

PRECIOUS BLOOD SPIRITUALITY AND ITS SYMBOLS

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The Importance of Symbol

Theology is often formulated in concepts. For sustaining our spiritual lives, however, it is symbols which really nourish us. Concepts can be a way of our identifying a whole body of information, but symbols stimulate our imagination. They create entire worlds for us, weaving memory, thought, and feeling together. Concepts have a role to play in spirituality, to help us define the limits of our thinking and to relate our spirituality as a body of ideas to other spiritualities. Thus, concepts are useful in relating Precious Blood spirituality to a spirituality of the heart of Jesus, for example, or to liberation theology. But we find ourselves returning to symbols, since they create the space not only for our imagination and feelings, but also the space for relating to the rest of our experience as members of a congregation devoted to the blood of Christ, and in the apostolates we undertake.

This presentation will explore four basic symbols of Precious Blood spirituality. They are: covenant, cross, cup, and the Lamb. All of these are rooted in the Scriptures, and evoke a wide range of meanings and memories. Each symbol will be presented as to its basic meanings as presented in the Scriptures, and then some of the meanings it has for us today, both in our personal and communal lives in community, and also these connect with the work we do for the sake of the Church and the Reign of God.

Covenant, Connections, Community

Covenant is the fundamental symbol of Precious Blood spirituality. The special relationship between God and God's people — sealed first in the blood of lambs and bulls, and later with Christ's own blood is the foundation upon which other symbols are built. The

blood of the cross takes its meaning from covenant, for the blood of the cross is the means by which God reconciles the world (Col 1:20), bringing near those who once were far off (Eph 2:13). The eucharistic cup is a new covenant in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20) that prefigures the eucharistic banquet in heaven. Those who have suffered are reunited to God in heaven, washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 5:9). All of the symbols associated with Precious Blood spirituality that we are examining here -- cross, cup, the Lamb -- go back to that fundamental symbol, the covenant.

Covenant is one of the richest of the biblical symbols, and can be viewed from a number of angles. Seen from one side, covenant is about how God touches the world. That touch is a call into intimacy with an intimacy that transforms those who are so called. In the covenant with Noah and his children (Gen 9), God draws near to the survivors of the flood and promises them a new life. (Abraham called out of his own country and is promised that he will be a blessing on the earth, and that he and Sarah will be blessed with many descendants (Gen 12). But perhaps the most dramatic transformation is that of the Hebrew slaves in the Sinai desert, who through a covenant become God's special people (Exodus 24). In all of these instances, those who come into covenant with God experience new things. They are given new identities by God's coming close to them. With that new identity they receive a new destiny as well. As God's special people, Israel receives not only a privileged relation but special responsibilities: their lives together must mirror the compassion, the justice, and the mercy of God.

Seen from another angle, covenant is much more than merely a contract or agreement. Covenant is a belonging to God, a kind of belonging that opens up our deepest capacities for being human for being in the image and likeness of God. Those capacities for being human -- our ability to trust, to love, to struggle for justice, to show compassion and care -- are opened up by the call into covenant by God. It is a call to become part of something (and of someone)

greater than ourselves, a call to understand what it means truly to belong. It is that belonging to God that reaffirms our destiny, to become daughters and sons of God.

Covenants do not simply define our past by reminding us of how God has worked in our history. Covenants carry with them a vision for the future. Like the rainbow that marked the sky in the story of Noah and his family, covenants promise a different kind of future. They promise safety in an uncertain and dangerous world. They promise in the story of Abraham and Sarah that they will live on in the descendants they thought they would never have. To the Hebrew slaves, the covenant promised a land of their own where they might live justly and freely. But more than any other covenant, the one offered us by Jesus in his own blood holds up the vision of the coming Reign of God, where there will be no hunger or thirst, and every tear will be wiped away. Covenants have a vision, then, of what the world really looks like when God draws near.

Covenants were sealed by the blood of sacrifices. The blood was the seat of life and carried in it the breath of God, who breathed life into the first human being (Gen 2:7). In Exodus 24, we read how the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the people to show their unity with God. At the Last Supper, Jesus offers a new covenant, sealed with his own blood, and invites us into communion with him.

