

Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Dearly Beloved, over the past several weeks the Church has presented us with a series of liturgical observances which leave a very particular mark on this time of the year. The Easter cycle drew to a close with the celebration of the great Feast of Pentecost with its ancient octave, one of three such festivals in our calendar. That was followed by the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity, sublime and fundamental truth of holy revelation. Then, the following Thursday Holy Church observed the radiant Feast of Corpus Christi – not the institution of the Eucharist which has its necessary framework within the Passiontide liturgies of Holy Week – but the *Blessed Sacrament as such*, a glorious and joy-filled feast of the Incarnation of God, marking the abiding condescension of God's love for sinners in the perpetual presence of Our Redeemer in the Sacrament of the Altar until the end of all time. A week later fell the Feast of the Most Sacred Heart, seat of Christ's love for all mankind, source of the entirety of our life of grace.

Within this framework falls today's feast of July 1 – exceptionally, this year appearing on a Sunday as I mentioned last week. This is the Feast of the Precious Blood, the liturgical commemoration of the infinite value of the price of man's redemption.

Beloved we should note that the liturgy not only rehearses by fixed cycle the various mysteries of our redemption, in a more hidden but nonetheless real

manner, it marks the whole cycle of human history as well. This is because many of the events of man's redemption found in our worship are there as hidden commemorations of important events in the history of human affairs. Whereas the Feast of Corpus Christi owes its appearance in the calendar to Pope Urban IV on September 8, 1264 – and that through the efforts of the medieval nun, Blessed Julian of Cornillon, today's Feast of the Precious Blood was instituted by Pope Pius IX in 1849.

At that time he had been driven from the Rome and his Papal States by the Masonic forces of revolution. In an important battle the French army routed the Masonic enemy of Christ and Pope Pius found himself a refugee of war found in the city of Gaeta. It was there, in order to perpetuate the memory of this battle and its success arising from the merits of Our Lord, the Supreme Pontiff established this Feast as a perpetual memorial of the event. In 1934, on the 19th centenary of Redemption Pope Pius XI raised it to rank of a Feast of the First Class.

As it was the Sacred Heart of Our Redeemer which made this adorable Blood circulate in the physical body of Our Redeemer, the Gospel appointed to for Mass tells of the thrust of that lance which pierced the side of the Crucified One: from that living flesh came a flow of blood and water, the life-giving stream which heralded the birth of Holy Church in the pivotal Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Thus, two living testimonies given by the Holy Spirit of the Messiah were united in this last and brutal act of the Passion: the Spirit's testimony at Jesus' Baptism by John in the

Jordan River, and its saving culmination in His baptism of Blood upon the altar of the Cross.

And even if it is of recent vintage that the this month of July is dedicated to the Precious Blood, it is of small importance. The liturgy and its attendant culture of personal devotion are both the product of a long development. Holy Church, despite the errors of our times, is ever at pains to present us with the truths of our redemption and this she does through the ongoing and homogenous development of our culture of Catholic worship.

In today's feast we see that all the works of salvation are gathered together in the Precious Blood of the Lamb of God. Thus this feast is one of grateful remembrance of our mankind having been redeemed by Christ. The introit of today's Mass introduces the theme when it sings, "Out of every tribe, every language, every people, Thou hast ransomed us, O Lord, with thy blood; Thou hast made us a royal race to serve our God." The text's of the liturgy presume us members of the choir of the blessed in heaven calling to the Lamb: "You were slain in sacrifice; You have ransomed us with Your blood and given us again to God the Father." (Apoc. 5:9).

Unlike the high priest of the Old Law who entered the Holy of Holies only one time each year, there to sprinkle to the Ark of the Covenant with the blood of sacrificial animals, Christ, our high Priest, has entered once and for all into His sanctuary (heaven) and "the ransom he has won lasts unto eternity." (Epistle). This redemptive ransom is effective, therefore, for the duration of all time. It is, therefore, profoundly different from the sacrifices of the Old Law which were

its ineffective prefigurings. Christ's Blood has the power to truly "purify our consciences," thus giving us a share in the promised eternal inheritance as Paul says in today's Epistle reading.

"We have found justification through his blood" (Rom. 5:9); from this Blood alone can we be rescued from God's wrath due to our languishing in sin. The Precious Blood of Jesus gives us the firm hope of our some day entering into the sanctuary of heaven. "He has opened up for us a new, a living way, by way of the veil, I mean, through His mortality," Saint Paul goes on to say in the following chapter of Hebrews. This *veil* is none other than Christ's human flesh given for the life of the world on the Cross, flesh which is symbolized in all its divine humanity in the blood which is offered as the only true ransom for our sins.

Thus, children in Christ, we should be deeply moved with gratitude for the generosity of God's love in paying with His own life's Blood what is due to God for the commission of our sins. Not only should we humbly meditate on this truth, we should express our gratitude in "glorifying God" by "making our bodies the shrines of his presence" (cf. I Cor. 6:20). This we do by the humble, worthy reception of Holy Communion and lives of rigorous moral probity.

"It is finished," says today's Gospel reading. "Then He bowed His head and yielded up His spirit. . . . And so the soldiers came and broke the legs both of the one and of the other that were crucified with Him; but when they came to Jesus, and found Him already dead, they did not break His legs, but one of the soldiers opened

his side with a spear; and immediately blood and water flowed out.”

Our Blessed Savior first shed His sacred Blood at His circumcision; a second time in the Garden of Olives; again when the soldiers scourged Him and rudely thrust the crown of thorns upon His sacred head; a fourth time when, on Calvary, they tore the garments from His lacerated body and nailed His hands and feet to the Cross, there to hang with only the garment of this Precious Blood covering His naked flesh. Despite such suffering retained such blood in His lifeless body that even dead, “He still loved those who were his own, whom he was leaving in the world, and he would give them the uttermost proof of his love” And so the last of His Blood came forth under the thrust of the lance: signs of the wonder of this Eucharistic sacrifice and sacrament we celebrate day in and day out, even as we wait for His Second Coming in dread majesty.

As Saint John says of Our Lord, “He it is, Jesus Christ, whose coming has been made known to us by water and blood; water and blood as well, not water alone. We have a threefold warrant in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, three who are yet one; and we have a threefold warrant on earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, three witnesses that conspire in one, that is, they testify to the same truth.” (Gradual). John teaches that Jesus the Savior became man, and that we have a threefold testimony to prove it: 1) the water, that is, the Father’s words at the baptism of Christ; 2) the blood, that is, the Son’s bloody death on the Cross; 3) the Holy Spirit, that is, the Pentecostal grace in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful.

As Christians therefore we offer with Holy Church the most precious gift of Christ's Blood according to our inward dispositions in the Offertory of every Mass. We are called by God to offer up this Precious Blood, the blood of our divine reconciliation with the Father through the hands of the sacrificing priest. In Holy Communion we receive, under the one form of bread, the whole Christ, His flesh and His blood, which is the pledge of our salvation on the very day when our Lord will come to take us home to His Father and our own (cf. Communion).

The chosen people were commanded to slay the Paschal lamb and to sign their doorposts with its blood. Then: "The Lord will pass on his way smiting down the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and the jambs of a door way he will pass by that house, and will not let the destroying angel enter your homes to do them injury" (Exod. 12:23). This was a figure and a guarantee of the saving power of the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. As from the side of Adam was made Eve, the mother of our race, and from the side of the ark flowed the new life of a world cleansed from sin, so from the side of Our Blessed Savior has come the saving water of Baptism and the Blood which gives us the new and perfect life of grace, Blood which is communicated to us in the saving Mysteries of the Holy Mass, and Blood which has purchased for us the pledge of eternal life.

Let us place all our trust in the power of this Blood. The opening prayer of this great Feast of our faith we prayed: *Eternal, ever-living God, who didst ordain that Thy only-begotten Son should redeem the world and with*

His blood atone to Thee for man's offenses; grant, we pray Thee, that we may so worship in this festival rite the ransom paid for our salvation, and find in its power such defense against the evils of this earthly life, that we may enjoy its everlasting fruit in heaven.

Beloved, let us make this prayer our own by lives which are converted to Christ, lives which love our neighbor for the love of Him, lives that are not of this world, but ever on the path to that glory for which we have been wondrously created and more wondrously redeemed, heaven, our home in glory where Jesus shines brighter than the sun, moon and all the stars of this earthly creation.