

DEVOTION TO THE MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD OF JESUS

By

Prof. Michael Ogunu

Introduction

The term “devotion” encompasses two distinctive meanings. Devotion is first of all a posture, an approach, or an attitude toward an aspect of the divine mystery. Michele Colagiovanni, in one of his reflections on the meaning of devotion, aptly traces the meaning of devotion back to its etymology in the word “dedication”. To engage in devotion to someone or something is to have a special commitment to that reality, a commitment that is marked by a focusing or dedicating of one’s life to that reality. To engage in devotion is, therefore, to “be devoted”. Everything encompassed in that field of focus and dedication constitutes “devotion”.

Devotion has also a second meaning. It refers to the set of spiritual practices one engages in to give expression to that object of dedication. These practices are the concrete embodiment of that devotedness. Sometimes this second meaning of devotion is expressed in the use of the term “devotion” in the plural, as “devotions”.

Devotion, then, represents entering into the divine mystery with a special focus. Devotion also entails engaging in spiritual practices which give expression to these commitments.

Blood of Christ in Christian theology refers to (a) the physical blood actually shed by Jesus Christ from the foreskin and later on the Cross by which salvation which Christianity teaches was accomplished and (b) the sacramental blood present in the Eucharist, which is considered by Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran Christians to be the same blood of Christ shed on the Cross.

Origin and Development of Devotion to the Precious blood

Veneration of the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is a devotion as old as our Holy Faith. This Precious Blood, by which mankind was to be redeemed, was alluded to immediately after the Fall of our first parents in the Garden of Paradise.

The Precious Blood of our Redeemer was prefigured by the innocent blood of Abel, by the sacrifices of Isaac and Melchisedech, by the Paschal Lamb (the blood of which was sprinkled on the doorposts of the ancient Israelites on the night before they left Egypt), by the blood of innocent animals in the Old Covenant, and by many other customs practiced by the Israelite people. The prophecies—and the prophets to whom God showed in spirit when, where and in what manner it was to be shed—had reference to this Blood which Our Lord would shed in His Passion to redeem us. This is the Blood of the New and Eternal Testament, from which all the Sacraments derive their efficacy, from which all graces proceed, and from which, like heavenly dew, all graces are ever descending upon the children of God.

The Precious Blood is daily offered by priests in the Mass, and it is at all times venerated by the faithful in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. In Holy Communion, all receive the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ as a pledge of life eternal.

Every act of honour, love, and adoration paid to any part of Christ's sacred humanity is paid to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity in Whom the Body, Blood and Soul of Christ are inseparably united.

The Church invites and urges us to venerate the Sacred Heart of Christ because it is in a particular manner a symbol of the God-Man's love for His human brothers. Just as we give honour to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it is fitting that we should give special honour to the Most Precious Blood of Christ.

St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, gives us the reason in his First Epistle, when he said, "You know that *you were redeemed* from the vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, not with perishable things, with silver or gold, but *with the precious blood of Christ*, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Christ's Precious Blood, shed during His Passion, is the price He paid to ransom us from the slavery of the devil.

The devotion to the Precious Blood was an especial phenomenon of Flemish piety in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that gave rise to the iconic image of Grace as the "*Fountain of Life*", filled with blood, pouring from the wounded "*Lamb of God*" or the "*Holy Wounds*" of Christ.

It took many centuries before devotion to the Precious Blood achieved a liturgical status with its own Feast, Mass and Divine Office. There is little doubt that liturgical devotion to the Precious Blood began with feasts in honour of the various bloodsheddings of Our Lord. Documents of the Holy See indicate that Pope Pius V restored the Office and Feast of the Precious Blood to the church of Valencia when he reformed the breviary and missal toward the end of the sixteenth century.

