**Wounds in Scripture: Jacob, Thomas, and Christ**

*Rev. Jeffrey Kirch, C.P.P.S.*

**IN TRO D U CTIO N**

Every six years Missionaries of the Precious Blood from around the world gather for the General Assembly. During their time together representatives from all of the units of the Congregation gather with the Moderator General and General Council to elect a new leadership team and to take care of important issues that the Congregation is facing. But the General Assembly is more

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**Finding our Truth through our Wounds**

*Rev. Joseph Nassal, C.P.P.S.*

I n April, 2017, I had the opportunity to give talks on Precious Blood spirituality to our missionaries in Poland. Prior to the spirituality conference, our missionaries extended gracious hospitality as we toured historic sites in Krakow and Warsaw. But the most powerful memory for me is the day we spent in Auschwitz and Birkenau.

The echoes of Auschwitz are haunting: the wall where those imprisoned were shot, the cell where Father Maximilian Kolbe was imprisoned, the barracks filled with human hair, shoes, and household utensils from the victims that were found when the camp was liberated. Stunned silence and deep prayer are the only responses to being in a place where such unimaginable evil and horror took place. Here the ashes of those who died in the gas chambers and the crematoria cry out: never forget.

Among the most poignant pictures are the face of the victims that line the walls of the barracks—the faces emaciated, hair shorn, eyes filled with fear. Beneath the photos taken when they arrived in the camp are the names of the victims, the places where they
lived before being deported to the camp, what they did for a living before arrival—teacher, doctor, monk, priest, shop owner, beautician, barber, butcher. Some had an inverted triangle sown on to their stripped uniform indicating suspicion of being a homosexual. Also listed was the day they arrived in the camp and the day they died. One could spend days just studying these faces and the stories behind each one.

There is one photo of the SS doctor meeting people at the trains in Birkenau and determining if they were healthy enough to work. This was the place where the trains from all over Europe would unload and sort their human cargo. If the SS doctor determined they could work, he would point to the right where they were subjected to unspeakable suffering, from the indignity of being stripped and starved to working at hard labor until they collapsed from exhaustion. If they appeared too weak or too old or too young, he pointed to the left where they were told they were going to the showers. They were stripped and poison gas was unleashed in the shower. After everyone had died, the bodies were burned. A few months after visiting Poland, I read a new memoir by Dr. Edith Eva Eger, *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*. Dr. Eger was imprisoned in Auschwitz when she was 16. *The Choice* is not only a powerful story of how she survived Auschwitz and a death march of inconceivable suffering, but how, as a psychiatrist, she draws upon her wounds and memories to help those who have experienced trauma, terror, and tragedy in their lives. Dr. Eger offers many stories from her imprisonment at Auschwitz that reveal how we can survive the most demeaning, dehumanizing, and devastating experiences of our lives with our dignity and hope intact.

Dr. Eger’s insights resonate with how we discover the meaning of Precious Blood spirituality through our wounds.

**A SPIRITUALITY OF RESILIENCE**

When we confront crushing losses in our lives, we discover within ourselves a spirit of resilience and resistance—the resiliency to come back from the most excruciating experiences and the resistance to stay the course and stand up against the worst kind of evil. I experienced this when my older brother Ed killed himself on June 8, 1987. He had suffered for several years from paranoid schizophrenia. The wound inflicted by his death was raw when I arrived in Rome in late June of 1987 for an international meeting of Precious Blood formators. It was during those weeks as we studied the spirituality of the Precious Blood, traced the charism of St. Gaspar, and listened to the stories of his life that Precious Blood spirituality wedged its way into the cracks of my broken heart. Though the pain of my brother’s death has faded over the years, the scar of his suicide survives. When I touch the scar, I touch part of my...
The spirituality of the Precious Blood proclaims that each of us is wounded. It is what we do with these wounds, how we live through them, that will determine whether our lives reveal the redemptive suffering of Jesus or conceal the saving power of Christ's compassion and love because we are bitter and feeling betrayed.

This is the way we survive the most difficult times of our lives. We listen for that inner voice. This is the choice each of us face when tragedies, trauma, and terror arrive at our door. “We can choose what the horror teaches us,” Evers writes. “To become bitter in our grief and fear. Hostile. Paralyzed. Or to hold on to the childlike part of us, the lively and curious part, the part that is innocent.”

