

Blood, Sacred Blood

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This is my latest article for Precious Blood Family Magazine. It is basically my homage to St. Gaspar's letter 57

Blood is not pleasant to think about sometimes. Some become squeamish. At the same time, blood has a central place in some of our violent movies and other entertainment. There we do not pay attention to it. It is not real in the movies. Still, spend a few moments thinking about blood, your blood. Stop. Take your pulse. Blood is central. It is powerful. Its action, its force, what it carries, gives us life. It moves faster, we move faster. It fails, we fail. It is the silent, ever present essence of the power of life.

Our ancestors had a vastly simpler, maybe primitive approach to blood. It was simply where life met death and death met life. Fresh, warm, crimson blood was an offering, a sacrifice, a gift back to God, taking the substance of the life God had given and, giving it back, offering it all. We flinch when the priest passes among us on Easter morning scattering the water of the newly blessed font over the people. Can you imagine what it was like in the desert when inaugurating the covenant Moses took half of the blood of the bulls and splashed it on the people? This was before dry cleaning was even imagined. You were stained. It didn't come out. It was an enduring mark of life. Life branded you, stained you, claimed you as belonging to a covenant with life itself. It was remarkably more than the privileges of membership, and you can't leave home without it. This primitive approach developed through time to an elaborate ritual in the holy of holies where the blood of sacrifice was placed in the temple's inner heart on the mercy seat. Blood was a way to communicate with God, to approach the very limits of life and death and receive in return his life and forgiveness.

St. Gaspar would invite us to this same reflection, but then would ask us to spend a few more moments reflecting on God's blood, divine blood. His letters indicate it is too little to call this blood significant. Somehow our words do not convey its grandeur. This blood was the flaming outburst, the burning expression, the extravagant generosity, of a God of unreasonable and unimaginable kindness. (1) The human body of the Son of God becomes the holy of holies, and now the blood on the mercy seat is the blood rushing through his precious heart. His death on the cross and the tearing of the veil in the temple indicate that the presence of the divine has been snatched from a temple of stone and placed in the temple of a human heart where it is most defeated, overwhelmed or broken. We may think that God has abandoned us in our struggles; yet, in fact, he is closest to the broken and forsaken. You who once were far off have been made near through the Blood of Christ. (2)

This blood has a voice, a piercing cry. For Gaspar the sound of this blood extinguishes any noise of sin. (3) This voice cries out clearly on behalf of sinners and any who are broken. This voice cries to the heavens when life is lost or blood is shed. This is precisely where a devotion to or spirituality of the Precious Blood identifies us. Reciting a devotion is untruthful if it does not correspond to devoted living, and a spirituality is empty if it is

not a way of life. A Spirituality of the Precious Blood drives us to follow that voice, to take it up as our own. St. Gaspar would plunge us into these mysteries, (4)bending to its gentle crushing force that urges us on to a courageous love, first for the ineffable love of God, and in the same beat of the heart, to a love for all people, especially those who are far off. Yes, blood can be messy, but it is sacred too.

NOTES

1. Letter 57
2. Eph. 2:13
3. Letter 52
4. Letter 57