

Holy Thursday Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper

I'm a regular blood donor, but I do not watch while they stick that needle into my arm. I'm afraid I'll flinch or pass out. So I look away, feel the prick, and count the minutes until they set free my outstretched arm. Eight weeks later, I go back and do it again. Several times in my mother's final illness, she needed blood. I saw her get more life after each transfusion. She improved because somebody donated blood. I decided I should do my part. When my donation day comes, I've always got a long list of other tasks to perform, but I remember that somewhere there's someone with just one task that day - staying alive. So I go.

As hard as it is for me to look at blood, drinking it is not appealing. Yet I have eaten blood sausage in Ireland and duck blood soup in Poland. People there enjoy those dishes; you don't have to be a vampire to like the flavor of blood. Every year I order beef from a rancher up in Cameron. He invites clients to watch the butcher process the cow. I have never done this, but some foodies do.

Still, every day, when I celebrate mass, I pick up a chalice and repeat the words of Jesus. I drink from it, and I pass it to communion ministers declaring the content of the vessel from which they are about to drink: "The Blood of Christ."

If I were going to start a new religion, I don't think I would tee off with an invitation for my followers to drink my blood. Not sure that religion would get much traction. Yet here we are, nearly 2000 years distant from the Last Supper, and we're still drinking - worldwide - the Blood of Christ.

Many Catholics do not drink from the cup. They may think sharing cups shares germs. They may be content to eat the Body of Christ. Yet Jesus took into his hands both bread and wine at the Last Supper, and he commanded his disciples to eat and to drink. Blood mattered to him because of the role it played in the Old Testament. At the first Passover, lamb's blood marked the lintels of faithful Jews, preserving their firstborn from death. Later, to seal the covenant, Moses sprinkled bull's blood on the altar and on the people. Jesus marked the new covenant with the same sign. We sang a verse from St. Paul as the refrain to our responsorial psalm today, "Our blessing cup is a communion with the blood of Christ the Lord." His blood signifies his covenant with us, and drinking it makes us one with Christ.

Psalm 116 was probably composed for Passover. It asks, "How can I repay the Lord the goodness God has shown to me? The cup of blessing I raise, I call upon God's name." God had made a covenant with the people of Israel, rescued them from slavery, and commanded them to commemorate these events with a Passover meal, including a cup of blessing.

Perhaps like the people of ancient Israel, you too have made an exodus. Perhaps in your life God has set you free from something that held you or that you held too close: a bad relationship, a relentless addiction, destructive habits. When you look back over the past few years, perhaps you can see where you are a freer person than you were in the past, thanks to the powerful outstretched arm of God, transfusing life. If so, then make this prayer your own tonight. "How can I repay the Lord? The cup of blessing I raise." After all, as St. Paul said, our blessing cup is a communion with the blood of Christ the Lord.

Thursday, March 29, 2018