THE POWER OF MEMORY

As we view Precious Blood Spirituality through the lens of our own wounds and scars, memory plays an important role. The spirituality of the blood is rich in Scriptural references to the importance of memory. In Exodus 12, Moses tells the people to splash blood on the doorposts of their dwellings to protect their families from the angel of death. In reviewing the ritual to mark their liberation, he reminds them, “This day shall be a memorial feast for you.” In the Gospels, on the night he celebrated this ritual, the very night he was betrayed, Jesus tells his disciples as he identifies the bread and wine as his body and blood, “Do this in memory of me.”

We carry within us memories that can either imprison us in the past or impel us into the future with hope. “Memory is sacred ground,” Dr. Eger writes. “But it’s haunted too. It’s the place where my rage and guilt and grief go circling like hungry birds scavenging the same old bones. It’s the place where I go searching for the answer to the unanswerable question: Why did I survive?” But one memory was important in her survival as she writes how her mother’s last words to her on the train to Auschwitz kept her alive: “Just remember, no one can take away from you what you’ve put in your mind.”

For more than twenty years after her liberation and her new life in the United States, Edith tried to still the memories of the Holocaust. At Auschwitz, “memory was my lifeline,” she writes. But after she arrived in the United States, she tried to “shut out the past” because “to remember is to concede to the horror again and again.” And yet all the memories come flooding back to her as she goes to college for her degree in psychology and a young student asked her if she had read Man’s Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl. At that point, the name didn’t ring a bell for Edith. “Frankl was at Auschwitz,” the young man tells her. “He wrote this book about it, just after the war. I think you will find it of interest.”

Edith devours Frankl’s book. She discovers that “every page I read, I want to write ten.” Then she understands that by telling her story she “lightens its grip instead of tightening it.” She understood that speaking and writing about her experiences, her wounds, could help to heal her.

When we pray and preach, write and speak, live and teach from our own experiences of woundedness, we are fulfilling what Frederick Buechner wrote is one of our most important roles: “to teach gently the inevitability of pain” and help ourselves and others to heal.
TRACING THE SCAR

Behind every scar there is a story. When we touch the scar, we tell the story.

My dad died on December 7, 2014, the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. This is significant because dad enlisted in the Navy the day after Pearl Harbor and spent the next four years in World War II seeing a lot of action, including the D-Day invasion. Like many of his generation, his life was shaped by what he saw, what he experienced, and the friends he made and lost in the war. But he never talked about it.

Dad carried the scars of the war with him throughout his life. To cover those scars, he drank. Since my father rarely missed a day of work because of his drinking, he never thought of himself an alcoholic. We all covered for him when he was too drunk to attend a family function. The older I got, the more I wanted to confront dad about his drinking—even to the point of calling a family conference when I was in college. It was a disaster.

When we were children and one of us was hurting, whether it was a bloody nose or a bruised ego, we always went to mom for comfort because if we went to dad he would say, “Brush it off” or “Brace up!” But then, ten years after my brother’s death, he told a story that gave me an understanding about dad that I never had before and an entry into his wound. It was the day after Christmas and we were at the cemetery to visit my brother Ed’s grave. We also visited the graves of dad’s parents. None of us knew dad’s father since he was only 37 when he died of tuberculosis. As we stood in the cold winds whipping through the cemetery, dad told us how a couple of days before his father died, my dad who was four or five at the time cut his hand badly enough that he needed stitches. As his father lay dying, my dad was brought in to see him. His dad asked him about his hand; he wanted to see his wound. But dad said, “For some reason I wouldn’t show him my hand.”

His dad died the next day. In those days, they held the visitation at the home. Before the neighbors, family, and friends arrived to pay their respects, dad said, “I can still remember my dad lying in the casket and I kept trying to show him my hand. But it was too late.” This was the story that opened the door to let us into his life. Though he would rarely share anything personal, this was a moment of remembering his own father and how he spent his life hiding his wounds.

LIVING FROM THE WOUND

The spirituality of the Precious Blood proclaims that each of us is wounded. It is what we do with these wounds, how we live through them, that will determine whether our lives reveal the redemptive suffering of Jesus or conceal the saving power of Christ’s compassion and love because we are bitter and feeling betrayed.