In the previous presentation, we looked at sacrifice in some detail, especially at recent objections for including it in theological symbolism. But we should not let these objections, legitimate as they are, block us from other meanings. Sacrifice is about coming into communion with God. The blood signifies the seriousness of that communication, and reminds us that communion with God touches the very life that courses through us. The blood also keeps before us all those situations in our world where life is not respected, crying out with the blood of Abel (Gen 4:10). The blood of the covenant reminds us that God is the

source of all life, and that we dare not spill the blood of God's children, for all of them are our sisters and brothers.

There are three aspects of covenant that I wish to highlight here: covenant as commitment, covenant as connections, and covenant as community.

As was just noted, covenant is more than a contract or agreement. Because of the very nature of the relationship between God and ourselves which is covenant, it entails commitment. Commitment has to do with decisions and choices that see beyond the present moment. By so seeing beyond the immediate moment, we affirm more fundamental things that are lasting over the fleeting character of the present.

Some of you come from wealthy societies in Europe and the United States where life can be very fast-paced and therefore temporary and provisional. These consumer societies have built-in obsolescence, so that things do not last. Those same societies create comfort by allowing much to be wasted and thrown away because it is not convenient to continue to hold on to some things. The very temporary nature of just about everything not only makes commitment difficult; it also makes it look senseless.

It is not surprising that in such fast-paced, throw-away societies that many young people in their twenties find themselves postponing life decisions as long as possible. They are no less capable of commitment than previous generations, but they are being presented with a world that is so uncertain that it becomes harder and harder to see the consequences of commitment and to trust the values of long-term commitment.

Covenant is about long-term commitment, through thick and thin. It is about a God who stays in the desert with former slaves for forty years, seeing something in them that they cannot see in themselves. It is about an aged couple, Sarah and Abraham, who can still dream about new possibilities. And it is about Jesus, who thought that the New Covenant was worth dying for. A covenant spirituality promotes what Pope John Paul II in the encyclical

Evangelium vitae called “a prevailing “culture of death.” Accepting everything in life as merely short-term and therefore unworthy of commitment goes against a culture of life. By deeming everything short-term we end up living a life that says nothing (and no one) is all that important. We create an environment or culture in which little or nothing is taken seriously, an attitude that undermines trust, care, and finally human dignity itself

The blood of Christ is a constant reminder that there are people and values worth dying for. If we do not dare reach down into the depths of our beings to touch and care for those values, if we do not reach out in commitment to other people around us, we have broken the covenant and the blood of those people we would not touch will cry out.

Second covenant is about connection, the bonds of belonging. To be connected is to be acknowledged and recognized, to be accorded our dignity as humans. In Africa, theologians have come up with an alternative to Descartes’ famous “I think, therefore I am” (*cogito ergo sum*). They say instead, “I am because we are.” That captures the essence of covenant as connections: the recognition of those bonds that those of you who come from societies where the bonds of collectivity are still strong have much to teach those who come from societies that prize the individual above all else. Individuals sometimes make up for the lack of bonds by accumulating a lot of things to fill up the void. Consumerism is based on that principle. But a spirituality of the covenant speaks of something different.

Societies can also create false connections that turn people into objects. Unfortunately, human societies are rife with such false connections: addictions, abuse, prejudice, oppression, racism. False connections may abound in a society, but a covenant spirituality strives to overcome them. The first mention of blood in the Scriptures is about a broken connection: the death of Abel at the hands of his brother, Cain. The cross, as we shall see, stands as a constant reminder of the broken character of so many of our relations and the insidious false character of still others. We have been bought at a great price (I Peter 1:18). People who have become

unconnected with others through age or accident, or who suffer under the burden of false connections, should be our special concern. It is the power of Christ's blood that gives us the assurances that our efforts to make connections are worthwhile, even when the society we live in says otherwise.

Third, the word "community" often comes too easily to our lips. True community, however, is based on commitment and connections. It is marked by a commitment that does not evaporate at the first sign of difficulty. It is also marked by a sense of connection that can encompass difference and find a commonality in a shared humanity, a humanity created in the image and likeness of a God who is one yet triune. As a community of covenant, it holds up a vision of what a redeemed community can become despite all its brokenness in the present. Community is not easily achieved, and a covenant spirituality reminds us that for a community to succeed as a community, it must be rooted in God's call to covenant.