Almost three centuries elapsed before this limited liturgical cult of the Precious Blood was to achieve universal standing with a Mass and Office for the Universal Church. In the providence of God much of the credit for this accomplishment must be given to a saint who has come to be known as the Herald of the Precious Blood, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, and to his devoted followers. On August 15, 1815, Father del Bufalo founded a Congregation of secular priests under the title of the Most Precious Blood. In 1822 he petitioned the Sacred Congregation of Rites to grant the new Community the privilege of a special Feast in honour of the Precious Blood to be celebrated on the first Sunday of July. Graciously the Holy Father granted the request.

It remained for Venerable Don Giovanni Merlini, the second successor of St. Gaspar as leader of the Society, to promote the extension of the Feast to the Universal Church. In the mid-nineteenth century Italy was in the throes of bloody revolution, so much so that the Holy Father, Pius IX, was forced to flee Rome. While in Gaeta, he was visited by Don Giovanni Merlini. During the course of their conversation, the Holy Father asked his visitor when he thought the disastrous days would come to an end. Merlini evaded a direct reply

but countered by respectfully suggesting that His Holiness solemnly vow to extend the Feast of the Precious Blood to the whole world. The Pope would make no commitment. Undaunted, Merlini later wrote several times to the Holy Father reminding him of his proposed remedy for the sad state of political life in Italy.

Then on June 30, 1849, Pius IX through his secretary, Monsignor Stella, informed Merlini that he was going to follow out his suggestion to extend the Feast universally. As though this had been what Divine Providence was awaiting, the French army attacked Rome on the same day and liberated the city from the revolutionaries the next day, July 1. On August 10, 1849, the Holy Father issued the decree extending the Feast of the Precious Blood with Mass and Divine Office to the entire Church.

Not only the day of the Feast itself, July 1, but the entire month is now commonly devoted to the adoration and glory of the Precious Blood of Christ.

How to Practice Devotion to the Precious Blood

There are a number of spiritual practices clearly identified with the Devotion to the Blood of Christ. Among them are the following:

The offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the most important means of honouring the Precious Blood of Jesus, for the Mass is in all reality the renewal of the bloody Sacrifice Christ offered the Eternal Father on Calvary. By actively participating in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and by offering it in union with the priest, one joins in the offering of the Precious Blood which Our Divine Lord inaugurated on Mount Calvary.

Most intimately allied with the offering of the Mass is the reception of Holy Communion. To participate in the offering of Mass to the fullest one must make his participation sacramental by receiving Communion, the Sacrificial Banquet which consummates the Sacrifice, which indicates God's approval of the Sacrifice, and which ratifies for each communicant the new and eternal covenant between God and His Children.

A second practice flowing from the participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist is *eucharistic adoration*. Devotees of the Precious Blood should make frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament to adore our Lord truly present Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Blessed Sacrament.

A third manner of honouring the Precious Blood is through prayer, both vocal and mental. There are many approved prayers in honour of the Precious Blood, among which are the Litany of the Precious Blood, approved for use in the universal Church by Pope John XXIII, the *Chaplet of the Precious Blood* which originated from Francesco Albertini and was propagated enthusiastically by St. Gaspar and his Missionaries, the "Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood" and a variety of other prayers to be found in manuals of prayers issued by the different provinces of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood.

More beneficial than vocal prayer is meditation on the mysteries of the Precious Blood. This includes loving and thoughtful consideration of those mysteries of the Faith which are in any way associated with the Precious Blood of Christ. No doubt the most familiar are the

Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. They are a summary of the chief bloodsheddings in the life of Christ. From them one can learn many of the glories of the Precious Blood; for example, its proof of Christ's tender mercy for sinners, of His infinite love for each of us, of His humility and obedience unto death. To quote again the Apostolic Letter of Pope St. John XXIII: "Would that they who are distinguished by the name of Christian would turn their thoughts more frequently to the paternal exhortations of the first Sovereign Pontiff, who wrote: 'Conduct yourselves with fear in the time of your sojourning. You know that you were redeemed ... not with perishable things, with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 17-19). If only they would turn a more attentive ear to the Apostle of the Gentiles: 'You have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear Him in your body' (1 Cor. 6:20).

Devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ is not a devotion fitted only for select members of the Church, nor is it a devotion whose appeal is limited to a certain group, nationality or race. Based as it is on the adoration which each member of Christ's Mystical Body owes to its Head, it is for all. We have all been redeemed by it; we all continue to enjoy the graces which it has won for us; we all must apply its fruits to our own souls, if we wish to inherit the kingdom of Christ in heaven, where much of our happiness will consist in joining in the paean of praise of the angels and saints: "to Him who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own Blood, and made us to be a kingdom, and priests to God his Father — to Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Apoc. 1:6).

How to Offer the Precious Blood to the Eternal Father

One of the best means of participating in the graces and blessings of the Precious Blood is to offer it to the Eternal Father. "An offering", says Father Faber, is "more than a prayer". In prayer, we are the recipients, but when we make an offering, God deigns to accept something from us. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi exclaimed on one occasion when in ecstasy: "Every time a creature offers up this Blood by which he was redeemed, he offers a gift of infinite worth, which can be equaled by no other!" God revealed to this sainted Carmelite nun the practice of making this offering when He complained to her that so little effort is made in this world to disarm His Divine justice against sinners. Acting upon this admonition, she daily offered the Precious Blood fifty times for the living and the dead. She did this with so much fervour that God showed her on different occasions the numerous souls whose conversion she had brought about in this manner and all the Poor Souls she had delivered from Purgatory. "This devotion", says Longius, "is pleasing to God, because He is thereby honoured by the best and the most Sublime gifts".

We should offer to God the Father the Precious Blood of Jesus frequently during the day. We can do this, using the following short prayer:

Eternal Father, I offer Thee the Precious Blood of Jesus, in satisfaction for my sins, and for the needs of Holy Church.

By this short, efficacious prayer, a partial indulgence can be gained every time.* Many could make this offering whenever they hear the clock strike. And it is especially very efficacious when made during Mass, at the elevation of the Chalice during consecration.

In order to obtain special graces through the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, we should ask the Blessed Virgin to offer it in our stead. This advice is given to us by many devout servants of God, in particular by St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars, who says that this is the best method of prayer. Furthermore, he adds, “My children, mark this well: whenever I obtained some grace, it was obtained in this manner, which I never found to fail”. In the life of St. Dominic we read that on one occasion when he was preaching about venerating Mary, he saw the Blessed Virgin sprinkling his devout hearers with the Blood of her Divine Son. Once while the Saint was celebrating Mass, three hundred persons, among them the king and queen, saw the Mother of God, at the Elevation of the Chalice, pouring the Precious Blood over all who were present there and over the whole Church.

Let us in particular during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass beseech Mary to offer to the Eternal Father the Blood of her Son in the Chalice—for Holy Mother the Church, for the conversion of sinners, for the souls in Purgatory, and for all our various needs. We may enumerate them to her with full confidence, and the greater their number, the better is she pleased. What we offer to God in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is of infinitely greater value than what we ask for. We can use these words for the Marian Offering of the Precious Blood:

IMMACULATE Heart of Mary, do thou offer to the Eternal Father the Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for our Holy Mother, the Church, for the conversion of sinners, for the souls in Purgatory, and for our personal needs.

The Value of Devotion to the Precious Blood

On June 30, 1960 the Holy Father Pope John XXIII issued his Apostolic Letter *Inde A Primis*, a document extolling the value and timeliness of devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ as a means of spiritual progress for all in his praises of devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Christ. Speaking of the relationship between devotion to the Holy Name, the Sacred Heart, and the Precious Blood, he said: “The devotion to the Most Precious Blood is always the most important. It must be considered among the primary devotions of the Church. In fact there are three principal devotions: the Holy Name of Jesus, the Sacred Heart, and the Most Precious Blood; but both the Holy Name and the Sacred Heart have value only through the Precious Blood”.