When we live from the cracked and broken places of our lives, from the creases and the flaws, we learn a bit more about humility, about patience, about vulnerability. When we are vulnerable enough to touch our wounds, trace our scars, we deepen the well of compassion within us so that other thirsty souls might drink of God’s loving presence.

Often times we want to hide our scars or at least cover them up so that no one asks, “How did you get that scar?” But the question itself is an invitation into dialogue. Carol Howard Merritt tells the story of a friend who was asked by her doctor what kind of plastic surgery she wanted to remove a major scar. “Are you serious?” her friend told the doctor. “Do you really think I’m going to give up these bragging rights? I earned this scar!” Merritt imagines Jesus stepping into that upper room and showing his friends his hands, feet and side, and saying, “Hey, check out my scars!” He certainly earned them.

If we are looking for confirmation that we are called to be missionaries of reconciliation, all we have to do is check our scars. Whether they are inscribed on our skin or on our souls, they tell the story of a life lived amid the pain and suffering of a world crying out for redemption.
Woundedness and Empathy: a Challenge for a Precious Blood Missionary

Rev. Willi Klein, C.PPS.

Barbara Schnöll, a palliative care expert, wrote, “Can illness itself be a healing process? Is the Saviour a physician? Are saints especially healthy people? When I am released from hospital, am I healed or healthy (or is it simply too expensive)? Are we only able to heal our body? Or also our mind, our spirit – our whole being? As a human being we are not just a body; our thoughts (spirit), our feelings (psyche) and our relations with others define us too. We can be healed in all that. For the moment, in an encounter, or when we reach completion at the end of our life, at the moment of death.”


St. Pope John Paul II spoke of the importance of the Church’s healing mission in his encyclical Salvifici doloris (On the Christian meaning of human suffering). He wrote, “Humanity suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in its most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself... Moral suffering is ‘pain of the soul’... In fact, it is a question of pain of a spiritual nature... The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. But at the same time, moral suffering seems as it were less identified and less reachable by therapy” (Salvifici doloris #5).

A POSSIBLE RESPONSE: HAGIOTherapy

Since my first assignment at a boarding school, I have been interested in the Church’s healing mission. I felt that Precious Blood Spirituality could help people who are suffering in a special way. In the former Yugoslavia and in Croatia, where I later worked for 20 years and founded a new unit of the C.PP.S., I came into contact with Prof. Tomislav Ivančić (1938-2017) who developed the concept of hagiotherapy. I discovered that this concept is a response to St. Pope John Paul II’s Salvifici doloris. Hagiotherapy is a type of healing that originated in the Catholic Church and can help anyone, regardless of their religious beliefs. It is based on the Judeo-Christian conception of humanity, as described by the apostle Paul: “May the God of peace himself make you holy in every way; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept blameless” (1 Thess 5, 23).

DEFINITION OF HAGIOTherapy

Hagiotherapy deals with healing the spiritual dimension of a human being, described variously as the spirit, the spiritual soul or the immortal soul. Medicine essentially treats our physical nature, whereas psychiatry and psychotherapy concentrate on our psychological dimension. Pastoral care offers redemption as God’s sacred gift of grace through the spreading of the Gospel, prayer, and the sacraments. Our spiritual dimension, despite being essential for our overall wellbeing, has been little reflected on in the traditional health services or in pastoral care. Studies show that nearly 70% of all human illnesses have spiritual origins. Such illnesses do not occur in other living creatures, and are therefore unique to human beings. This is where hagiotherapy comes in.

PRECiOUS BLOOD SPIRITUALITY

Every day people come to Maria Baumgärtle seeking help. They co-

"Humanity suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in its most advanced specializations."

...
me to the sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary to receive help from the Missionaries of the Precious Blood through the sacrament of confession, through conversations, and through spiritual accompaniment.

Occasionally the sacrament of confession does not seem to me to be sufficient, so I then offer hagiotherapy. Others come to hagiotherapy after undergoing psychotherapy and one or more stays in a psychiatric clinic, where they may have experienced a certain amount of help but do not feel entirely free of their problem. They are suffering people who have been officially “cured” but now do not find anyone who shows concern for them or gives them hope. Still others have, in their need, sought help from a dubious “healer” or got involved in esoteric practices. As a result their suffering has increased. Such people are often ostracized, abandoned and left alone in their need. In them I encounter the suffering Christ who sheds his Precious Blood.