Certainly the blood of the covenant, celebrated in the Eucharist, is both a potent symbol of the community we share and the communion for which we hope. The cup of blessing which we share draws us deeper into that communion, and recalls for us how much we depend upon God to create that community. Bonded together in God's great love for us, we dare to imagine community in situations that may now seem so distant from it.

The Cross: Outside the Gates

Up until now, the cross has been the predominant symbol of Precious Blood spirituality. This is not surprising, because it is Jesus' shedding of his blood on the cross that stands at the very center of the Paschal mystery. That symbol draws so many things together. It speaks first and foremost, as Blessed Maria and Saint Gaspar were ever wont to say, of God's unbounded love for us, that Jesus would give his very life-blood so that we might be reconciled to our Creator. The cross speaks therefore of that restored relationship to God,

caught in the many terms that theologians call soteriology: redemption, liberation, justification, reconciliation. For Paul it stands as the great sign contradiction a “stumbling block” to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks,” but to those who have been called, “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (I Cor 1:24). And for countless generations of Christians, the cross has been the key to the riddle of their own sufferings. By uniting their sufferings to those of Jesus, their suffering can become redemptive -- that is to say, rather than having the pain destroy them, it gets placed in the larger context of the Jesus story in order to participate in the saving power of Jesus’ own suffering. Such redemptive suffering allows the one suffering to open her- or himself as Jesus opened his own life. Because the symbol of the cross is so rich, I want to concentrate on just one meaning of it for our spirituality, one that has become very important for me. It is based on the thirteenth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. It reads:

The bodies of the animals whose blood the high priest brings into the sanctuary as a sin offering are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach that he bore. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come. (13: 11-14)

This passage sets up a strong tension between being inside and being outside, being in the very center of things and being discarded or thrown away. It begins by looking at the sanctuary that stands at the center of the camp. The camp of the Israelites in the desert (and later, the city of Jerusalem) represented a place of safety in a hostile desert environment. To be inside the camp was to belong to God, to have value in the eyes of God and in the eyes of others gathered there into community.

Outside the camp was the wilderness, a place of danger. If one lived outside the camp, there was no guarantee of safety. Moreover, outside the camp, as today outside the city, was the garbage dump where the refuse of the community was pitched and burned. In the passage from Hebrews here, the remains of the sacrifices were burned in the dump. The garbage

dump, then as now, stands for the very opposite of the organized and civilized life within the camp: inside the camp was order, security, belonging, intimacy; outside the camp was chaos, danger, alienation, and loss.

The image of the garbage dump would have had a further, and terrifying, meaning for the Letter to the Hebrews' first-century readers. The Romans frequently carried out crucifixions in the garbage dump. Crucifixion was not only a painful way to die, it was meant to be a shameful one as well. Victims were typically crucified naked, to shame their bodies. Such exposure was meant to deprive them further of their dignity. Typically, after the victim had died, the body was taken down from the cross and unceremoniously thrown into the garbage. This was meant as the final humiliation. It was the first century equivalent of the horrors of our own century, where people have been herded into pits and ditches to be shot, or the bodies of the "disappeared" in Latin America are dropped alongside roads.

It is against this stark background that we read the startling words in verses 12 and 13: "Therefore Jesus suffered outside the gate, to consecrate the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the reproach he bore." The atonement for sin is no longer being done in the sanctuary but in the windswept, foul-smelling expanse of the garbage dump.

The significance of this passage was made transparent for me a number of years ago. A promising young theologian whom I had advised on his doctoral dissertation abandoned his teaching career to become a voice for the people in the Philippines who lived on Smoky Mountain. Smoky Mountain is the garbage dump of Metro Manila. It is indeed a mountain of waste, garbage and human refuse. Like garbage dumps everywhere, the rotting of organic waste creates a methane gas that periodically combusts, creating fires and a thick, acrid smoke that hangs over the site. Hence this garbage dump's name, "Smoky Mountain."

Smoky Mountain was home to more than twenty thousand people who built their homes from the scraps of wood, tin, and cardboard that had been dumped there. They scavenged for thrown-away food and any items that could be resold. So they lived, the people of Smoky Mountain.

This young priest had committed himself to work among the inhabitants of Smoky Mountain and served also as their advocate to the outside world. When I asked him what kept him going in such a demanding ministry, he said simply, “Christ was crucified outside the gates. Here is where we must come to meet him.”

