as the gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all." And finally, the Pope says: "It is from the blood of Christ that all draw the strength to commit themselves to promoting life. It is precisely this blood that is the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious."

These four hinges of the Christian vision of humanity are kept before us. This is the *Gospel of Life*, or rather the *Gospel of Blood*. The remainder of the encyclical is a deduction and consequential construction. The four pillars which the Pope has deduced, that is to say, from the "voice of the blood of Christ" form the backbone which holds all the encyclical in place.

The Pope affirms that in the blood of Christ all the ancient promises are fulfilled. This blood communicates life, purifies and saves; establishes a new world of relations, based upon absolute blood-ties, making therefore all things new. Well then, such an affirmation openly demonstrates the second chapter. The Pope makes us hear again the word of God and meditates upon the Gospel. Already the title of the second chapter is eloquent: "I came that they may have Life". The phrase continues: "that they may have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10). The words of Albertini in the chaplet of the Precious Blood come to mind when he says that the blood of the Redeemer was poured out "until the last drop for our freedom". Truly it is "to the full".

True life is made visible and we have seen it (1 Jn 1:2). The Christian message about life is such that every believer is able and ought to make his own the words of the canticle: "My strength and my song is the Lord, he has saved me (Ex 15:2). God in Christ again has given again vigor to the human person revealing that all of life has value. In the precariousness of human existence Christ brings to completion the gospel of life. The birth of Christ is presented as "great joy" and his death as the moment of Redemption. It is the joy that arises from ascertaining that death is defeated forever and that life springs up not from the prospective of death but from eternity. All this is testified to by the blood, which is also a river of mercy for all the times that the human being sincerely recognizes that he has been unworthy of his own greatness.

It follows from all this, that life has to be loved as a precious gift and lived in union with Christ, because only he who believes in him will have eternal life.

All human life ought to be loved, therefore every human person. All life must be loved: from the moment of conception until death.

The blood of Christ, while revealing the greatness of the Father's love, manifests how a human being is precious in the eyes of God and how inestimable is the value of his life. Since in practice such value is not always appreciated, all too often decisively unappreciated, the Pope dedicates the third chapter of the encyclical to the denouncing of the most grave forms of scorn towards life. He comments on the command "you shall not kill". After thousands of years, this commandment which seemed to denounce a barbarian characteristic of the primitive peoples, not only is topical now, but is broken with a frequency unknown to other epochs. The Holocaust has not been carried out by culturally backward peoples. It is an indelible stain of our times, at the end of the second millennium! And the genocides, ethnic cleansings, are daily chronicles. Then the holocaust of all holocausts: the immense wound of abortion, so much more pernicious because it is seen without the horror that universally recognized and provoked the Holocaust.

This commandment, says the Pope, explicitly has a strong negative content: it indicates the extreme borderline that no one can ever cross. This implicitly releases a positive attitude towards an absolute respect for life, leading people to

respect it and urging then towards love. To kill a human being, on whom the image of God is stamped, is like attacking the very life of God. Life is sacred because it involves a creative action of God. Life is sacred from its very beginning; and it sacred until its last breath.

"The blood of Christ, moreover, reveals to man his greatness, and therefore his vocation which consists in the true gift of self. Precisely because it is poured out as a gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all.

In the fourth chapter the Pope confronts the issue of a life interpreted as a gift. It is another way of giving blood for the common good: to place one's personal energies at the disposition of others. The same chapter title expresses fully this concern: "You did it for me". Therefore, any service done to one of the least of his brothers, shall be considered as done to Christ himself. And there is no one "more little" than a child not born, or an elderly person, or a sick and powerless person. The first service in these cases is to proclaim the gospel of life: shout from the housetops that their life is full of value.

But to make this type of announcement in today's world, so closed in its utilitarianism, so rebellious to a spirit of redemptive sacrifice, brings such a witness to the point of martyrdom: to blood. Here one understands what the Pope said in the well-known number 25, concluding his exposition on the blood of Christ: "It is from the blood of Christ that all human beings draw the strength to commit themselves to promoting life. It is precisely this blood that is the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious."

So therefore, the blood of Christ is the fountain of strength for witness and also motive of hope. These two affirmations point also to a cooperation: strength is born from the hope that is an absolute certainty in the triumph of good.

The people of God ought to be a people of life and for life. They ought to know how to implement a new culture: the authentic culture of life.

(D. Michele Colagiovanni, C.P.P.S. "Evangelium Sanguinis," Nel Segno del Sangue, Roma, Maggio 1995, pp. 99-107)