

Body and Blood of Christ B Corpus Christi

1. Back in the “Day”, I would donate blood ever so often. And as I would lie back and watch the collection bag slowly fill, I often reflected on how vital Blood is to life, and the sacredness with which it is regarded in every culture. Even in our modern age, to my knowledge, no one has come up with an artificial substitute for blood. Thanks to medical science, we know a lot about the complex, life-giving nature of blood. And, although ancient people did not have this knowledge, they had a deep respect for this mysterious liquid.

2. The Hebrew tradition closely associated Blood with life. Indeed, the root words for “blood” in “life” are paired in Hebrew, as well as other ancient languages. In the book of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are instructed, “only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat” (Deuteronomy 12:23). Since Blood was equated with life, we can better understand why it had such atoning value in Hebrew sacrifice. Thus, the Priestly writer in Leviticus says, “for the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement” (Leviticus 17:11). Since Blood was life, it was especially efficacious in ritual sacrifice. We have a reminder of this in the first reading from Exodus, which describes how Moses, after constructing an altar, collected the blood of bulls, half of which he sprinkled on the altar and the other half on the people.

3. With that as a background, we can better appreciate the amazement Jesus’s followers must’ve felt at the Last Supper, when for the first time he spoke the words we heard in Mark’s gospel: “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24). We could easily substitute “life” for “blood,” giving us, “This is my *life* of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” Jesus was telling his followers, that it was his life that would now bring about atonement, not the blood of bulls. Jesus was prepared to make the most efficacious sacrifice possible, the offering of his own life, not on an altar of stone, but on the wood of the cross.

4. But it was not just a new understanding of blood as sacrificial element, that Jesus gave to his disciples. He gave a new understanding of sacrifice itself. Jesus raised to a new level of meaning the notion of sacrifice. It is a meaning we still struggle to understand. Pope St. John Paul II, gave us an important document for probing more deeply the meaning of sacrifice, in his Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharisti*. In the very first sentence the Pope picks up the theme I just introduced to you. He says, “the church draws her life from the Eucharist.” This is the heart of the mystery of the Eucharist. But it is life derived *not* from a bloody sacrifice to appease an angry God, but the utter gift of oneself to another without counting the cost.

5. If we can grasp this understanding of sacrifice, then we see why the Eucharist is the center of everything for us. Every truth of our Catholic faith has its roots in the Eucharist. Pope St. John Paul II said, “the church was born of the Paschal mystery. For this very reason the Eucharist, which is in an outstanding way, the sacrament of the Paschal mystery, *stands at the center of the church’s life.*” For example, the Trinity is all about sacrifice, or self-giving: the Father pours out himself into the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit the same, all in a marvelous divine dance. The Eucharist, then, is not just something the church does; the Eucharist *is* the church. *Everything* finds meaning in the Eucharist.

6. If everything finds meaning in the Eucharist, then that has to include our individual lives as well. Every bit of our lives is part of the sacrifice intrinsic to the Eucharist. Not just the conscious offering of our prayers during the celebration of the Eucharist at Mass, but every moment of sacrifice, whether deliberate or simply imposed by the unavoidable circumstances of life, is a part of the

Eucharist. Every sickness, frustration, failure, humiliation, setback, disappointment – – everything we suffer – – is part of the living sacrifice of the Eucharist. Sometimes we say “that really took the life out of me...” Or “I sweat blood over that.” When we have those moments – – and everyone does – – we are further “Eucharist -ized” by life. The hope for us as Catholics, is that we will come to see those moments, not as meaningless suffering, but as part of the ongoing sacrifice of Christ in the Paschal mystery.

7. The one moment of our lives, which must also become a little Eucharist is, of course, our own death. In the Eucharist we encounter the majesty of death – – Christ death.

8. But our own death will find its majesty in the Eucharist as well. By learning the hard, but liberating lessons of sacrifice, which the Church strives to teach us through such documents as *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, we take ownership of our own deaths. Penetrated by the wisdom of that teaching, we will be able to say with St. Paul, “where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death too, will have been transformed by the Eucharist.

The two questions:

What should I offer to God in the offering this morning?

What is the one thing I can gain from this Mass to make me the better-version-of-myself that God wants?

Today, June 6, is the feast day of St Boniface, bishop and martyr.

Today is the feast day of St. Boniface, patron saint of our Parish. His witness to the Germanic peoples then has relevance for us today. Let me share a quote from him found in the Breviary for June 6. St Boniface, b. 673, d. 754.

“In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life’s different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course.

The ancient fathers showed us how we should carry out this duty: Clement, Cornelius and many others in the city of Rome, Cyprian at Carthage, Athanasius at Alexandria. They all lived under emperors who were pagans; they all steered Christ’s ship – or rather his most dear spouse, the Church. This they did by teaching and defending her, by their labors and sufferings, even to the shedding of blood.

Let us continue the fight on the day of the Lord. The days of anguish and tribulation have overtaken us; if God so wills, let us die for the holy laws of our fathers, so that we may deserve to obtain an eternal inheritance with them.

Let us be neither dogs that do not bark nor silent onlookers nor paid servants who run away before the wolf. Instead, let us be careful shepherds watching over Christ’s flock. Let us preach the whole of God’s plan to the powerful and to the humble, to rich and to poor, to men of every rank and age, as far as God gives us the strength, in season and out of season, as Saint Gregory writes in his book of Pastoral Instruction.” (Book III, p. 1457).