By approving the Litany of the Most Precious Blood and setting it on an equal footing with the litanies of the Holy Name and the Sacred Heart and by inserting the invocation in honour of the Precious Blood in the Divine Praises, Pope St. John XXIII carried out his programme of elevating the devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Christ to its rightful place of honour in Christian piety.

* Partial indulgences are no longer linked to specific periods of time—Publisher, 2008.

According to St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi:

- “It is not as severed from Jesus’ Sacred Body that the Precious Blood is now to be adored and offered, but as it is, at this moment, within the living Jesus, in heaven and in the Blessed Sacrament.
- Therefore, the soul that possesses the Precious Blood has everything and desires nothing more.
- The offering of the Precious Blood is of infinite efficacy.
- It begs remission for past sins or rather exacts it;
- It is a remedy against future sin;
- It returns thanks for all graces general or personal;
- It procures help from on high and brings comfort to the living and the dead.
- The practice of offering the Precious Blood is most pleasing to God; because, through It, He is glorified in the most sublime and excellent manner.
- As often as a creature offers the Precious Blood by which it was redeemed, it offers a gift of unequalled and infinite price”.

— From the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Our Lord told St. Gertrude the Great that the following prayer would release 1,000 souls from Purgatory each time it is said. The prayer was later extended to include living sinners as well.

“Eternal Father, I offer Thee the most precious blood of Thy divine son, Jesus, in union with the masses said throughout the world today, for all the holy souls in purgatory, for sinners everywhere, for sinners in the universal Church, those in my own home and within my family. Amen”.

Promises of Our Lord to Sister Mary Martha Chambon

“Those who pray with humility and who meditate on My Passion, (in which His Most Precious Blood was shed) shall one day participate in the glory of My Divine wounds. Their members will receive from them a resplendent beauty and glory”.

“The more you shall have contemplated My Painful wounds on this earth, the higher shall be your glorious contemplation of them in Heaven”.

The soul who during life has honored and studied the Wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ and has offered Them to the Eternal Father for the Souls in Purgatory will be accompanied at the moment of death by the Holy Virgin and the Angels; and Our Lord on the Cross, all brilliant in glory, will receive her and crown her.

“My Holy Wounds sanctify souls and insure their spiritual advancement...Offer Me your actions united to My Sacred Wounds, and even the smallest will have an incomprehensible value...”

Offer them often to Me for sinners because I thirst for souls. At each word of the invocation that you utter, I will let a drop of My Blood fall upon the soul of a sinner”.

Conclusion

Like the Sacred Wounds of Jesus, His Precious Blood deserves special honor because of its close relation to the Sacred Passion. That honour was given to it from the beginning by the Apostles who praised its redeeming power. (Rom. 5:9 “we are justified by His blood”; Heb. 13:12 “and so Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people by His blood, suffered outside the gate”; 1 John 1:7 “and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin”). The Church has always held devotion to the Precious Blood in high esteem, since It is the Price of our salvation! Without the shedding of the Blood of the Lamb of God, we could not be redeemed. Without His cleansing and vivifying Blood coursing through the Church, there would be no Mystical Body of Christ. Without His glorious Blood, the Sacraments would have no effect. Without His redeeming Blood, Mary would never have been conceived without sin, and there would be no saints whatsoever, for “they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb”.

Devotion to the Most Precious Blood of Christ rests on the bedrock truths basic to Christianity: mankind’s fall from supernatural life in the Garden of Eden, his utter inability to reinstate himself in God’s good graces, Christ’s superabundant satisfaction for the sins of all men through the shedding of His Most Precious Blood, mankind’s opportunity of reunion with God both in this life and particularly in the next through the application of the merits of the Most Precious Blood to his soul. These fundamental truths are in the direct need of constant repetition and reemphasis in an age when mankind tends to glory in his own puny worth and his ephemeral successes, unmindful of, or unconcerned about, his truly essential nothingness and, notwithstanding that, his sublime destiny as an adopted child of God.