His words brought alive for me the meaning of this passage from Hebrews like nothing else ever could. What Hebrews is telling us here is that God has chosen to dwell most intimately in the very place where there seems to be no possibility of belonging, of safety, or of community. In the place of the carefully arranged sanctuary as God’s dwelling place we now see a cross in a garbage dump. To see the cross as the place where God dwells reverses many of our ways of thinking. The all-powerful God now says that true power can only be found in the helplessness and the same of that victim on the cross. In a space of degradation God can be most intensely experienced. Among the cast-offs of society, God is gathering a new chosen people. At the foot of the cross, those new chosen people are consecrated in Christ’s blood.

And, as Hebrews reminds us, we cannot peer out toward the cross from the safe confines of the camp. To experience the living God, we must go out of the gate, to meet Christ in the very reproach he suffers on the cross.

It is hard not to be moved by this powerful image from the Letter to Hebrews. It is overwhelming. And it also gives us an insight into the meaning of the cross for Precious Blood spirituality. It is about the very essence of our lives, stripped of any decoration and well-crafted disguise. It is about a vulnerability that gnaws away at the most carefully defined

postures we may assume. It reminds us that all the human power we can accumulate will end up falling between our fingers like so much dust. It reminds us that what allows us to exist at all is not our own: it is a gift — the gift of life.

Throughout the Scriptures, the message of the blood is the message of the fragile boundary between life and death. God's own life is in the blood that animates every living being. Yet we are always but a step away from our own dissolution.

The cross stands on that boundary between life and death. The blood shed there reminds us of the fragility of all we undertake and hope to achieve. The cross calls us to go outside the gates, and live on that tenuous boundary. It reminds us that we cannot stay forever within our zone of comfort but must come to face the contradictions and the pain of the world. It is in the vulnerability that the cross so starkly signifies that we come to understand how God sees us and our world: a world so precious to God yet wounded deeply in so many ways. Nonetheless, it is called repeatedly to new life. The shattered fragments of lives — the losses, the regrets, the disappointments, the failures, the tragedies — are lifted up and drawn into the wounds of Christ, who brings all things together in himself. To be consecrated in Christ's blood means that those who had been consigned to the rubbish heap of society have been redeemed. They are given new life. They are given a chance to be restored to their full dignity.

An important aspect of the spirituality of the cross for us, then, is to go outside the gates to those whom Jesus is consecrating in his own blood. For our own spirituality, this was made real two years ago when I met some of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood from Korea who lived in the garbage dump of Seoul to be with those who made that dump their home and livelihood. An important question to ask of ourselves is: where is "outside the gates" for each of us?

The Cup: Suffering and Blessing, Memory and Hope

We had an opportunity to consider the cup in the previous presentation. It was noted there the biblical significance of the cup as the measure of one's destiny. The cup offered to Jesus was a cup of suffering — his destiny was to suffer on behalf of all of humankind. We saw too the significance of the cup in Jewish ritual, at the center of the worship of God in praise and thanksgiving.

For Christians, the cup has a deep Eucharistic significance. This is even more so the case since the receiving of Holy Communion under both species has been restored to the whole Church. No longer is the chalice something glimpsed from afar, but is now placed in the hands of each person who approaches the Eucharistic table. As communities devoted to the Blood of Christ, we have not yet reflected adequately on what this means for our spirituality. To be sure, nothing has changed in doctrine, but the symbolic difference is considerable. We have yet to plumb the significance of this important symbolic change.

One difference I suggested in the previous presentation has to do with is of the meaning of the cup as a measure destiny and the cup as a sign of communion. When we offer the cup as a Eucharistic minister to others, or when we take the cup in our hands as a communicant, are we willing to accept the responsibilities that this act entails? Are we willing to accept what God is asking us to do? In the words of Father Winfried Wermter, are we willing to be “living chalices” into which God pours our destiny and vocation? In giving and receiving the chalice from one another, are we willing to share one another's burdens? All of this gives new meaning to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: “Whoever, therefore, eat the break or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.” (I Cor 11:27)

The cup is the place in our spirituality where suffering and blessing come together, where memory and hope meet. The cup offered to many is a cup of suffering: the poor, the

oppressed, the marginalized. Part of our vocation as communities in the blood of Christ has been to share their cup in our apostolates. Blessed Maria's commitment to the education of poor girls was precisely an attempt to relieve them of some of their suffering. Today that sharing in the cup of suffering takes on many forms in the varieties of work that we do. Just as Jesus asked the disciples who wanted to share in his glory whether they could first share in his sufferings, so too we need to ask ourselves about our ability to share in the cup of suffering that others have been given.