**A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE**

A 48-year-old married woman with three children, whose first husband died young and who subsequently remarried four years later, complained of depression, weakness and a feeling of loneliness from the beginning of her second marriage. A five-week stay in a psychiatric clinic helped her to some extent, and medication restored her appetite, but physical work quickly tired her out. Her doctor confirmed several times that she was in good health, but her problems persisted.

Further conversations revealed that her mother had tried to drown herself in the fourth month of her pregnancy. After her birth she was separated from her mother for six weeks due to illness and from the age of three onwards she had to help her mother who was often ill. She unconsciously took on responsibility in the family and so had no real childhood.

Whenever her mother fell ill, she blamed her for the illness. Since her second husband and the three children did not get along well, she constantly doubted whether the decision to remarry was right. Added to this stress, one of her grandfathers had been a Nazi, add this subject hung over the family like a curse. The same stress hung over the second husband’s family.
Diagnosis: Her problems were due to her experience during the pregnancy, the first years of her life and the second marriage. A lack of love, a precarious domestic life, constant stress in her early childhood, and disappointment had a severely detrimental effect on her trust, self-esteem, enthusiasm, free will, ability to communicate, and vitality. After 19 hagiotherapy sessions the woman regained greater control over her life and grew in self-confidence. To free the family from the Nazi curse, a priest performed liberation prayers.

**THEORETICAL BASIS FOR HAGIOThERAPY**

Hagiotherapy according to Ivančić is based on research results in the fields of philosophy, theology, biology, medicine (particularly neuroscience) and psychology. It also incorporates scientifically evaluated experience of practical therapy. It builds on the “anthropological medi-intellect, understanding, heart, freedom, character, religiosity, creativity, sexual identity, trust, hope, love, language, memory and memories.

**PATHOLOGY AND THERAPY**

Ivančić speaks of the characteristics and principles of the human spiritual soul. The characteristics include its direct origins from the Creator, its transcendence, transparency and indivisibility, the vulnerability of its “organs” (functions and capabilities) and the possibility of healing the spiritual soul. The principles of the

“Our Precious Blood Spirituality calls us to respond to the cry of the blood with empathy and hagiotherapy is a valuable method for responding to the wounds in our souls.”
THE MODEL OF CHRIST

We realize, at times acutely and painfully, that we have to deal with our own woundedness even as we strive to be effective ministers. Maintaining a balance in addressing our wounds while at the same time being “ready to respond when we are needed” is challenging. Where can we turn to find a model in doing so?

The answer is obvious: as followers of Jesus we can find no better model. In his letter to the Philippians Paul reminds us, “Your attitude must be that of Christ. Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in our likeness. He was known to be of human estate, and it then goes on to explain that wounds require care. They need to be exposed now and then for healing remedies to be applied. When our wounds are not bound up and supported with bandages, we are weak and unable to respond when the needs of others press in upon us.

The Messiah realizes this, and so he binds and unbinds his wounds one at a time, so that when he is needed he will be able to respond. As Nouwen states, “He is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.” Nouwen concludes his story about the Messiah with this observation, “He is both the wounded minister and the healing minister.” So it is with us.

In one of his earlier works (The Wounded Healer, 1972) Henri Nouwen recounts a story from the Talmud. Rabbi Ben Levi asks Elijah the prophet when the Messiah will come. Elijah tells him, “Ask him yourself;” and is told that he is sitting at the city gate. “How will I know him?” the Rabbi asks. Elijah replies, “He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and then bind them up again. But he unbinds one at a time and binds it up again.” Rabbi Levi presses on, “Why does the Messiah unbind them one at a time and then binds them up again?” Because, the Messiah says, “Perhaps I shall be needed; if so I must be ready so as not to delay a moment.” (Taken from the tractae Sanhedrin) Nouwen then goes on to explain that wounds require care. They need to be exposed now and then for healing remedies to be applied. When our wounds are not bound up and supported with bandages, we are weak and unable to respond when the needs of others press in upon us.

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was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross.” (Phil 2:5-8) Jesus was more than willing to fulfill the words of the psalmist, “The Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Ps 147)

Jesus was willing to “empty himself,” to move beyond his own needs in order to engage with those living on the margins of society. Much woundedness can be found there. The gospels are clear that while Jesus was engaging in this ministry he also had to address his own needs; tend to his own wounds. There are numerous examples of Jesus going apart to pray; going away to deserted places in order to apply healing remedies to his human woundedness. It was during these times that he turned to his Father for the strength to continue his ministry.

SYMPATHY, EMPATHY, COMPASSION, AND PASSION

The words sympathy and empathy speak to the balance that must be maintained between taking care of oneself and taking care of others. The Greek word pathos refers to the inner core of a person’s being: feeling, emotion, experience. When that feeling is one of “sympathy” it refers to an awareness of what is going on within oneself. A sympathetic person is one who is in touch with the core of his or her own being.

In other words, sympathy refers to the unbinding of one’s wounds so they can be tended to with healing remedies. During these times the capacity to reach out to others and tend to their woundedness is not possible. In biblical language, one must first love oneself (i.e., take care of oneself) before one can love another (take care of another).

Empathy, on the other hand, refers to being in touch with the core of another’s being. Being empathetic is often referred to as walking in the shoes of another person, relating to what is going on in the life or the experiences of another. Indeed, “Walk a mile in my shoes, and you will know what I am going through!” Or, as defined in the dictionary, empathy is “the capacity for participation in another’s feelings.”

There must be a balance between sympathy and empathy (binding and unbinding wounds) if one is to be an effective minister.

Personal wounds must be tended to (sympathy); and once this has been done, then there is the ability to tend to the wounds of another (empathy). A quote relevant to this circulated among medical professionals is the observation: “The heart must first pump blood to itself.” Or in the words of Precious Blood Spirituality, one must hear the cry of one’s own blood before being able to respond to the cry of another’s blood.

The words passion and compassion speak to the same point. Both words come from the root Latin word patire, which also refers to what Jesus fully models this in his spirituality. He recognized and acknowledged his own wounds (sympathy/passion) and took time to address them. He recognized and acknowledged the wounds (empathy/compassion) of others and took time to address them.

It was through his woundedness that Jesus was able to be empathetic/compassionate to the suffering of those around him. Jesus is seen as following in the role of the Suffering Servant described in Deutero-Isaiah, “It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings he endured.” (Isaiah 53:4)

THE WAY OF THE BLOOD

Over the centuries there have been many others who followed in the footsteps of Jesus, including Maria and Gaspar. Among them is Teresa of Avila, known for her profound spirituality. She did not relish the suffering and woundedness that came her way, yet she also acknowledged that there was meaning and purpose in it.

The story is told that one day the devil appeared to her in the guise of
Jesus. The devil thought he was so well disguised that Teresa would not recognize him for who he was. But Teresa immediately did so, and sternly ordered him to get out, telling him she knew he was the devil. Since the gig was up, the devil agreed to leave, but he had one final question for Teresa, “How did you know I was not the Christ?” Teresa answered him, “Because you have no wounds.”

Jesus was well aware his ministry would come at a price. He knew he was going to endure wounds. Nonetheless, he was willing to shed his blood to the last drop; to give his life completely for others and thereby be a source of healing for humanity.

This is depicted in the powerful scene in the garden of Gethsemani, prior to his crucifixion. As is narrated in the gospel of Matthew, “He said to his disciples, ‘My heart is nearly broken with sorrow.’ He fell prostrate in prayer, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Still, let it be as you would have it, not as I… If this cup cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done!’” (Mt 26:38-41)

Walking the way of Jesus is to walk the way of the blood, the way of woundedness. There are times when we also must go to our garden of Gethsemani and lay bare our inner soul before God the Father. And like Jesus, engaging in this prayer will enable us to bind up our personal wounds to enable us to walk with those to whom we are called to minister. May the Blood of Jesus empower us to be effective wounded healers. ◆

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**UPCOMING INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS**

**MERLAP IV:**
Gathering of Representatives from C.P.P.S. Lay Associate Programs
September 9-15, 2018
Casa LaSalle
Rome, Italy

**Meeting of Major Superiors & General Council**
November 11-17, 2018
Casa San Francisco Javier
Santiago, Chile

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Addiction and Precious Blood Spirituality

Sr. Linda Fischer, ASC

This article will be a chronicle of my own addiction to alcohol and how I came to recovery and peace within myself, and as a result of that recovery and peace, how I live and share Precious Blood Spirituality in my own life as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ and as a recovering alcoholic.

On December 24, 2017, I celebrated 28 years of grateful recovery from alcoholism. Some of you might remember my own journey prior to this. I entered the community in 1960 right out of high school and left in 1969 prior to making Final Vows. I returned to the community in 1985.

On that same day, December 24, I was taken to a treatment center in upstate NY for alcoholic religious. I remained there for seven and a half months. It was there that my recovery truly began. It is said that recovery for an alcoholic will not begin until that alcoholic is willing to put down the shovel and stop digging. I was ready. I was desperate for so long that, somehow from day one, I knew this was a new beginning for me.

In treatment I was introduced to the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, written by alcoholics, for alcoholics. The 12 Steps made so much sense to me. Other people actually went through what I did, and had the same feelings of hopelessness that plagued my life for so long. I began to understand that alcoholism truly is a disease rather than an indication of a spiritual or moral defect, and it has nothing to do with will power. I learned there is no cure for the disease of alcoholism. However, there is a daily reprieve – just don’t drink one day at a time. I was told early on that it was possible for me to be an Adorer of the Blood of Christ and be an alcoholic in recovery at the same time. I never thought the two could co-exist. I stopped feeling ‘less than,’ and began thanking God for the two great gifts I have been given – the gift of my vocation and the gift of my sobriety. Edna St. Vincent Millay said, “God meets us where we are, not where we think we should be.” After years and years of searching, trying and failing, I was finally at peace with myself and within myself.

THE DISEASE OF ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism is a deadly disease. As well as being deadly it is also hereditary and progressive, and it destroys everything in its path. My mother was an alcoholic, and being the oldest of three, I saw the devastation and the progression of the disease in my mother’s life and the utter chaos, pain, and dysfunction it caused in my family. Of course, when it was happening, I did not have that knowledge. I did not understand anything about alcoholism until I faced my own addiction many, many years later. To me, an alcoholic was someone who did not have the willpower or the desire to stop drinking. I thought of an alcoholic as a self-centered, morally bankrupt loser.

My stories prior to recovery are many, some humorous, but most sad. Being back in the convent only four years and being sure, deep in my heart and soul, that I belonged here, I had an absolutely horrific time dealing with my addiction. It went against everything I believed in and wanted for myself. I could not accept it and abhorred even the thought of it. I just did not see how this was possible. I would pray, “God, anything but this.” I exerted every ounce of willpower I had and then some and nothing helped. I did my foxhole praying, “God, if you take this away I promise you I will do anything.” I asked this question repeatedly, “God, what did I ever do to deserve this? Why are you punishing me?” I would constantly ask, “Why me, God, why me?” I could not in any way reconcile being an Adorer of the Blood of Christ with being an alcoholic. Precious Blood Spirituality? Everything seemed so impossible for me.

ACCEPTANCE AND LOVE OF SISTERS

Then came December 24, 1989, the first day of my sobriety and the beginning of my recovery. I believe this was the lowest point in my entire life. I was totally without hope. Wonderful women in my own ASC community in Columbia, Pennsylvania and elsewhere, leadership and friends, gave me the hope that I did not have. They accepted me and loved me until I could learn to accept and love myself. They loved me enough to get me help. Without them and their support I definitely would not be here today.

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WOUNDS AND GIFTS

Singer and voice actor Ken Page, said so pointedly, “Our deepest wounds surround our greatest gifts.”
For the last twelve years I’ve been trying to share my woundedness and my gift of recovery by being involved in 12-Step Retreat Ministry. This is when, I believe, Precious Blood Spirituality took on form and flesh and came alive. Prior to this, I could never make the connection between the books and the retreats on Precious Blood Spirituality and my own life.

To me, our rich spirituality is all about compassion, acceptance, and reconciliation – one wounded person touching the wounds of another. Hopefully, I give that compassion, acceptance, and reconciliation to those I meet on retreats. However, even more important than what I share is how I listen. My spirituality comes alive when I listen with an open and non-judgmental heart: when I listen to the woman who is riddled with guilt because her daughter overdosed on drugs; when I listen to the man who can only see God as a vindictive and vengeful judge; when I listen to the 65 year old woman who cannot forgive herself for killing her infant son 40 years ago when she was driving drunk; when I listen to the heroin addict who tries to stay clean and sober and keeps failing and sees his life as hopeless. The stories and the pain go on and on. My acceptance of those I meet and the message of hope and love that I try to share with them... that, for me, is Precious Blood Spirituality. What I used to think of as my greatest curse, has indeed become my greatest blessing. Paula D’Arcy said, “God comes to us disguised as our life.” It took me decades but I understand that now – it has traveled that longest journey, from my head to my heart. All that happened in my life brought me to the place I am today, and for all I am so grateful.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, “Today my mind no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity or depression because, you see, I have been given a quiet place in the bright sunshine.”

"My acceptance of those I meet and the message of hope and love that I try to share with them... that, for me, is Precious Blood Spirituality.”
THE FAMILY OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD AND POPE FRANCIS

Saturday, June 30
9AM to 12:30 PM
Audience with Pope Francis
In addition to the audience with Pope Francis, there will be presentations on the Precious Blood during the morning.

7PM
Basilica of St. John Lateran
Prayer Vigil

Sunday, July 1
10AM at Saint Peter’s Basilica
Celebration of the Eucharist
with Cardinal Angelo Comastri

12PM
St. Peter’s Square
Angelus with Pope Francis

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than just another business meeting. The General Assembly is also tasked with setting a direction for the Congregation to follow in the coming years.

The XXth General Assembly held in July of 2013 developed a vision statement that has helped guide the work of the General Curia over these past few years. This issue of *The Cup of the New Covenant* is an outgrowth of that vision. The participants at the Assembly recognized that our spirituality calls us to recognize our own woundedness so that we can effectively minister to the people of God.

The final message of the General Assembly reads in part, “Embracing our own woundedness, missionaries are a committed presence in the midst of a suffering world and enter into healing relationships with those who cry out for reconciliation and liberation.” The articles found in this issue help us explore our own woundedness and reflect on how this woundedness helps proclaim God’s redeeming love.

**SACRED SCRIPTURE**

Article C3 of our *Normative Texts* notes that the “Congregation dedicates itself to the service of the Church through the apostolic and missionary activity of the ministry of the word.” Sacred Scripture plays a significant role in our spirituality and in our apostolic endeavors, just as it has since the time of Saint Gaspar. Our understanding of Precious Blood Spirituality is constantly growing so that we can respond to the signs of the time and the cry of the Blood. Through the study of and prayer with Sacred Scripture we come to know of our call, as people created in the image and likeness of God, to help build the Kingdom of God. In addition to our identity as Christians, scripture helps us make sense of our own woundedness and its place in the wider context of our Precious Blood Spirituality.

Within this article, two scripture passages will be presented that help illuminate our understanding of woundedness. The presentation here is not meant to be a scholarly, in-depth exegesis of these passages, but more of a reflection on their meaning for us today. The two passages are: Jacob wrestling with God (Genesis 32: 23-33) and Thomas’ encounter with the Risen Lord (John 20: 23-33). I hope through our exploration of these scripture passages our own spirituality will be enlivened.

**JACOB THE WRESTLER (GENESIS 32: 23-33)**

The story of Jacob wrestling with the mysterious man is found in Genesis. While Jacob was going to meet his brother Esau, a meeting that had Jacob very worried, he encountered a mysterious man with whom he wrestled. The wrestling match went on all night and the man was not able to conquer Jacob. However, he was...
able to strike Jacob’s hip, causing a permanent dislocation. Jacob still did not relent and would not let the man go until he received a blessing from the mysterious man. The man asked what Jacob’s name is and then gives him a new name, Israel. Jacob asks about the man’s name, but the man does not answer Jacob. Jacob comes to realize that he has been wrestling with God.

In reflecting on this passage in relation to our Precious Blood Spirituality and our understanding of woundedness, two interrelated ideas stand out. The wound that Jacob sustained, the dislocated hip, marked him for the rest of his life. We can imagine that forever after Jacob walked with a limp. Even when our physical wounds heal and our range of motion has returned, the wound still affects us. In some ways, it changes who we are. This is true for physical wounds, but also for psychological and spiritual wounds as well. When we experience pain we, to varying degrees, are changed. Those who have had major surgery or been involved in a serious car accident understand how these experiences change our outlook on life and our very selves. Wounds do not just heal and go away… instead they are part of who we are.

