



## *In His Light*

by Bishop Allen H. Vigneron

### **The outpouring of Christ's blood is for our salvation**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As I sit down to write this edition of my column I have an image that continues to play in my imagination. It is a scene from Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." If you've seen that movie, you will recall that after Christ's scourging, Our Lady is shown kneeling on the floor of the courtyard pavement wiping up her Son's blood with a cloth.

While there is no warrant in any of the Gospels or other sources for the historical truth of this depiction, it has a sort of fittingness that helped to make this moment, at least for me, one of the most memorable in the film.

This image vividly captures the inestimable worth of Christ's blood. I think it keeps coming back to me just now because of where we are in our progress through Lent to the Easter Vigil. In the readings for Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, there is an increasing mention of blood, of the shedding of Christ's Precious Blood for us in his Passion and of how that outpouring of his blood saves us.

These Lenten expressions of this truth of our faith come to full flowering at the Paschal Vigil when the deacon, in the Exultet, proclaims that we must rejoice, because "this is our Passover feast, when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain, whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers."

In the Office of Readings for Friday of the Third Week of Lent, we read in St. Gregory the Great's meditation on Our Lord's prayer for the forgiveness of his executioners, how this cry to his Father for mercy towards them is present in his blood. Since many of you do not have access to this text, I will share it with you here.

St. Gregory takes Job's prayer, "Earth, do not cover over my blood, do not let my cry find a hiding place in you (Job 16:18)," as expressing Christ's prayer for those who put him to death: "[This text] speaks of Christ's blood. Earth does not cover over the blood of our Redeemer, for every sinner, as he drinks the blood that is the price of his redemption, offers praise and thanksgiving, and to the best of his power makes that blood known to all around him. ... The blood that is drunk, the blood of redemption is itself the cry of our Redeemer. [The Letter to the Hebrews] speaks of 'the sprinkled blood that calls out more eloquently than Abel's' (12:24). Of Abel's blood Scripture had written: 'The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the earth' (Gen. 4:10). The blood of Jesus calls out more eloquently than Abel's, for the blood of Abel asked for the death of Cain the fratricide, while the blood of the Lord has asked for, and obtained, life for his persecutors."

### **An extended meditation on Jesus**

The Letter to the Hebrews provides St. Gregory with a reference that helps him to develop his point with great force. This is very understandable, since that Letter is, in some sense, an extended meditation on Jesus as the High Priest of the New Covenant, who, at his ascension, comes before the Father in the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood to obtain our salvation (see Heb. (9:1-14).

Undoubtedly it is because of the eloquence with which the Letter to the Hebrews explains how the offering of Christ's blood was the price of our redemption that this book of the New Testament is read continuously in the Office of Readings for the last two weeks of Lent, up until the Easter Vigil.

The whole of the New Testament, not just the Letter to the Hebrews, testifies to the infinite worth of the blood of Christ. According to all of the accounts of the institution of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, Jesus identifies his blood as poured out for the remission of sins, as the seal of the new and eternal covenant. Thus, it is the sacrifice of Atonement foretold by Isaiah in his prophecy of God's Suffering Servant.

St. Paul, in his farewell to the Ephesians, reminds them that God the Father bought his Church "with the blood of his own Son" (Acts 20:28). St. Peter puts it this way: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

And St. John's testimony to the outpouring of blood along with water from the open side of Christ dead on the cross is his affirmation of this mystery.

### **'The price of our redemption'**

Blessed John XXIII, in his Apostolic Letter on the Most Precious Blood, summarizes the riches of the biblical teaching by speaking of Christ's blood as "the price of our redemption, the pledge of salvation and life eternal."

This great pope reminds us that "unlimited is the effectiveness of [Christ's] the God-Man's Blood — just as unlimited as the love that impelled him to pour it out for us . . . in his agony in the garden, in his scourging and crowning with thorns, in his climb to Calvary and crucifixion, and finally from out that great wide wound in his side which symbolizes the divine Blood cascading down into the Church's sacraments."

To reinforce his point, Blessed John quotes from St. John Chrysostom: "This Blood, poured out in abundance, has washed the whole world clean."

In linking here the unlimited effectiveness of Christ's blood with the unlimited effectiveness of his love, Blessed John XXIII gives us the key to understanding how it is that the shedding of the Lord's blood accomplishes our redemption.

In his Passion he loved unconditionally and so he makes satisfaction for all the sinful acts of human history — from Adam until the end of time — in which we refuse God the whole-hearted love he deserves from us. Christ loves infinitely in the shedding of his blood, and that outpouring reconciles us with God and with each other.

Blessed John understands that insofar as Christians begin to comprehend the significance of the shedding of Christ's blood for us, we cannot help but "cherish warmly that marvelous manifestation of divine mercy toward individuals and Holy Church and the whole world redeemed and saved by Jesus Christ."

In other words, to the degree we grasp the worth of Christ's blood, we will grow in ardent devotion toward his blood. Such loving devotion is, then, a special fruit of our observance of Lent. As we recall what Jesus, as the Paschal Lamb of the New Covenant, did to save us, we respond with increased faith, and love, and trust in him. (I'll say a bit more about this at the end of this column.)

One of the most beautiful expositions about the power and worth of Christ's blood I've ever encountered was in a sermon of Dr. Billy Graham which I heard on the television many years ago. Dr. Graham concluded his preaching by calling on the congregation to comprehend the worth of the saving blood of Christ and to renew their faith in its power.

To me his sermon was not complete. It was like one of those ancient statues that has come to us as only a torso without arms or legs or head. It was fragment. Why? Because Christ invites us not only to have faith in his Precious Blood, but to actually receive his blood in the Holy Eucharist.

In the Blessed Sacrament Christ gives us his body under the appearance of bread and his blood under the appearance of wine. His purpose in establishing this sacrament is to unite us with his saving sacrifice, to give us communion with his love. And each set of appearances is an awesome sign of the grace given us through the sign.

#### **'An almost incomprehensible grace'**

As St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us, receiving the whole Christ under these two different signs "serves to represent Christ's Passion, in which the blood was separated from the body" (ST, III, 76, 2).

Drinking Christ's Precious Blood from the chalice is an almost incomprehensible grace: the presentation to us and the acceptance by us of the very blood by which we are saved.

It is my conviction that one of the best results to be looked for from our attentive Lenten meditations on the meaning and power of Christ's Precious Blood will be a renewed reverence in our drinking his blood in Holy Communion.

In consuming what admittedly looks and tastes like wine, we come into contact with nothing other than the very blood which Jesus in his love poured out in his agony in the garden, in his scourging and crowning with thorns, in his climb to Calvary and crucifixion, and finally from that great wide wound opened in his Sacred Heart when all "was finished."

With this renewed appreciation for the incomparable gift of Christ's Precious Blood offered us in the chalice at Mass, let us approach it with wonder and awe. Let us walk from our pew to the Host and then to the cup with hearts afire for the divine love we are about to consume. Let our simple gesture of reverence as we bow before the chalice be "supercharged" with all our love and adoration for Christ who shed this, his Precious Blood, for me and for those dear to me, even for my enemies and for the whole world.

Let none of us refer to what is in the cup as "wine." No more casual references to "taking the wine," or "drinking the wine" or "ministering the wine," or "liking the taste of the wine." It is not wine; it is blood, God's blood.

Let all of us, especially us priests and deacons and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, unfailingly express our worship of that which we hold in the chalice as long as the Precious Blood remains present it.

Let us observe carefully and fully the norms of the Missal's "Instruction" about receiving and distributing the Precious Blood, not for the sake of the norms themselves (that would be only legalism), but with an attention and reverence that gives heartfelt expression to our loving worship. In this way we will call and inspire one another to be of one heart and mind in acts of adoration and gratitude.

And, finally, let us give our whole soul to the grace of drinking Christ's blood so that we will, in turn, pour ourselves out in love for God and neighbor.

I mentioned above that Lent is a most appropriate time to nurture our devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ. Meditating on the Scripture readings and the other liturgical texts for this season is an excellent way to achieve this goal and take possession of this great grace.

Another help I would mention is one praised by the letter of Blessed John XXIII quoted above: praying the "Litany of the Most Precious Blood." To assist you in this regard I am appending a copy to this column. You could cut it out, place it in your prayer book, and make it part of your Lenten prayer.

May the Holy Spirit bless these days of the final weeks of our Lent, and may you come to the Paschal Triduum new again in the life of Christ.

### **Litany of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus**

*(This litany clearly traces the line of salvation history through a series of biblical references and passages. In its present form it was approved by Blessed John XXIII on February 24, 1960. "Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy")*

Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us.  
Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.  
God the Father of Heaven, Have mercy on us.  
God the Son, Redeemer of the world, Have mercy on us.  
God the Holy Spirit, Have mercy on us.  
Holy Trinity, One God, Have mercy on us.  
Blood of Christ, only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Incarnate Word of God, save us.  
Blood of Christ, of the new and Eternal Testament, save us.  
Blood of Christ, falling upon the earth in the Agony, save us.

Blood of Christ, shed profusely in the Scourging, save us.  
Blood of Christ, flowing forth in the Crowning with Thorns, save us.  
Blood of Christ, poured out on the Cross, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Price of our salvation, save us.  
Blood of Christ, without which there is no forgiveness, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Eucharistic drink and refreshment of souls, save us.  
Blood of Christ, river of mercy, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Victor over demons, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Courage of martyrs, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Strength of confessors, save us.  
Blood of Christ, bringing forth virgins, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Help of those in peril, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Relief of the burdened, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Solace in sorrow, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Hope of the penitent, save us.  
Blood of Christ, consolation of the dying, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Peace and Tenderness of hearts, save us.  
Blood of Christ, Pledge of Eternal Life, save us.  
Blood of Christ, freeing souls from Purgatory, save us.  
Blood of Christ, most worthy of all glory and honor, save us.  
Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.  
Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.  
Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world, Have mercy on us.  
V. Thou hast redeemed us, O Lord, in Thy blood,  
R. And made of us a kingdom for our God.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Eternal God, Thou hast appointed Thine only-begotten Son the Redeemer of the world, and willed to be appeased by His Blood, Grant, we beseech Thee, that we may worthily adore this Price of our salvation, and through its power be safeguarded from the evils of this present life, so that we may rejoice in its fruits forever in Heaven. Through the same Christ Our Lord.

R. Amen.