



SATURDAY OF THE TWELFTH WEEK OF THE YEAR II

VOTIVE MASS OF OUR LADY OF THE MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD

Lamentations 2:2, 10–14, 18–19

Psalm 73:1–2, 3–4, 5–7, 20–21 (R. 19b)

Matthew 8:5–17

July 1, 2006

Monastery of the Glorious Cross, O.S.B.

Branford, Connecticut

Forty-six years ago yesterday, on June 30th, 1960, Blessed John XXIII addressed an Apostolic Letter to all the shepherds of the Church, asking them to bring it to the attention of their priests and people. He wrote that he had *full confidence* that its message would be put into practice “not just willingly, but enthusiastically.” Have we, in fact, honoured “Good Pope John’s” full confidence in us?

The aim of Blessed John XXIII's letter was to inspire a living devotion to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. "From the very outset of our pontificate," he wrote, "in speaking of daily devotions we have repeatedly urged the faithful . . . to cherish warmly that marvelous manifestation of divine mercy toward individuals and Holy Church and the whole world redeemed and saved by Jesus Christ: we mean devotion to his Most Precious Blood." Pope John spoke of his own childhood and of the lively faith of his parents: "From infancy this devotion was instilled in us within our own household. Fondly we still recall how our parents used to recite the Litany of the Most Precious Blood every day during July."

Blessed John XXII looked forward to a renewal of devotion to the Precious Blood in the month of July: "As we now approach the feast and month devoted to honouring Christ's Blood — the price of our redemption, the pledge of salvation and life eternal — may Christians meditate on it more fervently, may they savour its fruits more frequently in sacramental communion. Let their meditations on the boundless power of the Blood be bathed in the light of sound biblical teaching and the doctrine of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church."

Good Pope John approved the Litanies of the Most Precious for both public and private devotion, and enriched their recitation with indulgences. I know folks who pray the Litanies of the Precious Blood often, savouring each invocation, allowing each plea — Save us! — to fall like a drop of the Precious Blood upon their hearts. The Litanies of the Precious Blood are a powerful prayer for inner healing and for the purification of memories. I like to pray them at the end of the day, placing the invocation of the Precious Blood like a healing balm on souls wounded in spiritual combat, on those at the hour of death, on those in need of a great mercy.

I return to Blessed John XXIII's teachings on the Blood of Christ every July. His Apostolic Letter has lost nothing of its impact. He makes a point of referring us to Sacred Scripture, to the Liturgy, and to the Fathers.

Today the ferial lectionary gives us a familiar passage from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, one that the Church in her liturgy for September 15th applies to the Mother of God in her sorrows: "What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can restore you?" (Lam 2:13).

The Mother of God, seeing the Precious Blood of her Son poured out in His Passion, wept for all those to whom that Blood would mean nothing. Her sorrow was immense because her motherly heart intuited that many would refuse the healing and peace purchased by that Blood. She wept because the Precious Blood of her Jesus would be treated with indifference, with irreverence, and with scorn. She wept because she saw that the Blood of the Lamb was the remedy for every ill, the antidote for every poison, the cleansing of every defilement — and saw that many, refusing the Blood of the Lamb, would prefer to remain sick, poisoned, and disfigured by sin.

Today's Gospel gives us the prayer of the centurion that we repeat in every Mass immediately before Holy Communion. Happily, we will soon be using the correct translation of this text at Mass, one that renders the centurion's prayer just as the Roman Missal has used it for centuries: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed." (cf. Mt 8:8). The centurion's prayer inspires us to pray, "Lord, I am not worthy to partake of the Chalice of your

Precious Blood, one single drop of which can cleanse the entire world from sin.” He who “took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Mt 8:17) presents us with the Inexhaustible Chalice of His Blood to cleanse us of our impurities, to heal our infirmities, and to free us from the webs of sin that have spun themselves around our hearts.

Saint John Chrysostom once preached on the effects of the Holy Chalice in the souls of those approach it. Blessed John XXIII quotes him in his Apostolic Letter. Saint Chrysostom’s teaching is as vehement and as fresh today as it was on the day he spoke it in Constantinople: “Let us, then, come back from that Table like lions breathing out fire, thus becoming terrifying to the Devil, and remaining mindful of our Head and of the love he has shown for us. . . . This Blood, when worthily received, drives away demons and puts them at a distance from us, and even summons to us angels and the Lord of angels. . . . This Blood, poured out in abundance, has washed the whole world clean. . . . This is the price of the world; by it Christ purchased the Church. . . . This thought will check in us unruly passions. How long, in truth, shall we be attached to present things? How long shall we remain asleep? How long shall we not take thought for our own salvation? Let us remember what privileges God has bestowed on us, let us give thanks, let us glorify him, not only by faith, but also by our very works.”

I ask the Holy Mother of God of the Inexhaustible Chalice, Our Lady of the Precious Blood, to accompany us to the altar today and to remain close to us throughout this month of July. Live with the saving Blood of Christ at every moment before the eyes of your soul. The Inexhaustible Chalice overflows for us with sweetness and purity. O taste and see!