This leads to the second element of Jacob’s story that can help us grow in our understanding of Precious Blood Spirituality. In the course of Jacob’s wrestling with the mysterious man, who we can deduce is actually God, he is not only wounded but is also given a new name, Israel. In the course of wrestling through the night, a night where Jacob never quite conquers his sparring partner, but a night filled with exertion and constant struggle, Jacob is changed to Israel. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary points out that in scripture a change of name denotes a change in mission. Jacob, through his struggle and his woundedness, has received a new mission in life. He is now Israel, God’s chosen.

The connections between the story of Jacob and our own Precious Blood Spirituality and our woundedness are significant. The struggles in our life, whether they are physical, personal, spiritual, or psychological, help form our identity. These struggles and wounds can not simply be ignored or swept away. Instead, they must be embraced, just as Jacob embraced his new name. It is through these struggles and wounds that we are able to connect to the People of God with whom we are ministering.

**THOMAS IN THE UPPER ROOM (JOHN 20: 23-33)**

Fast forwarding from the beginning of the Bible to the end of the Bible, another passage that can help us appreciate how our woundedness is an integral part of our Precious Blood Spirituality is found in the Gospel according to John. The scene of Thomas’ encountering the Risen Christ is one of the most vivid in the John’s Gospel. It is from this encounter that Thomas receives his nickname “Doubting Thomas.” But the story is much richer than simply the source of an unfortunate nickname. Within these few verses we find a treasure trove of wisdom that helps form our understanding of the importance of our own woundedness.

To set the stage, after Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, the disciples gathered in the Upper Room with the doors barred and locked. Jesus comes through the door and showed them his wounds. He breathed the Holy Spirit on them and they were commissioned for ministry. Only one element was missing: Thomas. Thomas was not with the others when Jesus appeared the first time. And he insists on seeing the nail marks and the wounded side of Jesus before believing. Jesus accommodates Thomas’ request. He appears again in the Upper Room while Thomas is present. Thomas touches the wounds of Christ and comes to believe.

Like the story of Jacob, the story of Thomas offers us several avenues to explore our Precious Blood Spirituality. First, there are the scars of Christ. One might think that in the Resurrection the scars from the scourging, the nails, and the lance would have been healed. Instead the nail marks are still there. The wound from the lance that pierced the side of Christ is still visible. Christ has truly conquered death. Christ has risen from the dead. But the marks caused from the pain and suffering he endured remain with him. The Resurrection is not plastic surgery meant to fix our blemishes and cover over our scars. The Resurrection is new life with God, but as theologian Roberto Goizueta points out, “Christ’s bodily resurrection involves the realization that past injustices are never erased by future victories. Past suffering remains forever a part of the history of the resurrection; the wounds remain forever inscribed on the body.”

As with the story of Jacob, the wounds and sufferings we encounter throughout our lives do not magically disappear. Instead they contribute to who we are. Our own wounds and the wounds of those with whom we minister cannot be ignored, but must be attended to. When Thomas met Christ in the Upper Room, he touched the wounds of Christ. He put his hand into the side of Christ and he believed. Through the
When we acknowledge our woundedness, we connect our wounds with the wounds of Christ. A second element from the story of Thomas helps inform our understanding of the importance of our own woundedness when it comes to our ministry. The evangelist John connects the appearance of Christ to the disciples with the mission of reconciliation.

It is in the context of seeing the Risen Christ, marked by scars, that the disciples are sent as ambassadors of reconciliation. Jesus offers peace to the disciples, the same people who just recently had abandoned him and fled in fear. Jesus does not condemn his disciples as failures. He does not berate them for not having enough courage. Instead, twice he offers them peace and breathes the Holy Spirit on them. They are created anew. The sufferings that Christ endured are still there. The disappointments and wounds of the disciples are still there as well. But through the ministry of Jesus, the Holy Spirit has transformed and empowered them to preach the Good News.

**PASCHAL MYSTERY**

When we acknowledge our own woundedness, we connect our wounds with the wounds of Christ.

Lay associates from around the world gathered in Rome for MERLAP III in 2012. MERLAP IV will be held in September 2018.

Next Issue: October 2018

“Lay Associates: MERLAP IV”