

## **Communion and Reconciliation in the Blood of Christ**

(Intervention at the Synod of Bishops, October 2005)

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the Blood of Christ?” (I Cor 10:16) With these words, St. Paul reminds us of the circle of communion that is created by participation in the Eucharist. That communion in the Blood of Christ is the source and support for many other forms of our coming together in the human family, and especially also for our going forth in mission. Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, noted a number of these in his Apostolic Letter, “*Mane nobiscum Domine.*” There he speaks of a “culture of the Eucharist” that leads to a “culture of dialogue” (no. 26), and of a “project of solidarity for all humanity” (no. 27). The *Instrumentum laboris* for this Synod echoes these sentiments of the timeless message of the Eucharist “which is necessary in constructing a society where communion, solidarity, freedom, respect for the person, hope and trust in God prevail” (no. 79).

In these remarks I wish to address but one of these areas, namely, how the Blood of Christ is the source and motivation for a mission of reconciliation in our troubled and wounded world. The many conflicts and divisions, from the death and destruction of terrorism to the deterioration and disintegration in families and the great suffering caused by them, must be the object of our mission. Our evangelization must speak of reconciliation, but also embody the message of the reconciliation that God has brought about in Jesus Christ. Those who are aliens and strangers are brought near by the saving Blood of Christ. For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made the two one, and has broken down the walls of hostility (cf. Eph 2:12-14).

In that sharing in the Blood of Christ of which St. Paul speaks, we not only enter into communion; we also commit ourselves to sharing the suffering of others as Christ did in his own death. Elsewhere, St. Paul reminds us that we carry the death of the Lord in our bodies (2 Cor 4:10). It is in that commitment, so marked by Christ's shedding of his Precious Blood, that we truly enter into the suffering of others so as to be able to offer the gift of reconciliation and healing of God.

In sharing in the Eucharistic cup God invites us to renew the covenant relationship with Him, as the basis of all other relationships. For reconciliation is indeed a gift from God, "who has reconciled us to himself in Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation....So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:18-20). We are to carry that message of reconciliation into a world so in need of its healing balm.

In receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we are called to "*recognize the body,*" that is we are called to recognize our own broken and wounded body and that of our brothers and sisters: our families, our communities, our society and even our Church.

The Blood of Christ, shed on the cross, and renewed in the sacrifice of the Eucharist, is a sign of God's great love for the world and is the pledge that God will accompany us in that often arduous ministry of reconciliation.

The aim of that reconciling ministry is to overcome hatred, injustice, and division. But its ultimate goal is the bringing of peace, the peace that Christ has won by the blood of his cross (cf. Col 1:20), the peace that reconciles all things in Christ. Pope John Paul II called the Eucharist a "great school of peace": "More than ever, our troubled world,

which began the new millennium with the specter of terrorism and the tragedy of war, demands that Christians learn to experience the Eucharist as a great school of peace, forming men and women who, at various levels of responsibility in social, cultural and political life, can become promoters of dialogue and communion” (no. 27).

The communion achieved in the reconciling Blood of Christ empowers us to be bridge-builders, truth-tellers, and the healers of wounds; it is also an evangelization in action of the great message of the Gospel. Our “amen” when receiving communion affirms not only the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist; it invites us to be bread broken and blood poured out, life given, for the life of the world; it is also a commitment to respect life and uphold the dignity of every human person and to help others, especially the poor. We become as it were “living chalices” carrying the Precious Blood of Christ, that sacred balm, to those who are in need of healing in their brokenness, to those wounded by poverty, to those left half dead by the wayside, scorned and scarred by prejudice, racism, and war. The Precious Blood is an invitation to inclusion, to the expansive vision reflected in the book of Revelation (7:9-14), that speaks of welcoming and hospitality to those abandoned or pushed to the margins.

St. John Chrysostom wrote: “We stain with the Blood of the Lamb, the doors of our Temple, so that His Blood shines on the lips of the faithful” (Office of Readings for Good Friday). We share the cup together just as Jesus shared the cup with his disciples at the Last Supper, and we are transformed into the one body of the living Christ, always dying and always rising for the salvation of the world.

As “ambassadors of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:20) we offer the Blood of Christ to a world thirsty for harmony with God, with humanity and with all creation. The Blood of

Christ quenches the thirst for that communion in which people of great diversity can come together in deep and abiding unity, and calls us to be Eucharistic communities which embrace those who are distant, separated, or cut off. Participation in the Eucharist strengthens and emboldens us to dream a different history, to build a new world, a world that conforms to God's plan for humanity as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We need to recover the social dimension of the Eucharist in order to make the Eucharist truly the font and culmination of the Christian life. Without this social dimension our celebrations run the risk of becoming hollow ritual. For it is on the basis of how we live out the Eucharist in our daily lives that our participation in the Eucharist will be confirmed. As St. Augustine reminds us (Sermon 272): "You are the body of Christ and His members ... You reply 'Amen' to that which you are, and by replying you consent. For you hear 'The body of Christ,' and you reply 'Amen.' Be a member of the body of Christ so that your 'Amen' may be true... Be what you see, and receive what you are."

The "*Ite, missa est*" sends us forth with the Eucharistic message to create that culture of peace where the practice of reconciliation reflects God's project of solidarity for all humanity.

Rev. Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.  
Moderator General  
Congregation of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood