

Corpus Christi 2009

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I once asked one of our deacons after he had talked about a football game between BC and Notre Dame in his homily, if he knew anything at all about football. He honestly admitted that he didn't. Neither do I, I said, but I know enough to know that you don't really know what you're talking about. So, if you want to use the image in a homily, at least begin with a disclaimer that says: I don't really know what I'm talking about but I think you may, even if I don't.

So here's my disclaimer. Today is the feast of the body and blood of Christ. The readings today focus not on the body but on the blood of Christ. And that's what I'd like to invite you to reflect on this morning. Blood. So if you are a medical person and you are thinking he really doesn't know what he's talking about, you're right. For example, I am presently undergoing a treatment for problems in my Achilles tendon and in my elbows (bad golf playing) that uses my own blood. It's called PRP, platelet rich plasma and the process involves drawing the blood of the patient, spinning it and isolating the platelets and injecting it into the areas where there is cell degeneration. The results so far are remarkable. The physician can actually see on the ultrasound how the blood is healing, mending and creating new cell growth. I really don't understand why this is happening but I am in awe of the healing power that is in my blood.

I know you didn't come to hear about a medical procedure but today blood is being drawn from all of our scriptures.

Blood runs through the veins of each one of them. In Exodus the blood of young bulls is shed. Offered in sacrifice as a sign of the covenant and sealed through sprinkling some of the blood of the sacrifice on the people. The letter to the Hebrews speaks of the blood of goats and calves, which were signs of the covenant and the blood of Christ, which seals the new covenant. In the familiar Gospel of the last supper Jesus says, "take and drink. This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you..."

Blood runs through the veins of each of these scriptures and I wonder if we have been so inured to this talk of blood that we are not shocked, startled,

even put off by the images of a people sprinkled with blood, of the shedding of the blood of animals in sacrifice and of course, the drinking of the blood of Christ, even if it is under the form of wine, the fruit of the vine.

We human beings have a very mixed relationship with blood. We can't live without it but for most of us it is a great mystery: A blood test can reveal so much of what's going on inside our bodies; we can donate our blood in a blood drive as a gift of life to someone who has lost their blood and needs a transfusion; we can be in awe of its healing properties as I described to you earlier and we can be afraid of the blood of another if they are sick and could be contagious, it can evoke great pain when we see it spilled or shed senselessly in acts of violence. Blood is such a powerful symbol of life and death, of healing and contamination. In John's gospel when Jesus' side is pierced, blood and water flow, the two most powerful symbols of life that we have.

It is that mystery of the blood of Christ with its life-giving power and its sacrificial and saving nature that we are invited to reflect on and experience today. This is the mystery, which we are invited into, hopefully drawn into in today's feast. Unlike the past two weeks where our reflection might be more "spiritual," reflecting on the mystery of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, today's feast of the body and blood of Christ is about as "down to earth" as you can get. Like the force of gravity it pulls us out of the rarified air of theological dogma into the real presence of Christ, in an act of self-gift, of unconditional love and sacrifice in which we are invited to share in the Eucharist.

But let me suggest to you that even more shocking and startling than the images of blood being spilled, shed, even as drink, what is even more startling is that we who participate in this Eucharist are meant to be transformed into the life of blood of Christ for the world. We are transfused with the very life of Christ, his love, his sacrifice, his blood shed. We are transfused with his blood so that we may become his life in the world. We are transfused with his blood so that we can be transformed into a community of disciples who are willing to pour out our lives, to empty ourselves in loving service.

I would like to finish this reflection with a story and an image. The story is this. It was probably the most powerful experience I've ever had as a priest with the blood of Christ. One of our parishioners who was suffering from

Lou Gehrig's disease was unable to take any food or drink through her mouth. She still had a great hunger and thirst for communion and wanted so much to be united with Christ's body and blood during this time of great suffering. Since she was not able to take any solid food or drink in an ordinary way, we were able to give her the blood of Christ with the fluid she received for nourishment. I cannot tell you what a powerful experience of the very life of Christ being received in this woman who had such great faith and was suffering so much.

Finally, I can't let this feast go by without calling your attention to the reredos and the carving of Jesus on the Cross. At his hands are the two angels with cups so that his precious blood would not be lost. It is that precious blood which is his life for us so that we may be life for each other.