The cup is a cup of blessing. In Jewish ritual, the blessing cup was raised as God was praised and thanked for all the goodness of the world. Today we raise the cup to remember what the blood of Christ means for us. As the salvation of the world it holds up a vision of a world redeemed from the powers of sin and evil, a world liberated from oppression and poverty, a world free of all the things that human beings inflict upon one another. The blessing cup also is held up in the name of God's creation, that what humankind has done to the earth might not be irreparable damage, but rather that the earth's healing might come about. The blessing cup helps us imagine a reconciled world, reconciliation between men and women, between factions within countries, between countries themselves, between religions. The blessing cup blesses us, it blesses our world. Steeped in the blood of Christ, the life-giving power of the blood makes of us a new creation.

The previous presentation had already taken up the themes of celebrating memory and hope. Let me tie those reflections to the symbol of the cup a bit more closely. The cup is the place where memories are gathered. The bowl of the cup brings them together, allows them to flavor one another and create together the identity of a community. So what memories do we pour into the cup? How might one memory temper the other or bring out its distinctive flavor? The cup is passed around, and the brew of memories is shared.

Partaking of the blood of Christ is partaking of his memory so that the form of his life might become our form as well. As his memory blends with our own memories we become more and more conformed to him.

As was noted in the previous presentation, Jesus' offering of the blessing cup at the Last Supper was given with the pledge that he would not drink of the cup again until they all drank it together in the Reign of God. The blood of Christ is a sign of hope to us. The blood that was shed was not shed in vain. It led, not to dissolution, but to new life, and continues to do so for those who partake of it. We often fail to see how important hope is, especially if we lead relatively comfortable lives. Yet it is hope that sustains so many of the poor of the world. With hope comes the ability celebrate the small victories in the face of often overwhelming odds of hopelessness. Hope allows us to discover the beauty of little things, to appreciate the small gesture of kindness, the smile. It urges us into celebration that the gift of life is still being given, and that joy and laughter can still be experienced.

The spirituality of the cup is, therefore, a spirituality of mingling, of sharing. It is a spirituality of remembering and of looking forward. The blood of Christ makes that possible inasmuch as blood is the seat of life, and the mystery and meaning of life continue to draw us onward. The spirituality of the cup is a spirituality of celebration, a spirituality with an eye for the fullness of God to be found in all things.

The Lamb: Symbol of Reconciliation

This brings us to the fourth and final symbol under examination here: the symbol of the Lamb. The Lamb figures in the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, with a single reference each in the Acts of the Apostles and the First Letter of Peter. Paul, for example, never mentions it.

The Lamb of the New Testament, who is Christ, is prefigured in the lamb sacrificed in the Passover. It is an important part of the linkage that New Testament writers made between the great saving events of Israel and God's saving work in Christ. The Lamb in the Book of Revelation carries within it a paradoxical meaning: it is standing, as if alive, but bears the marks of having been slaughtered (Rev. 5:6). The slaughter referred to here is not ritual slaughter, but death by violence. Although still bearing those marks of death, it has clearly overcome death, and now makes it possible to rescue the others who have suffered persecution.

I would like to suggest that the Lamb -- who has always figured prominently in the iconography of the Precious Blood — is a symbol for a part of our spirituality and our apostolates that has taken on increasing importance in recent years, namely, that of reconciliation. The Lamb of the Book of Revelation redeems those who have come through the great tribulation; he redeems them with his blood. The fact that he has made the passage from death to life allows him to lead us along the same path. He restores to the victims of violence their dignity and their humanity and leads them to a safe place (cf. Rev. 6:9-10). Eventually they come to live in peace:

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev. 7:16-17)

The Lamb, having reconciled death and life in his own body, now through his blood, extends that reconciliation to victims everywhere

Because reconciliation has become such an important theme for our spirituality, I would like to conclude this presentation with some thoughts about the shape of a ministry of reconciliation. As was noted in the previous presentation, it is God who brings about reconciliation, not us. Our task is to create the environment in which reconciliation might take place. To that end, it behooves us to create communities of reconciliation to engage in those

disciplines and practices that will form us into such communities. I would like to suggest that there are four parts to a ministry of reconciliation.

