

The Most Precious Blood

I would like to consider the word of God and reflect on the mystery of the Most Precious Blood. For that mystery leads us to see the unity between Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, the Eucharistic sacrifice which he has given to his Church, and his eternal priesthood, whereby, seated at the right hand of the Father, he makes unceasing intercession for us, the members of his mystical body.

Let us begin with the sacrifice of the Cross. The outpouring of Christ's blood is the source of the Church's life. St John sees in the water and blood which flowed from our Lord's body the wellspring of that divine life which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit and communicated to us in the sacraments. Our Lord's own words at the Last Supper, when he instituted the Eucharist as the sacrament of his body, given up for us, and his blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Faithful to Christ's command to "do this in memory of me", the Church in every time and place celebrates the Eucharist until the Lord returns in glory, rejoicing in his sacramental presence and drawing upon the power of his saving sacrifice for the redemption of the world. The reality of the Eucharistic sacrifice has always been at the heart of Catholic faith; called into question in the sixteenth century, it was solemnly reaffirmed at the Council of Trent against the backdrop of our justification in Christ. Here in England, there were many who staunchly defended the Mass, often at great cost, giving rise to that devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist which has been a hallmark of Catholicism in these lands.

We see this aspect of the mystery of Christ's precious blood represented, most eloquently, by the martyrs of every age, who drank from the cup which Christ himself drank, and whose own blood, shed in union with his sacrifice, gives new life to the Church. It is also reflected in our brothers and sisters throughout the world who even now are suffering discrimination and persecution for their Christian faith. Yet it is also present, often hidden in the suffering of all those individual Christians who daily unite their sacrifices to those of the Lord for the sanctification of the Church and the redemption of the world.

How much contemporary society needs this witness! How much we need, in the Church and in society, witnesses of the beauty of holiness, witnesses of the splendour of truth, witnesses of the joy and freedom born of a living relationship with Christ! One of the greatest challenges facing us today is how to speak convincingly of the wisdom and liberating power of God's word to a world which all too often sees the Gospel as a constriction of human freedom, instead of the truth which liberates our minds and enlightens our efforts to live wisely and well, both as individuals and as members of society.

Dear friends, in the Most Precious Blood, I invite you once more to look to Christ, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection. I ask you to unite yourselves ever more fully to the Lord, sharing in his sacrifice on the Cross and offering him that "spiritual worship" which embraces every aspect of our lives and finds expression in our efforts to contribute to the coming of his Kingdom. I pray that, in doing so, you may join the ranks of faithful believers throughout the long Christian history of this land in building a society truly worthy of man, worthy of your nation's highest traditions.

*Extracts from the Homily preached by Pope Benedict XVI
Westminster Cathedral
18 September 2010*