The first is an *intense accompaniment of victims*. It is marked by a listening patience that allows the victim first to trust, then to struggle to unburden the painful past. This takes a lot of time, since the nature of the burden is such that it cannot be gotten rid of quickly. Often, in the case of abuse or torture, the lies perpetrated on the victim are become so interwoven with the truth that to tear out the lie would bring down the truth as well. This first stage of a ministry of reconciliation is one of patience and learning the discipline of knowing how to wait. Waiting is not simply an empty space that precedes an event. It is a cultivation of a mindfulness and a watchfulness that gives a focus to what has been a shattering experience.

The second stage in the ministry of reconciliation is *hospitality*. A hospitable environment exudes trust and kindness. It also creates an atmosphere of safety. For victims of violence trust, kindness, and safety are precisely the things that are sorely lacking in their lives. An atmosphere of trust makes human communication possible again. Kindness reaffirms that violence is now past and that the vulnerability that healing requires can count on a place in which to operate. Safety is the other side of trust. For those who have been threatened and have experienced danger, the restoration of safety allows the bonds of trust to be rebuilt.

Hospitality carries with it also a sense of gratuity, a graciousness that is not measured in a quid pro quo, but in an abundance that allows thinking about new possibilities. One of the most difficult aspects of reconciliation is coming to terms with the violence that has been done to the victim. In assessing the damage that has been done — be it the loss of loved ones, the destruction of one's home, the experience of torture, or a long imprisonment — victims try to imagine for themselves what it will take to redress the wrong. That is what many people mean by "justice." But reconciliation does not take us back to redress the wrong along a route

that we have traced out. Reconciliation always comes by a different path that surprises us. That is why hospitality, which sets up an environment of trust, kindness, and safety, is the prelude to reconciliation. It helps prepare the victim for the welling up of God's healing grace in their lives, in the restoration of their humanity — not as a restoration to an earlier, unviolated condition, but by bringing them to a new place.

The third stage of a ministry of reconciliation is *reconnecting*. Victims are often disconnected or even isolated from the community. The ultimate example of such victimhood is the plight of the refugee separated from home, often from family, completely dislocated and lost. Reconnecting is about ending the isolation that severs trust and presses the victim to believe the lies the wrongdoer tells about them — that they are not worthy of human treatment, that no one can rescue them, that they are despicable. Violence strives to inculcate that lie, that hatred of self in the victim, since that self-hatred will keep them in the bondage of victimhood. Reconnecting is the establishment of truth about the victim, that the victim is made in the image and likeness of God and is therefore of inestimable value. Reconnection recreates the bonds of trust and belonging that make us human. It is during this stage that reconciliation actually takes place.

The fourth stage of a ministry of reconciliation is *commissioning*. At this stage, the reconciled victim feels reconnected, and then called by God and by the experience of reconciliation to follow a particular path. That the commission grows out of the experience of reconciliation means that the call may be related to the original experience of violence: the restored victim may feel called to work with other survivors of torture, or to create understanding to avoid future conflicts. Again the reconciling community does not give the commission. It comes via the experience of reconciliation from God. But if a community is skilled in listening and waiting it can help the restored victim the call and its meaning. The

going out to serve in this fashion is characteristic of the reconciled victim: the victim is now able to show the same self-giving love that is a sign of God's form in the world.

The blood of the cross makes peace. Those who have come through the great tribulation have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb signifies that end-point of reconciliation. The reconciling blood of Christ is revealing to us, I believe, what might be the crucial ministry for our time.

Conclusion

This all too quick survey of some of the riches of Precious Blood symbolism opens up for you, I hope, some avenues in your own ministries in renewing your own communities and the communities you serve. The symbols of covenant, cross, cup and the Lamb open up so many possibilities for us. I would like to close echoing again the words of Blessed Maria quoted in the first presentation: it is my hope that the time we have spent together here might help bring about "that beautiful order of things that the great Son of God came to establish upon earth through his divine blood."