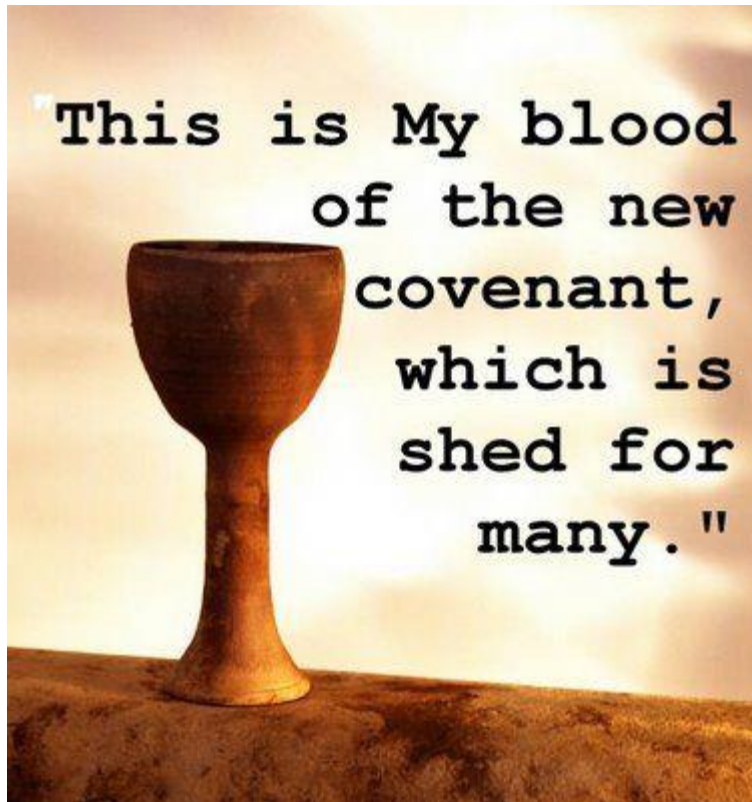


Homily – June 2nd, 2024 – Corpus Christi



I realize, that by the time we get to proclaiming the Gospel, it's already the fourth piece of Scripture we've heard, and we don't always remember what we heard in the first reading, the second reading, or the psalm. So, let me refresh your minds by taking you back to that first reading from the Book of Exodus.

The Book of Exodus gets its name from that great departure, that great "exodus" of the Hebrew people from the

land of slavery in Egypt (about 1400 B.C.E.). While under the leadership of Moses, it was really God's presence and miraculous interventions that eventually freed the people. God first freed the people and only afterwards established a covenant with our ancestors in faith. God never says, "Follow my laws, and if you prove to be worthy followers, I might consider liberating you from whatever is enslaving you." Rather, the true God always takes the initiative to bring about good in our lives and patiently awaits our response, which may or may not come.

So, in that first reading, God liberated the people and asked for a covenant, a relationship, to be established with the Hebrews. The Hebrews gave their consent by saying together, ***"All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do!"*** God and our ancestors were in agreement; they were on the same page looking to the future together. To ratify, to endorse this covenant, a ritual in blood was enacted. (Do you remember when you were a kid and you and your best friend each pricked a finger until you drew a little blood? And the blood of your finger touched

their blood and you swore to be best of friends, “blood brothers” for the rest of your lives, and by grade four you never saw them again?). What Moses did in the desert was similar but on a much larger scale. Blood from an ox was dashed against an altar. The altar symbolized the presence of God (that’s why the priest always venerates the altar at the beginning of Mass). Apart from the altar, Moses also dashed oxen blood on the people (and you get ticked off when I sprinkle a little holy water in your face!). The blood sprinkled on the people was a sign of the blood relationship they had with one another and with God. Blood was the sign of unity, the sign of oneness between God and us. It’s a sign of God’s great desire, that we all be one. It’s also Jesus’ great prayer at the end of his earthly life, **“Father, may they all be one. Just as I am in you and you are in me, so may they also be in us”** (Jn. 17:21).

Oneness, unity doesn’t come easily, as you know. At any given moment in our lives, including this moment, every one of us can think of at least one person that we are not at one with. Unfortunately, our desire to be right often takes precedence over our desire to be one. That is not so with God. If we thought about it, the covenant between us and God is even more dramatic for us Christians than it was for our Hebrew ancestors 3400 years ago. Instead of spilling blood in order to get close to God, Jesus spills his blood on the Cross to remind us of God’s endless desire to be close to us. All God wants is intimacy—nothing more.

The Old Testament ritual of dashing blood on an altar and then on the people pointed beyond itself—as all rituals do—to a dream that is not yet fulfilled. The dream was God’s dream. God’s dream was not only to be in covenant with Israel but with the whole world. When I watch the news and the images of suffering people in Gaza and people suffering close to home, I realize God’s dream of oneness is still only God’s and we’ve yet to make it our own. Christ said, **“My flesh is food for the life of the world”** (Jn. 6:51). The Church exists for the world. Its life must be for the world and its love must be for the world. Today, in virtually all church circles, liberal and conservatives alike, there is too little love for the world, and the Church life that is generated is essentially food for the life of our own

circles and not food for the life of the world. When Moses sprinkles blood upon the altar and upon the people and when Jesus invited us to drink his own blood, these were not simply rituals. It was a dream of the divine. It was God's dream for the world.

When Jesus handed his Apostles the Cup of his Blood, he didn't preface it with, "It would be nice if you considered drinking this." Instead of that, he held the cup between himself and each person around that Table, looked them in the eyes and said, "***This is the Blood of the covenant.*** This is the new agreement between God and all humans. I give my life freely to you, and all I ask of you is to receive it freely." The ritual is the dream yet to be fulfilled. That's why we have to keep coming back to the Table every week. As long as blood is spilled anywhere in the world, we still need to celebrate Eucharist. We need to drink of the one cup of the one Lord, the only one who can finally make us one.

The ritual is the unfulfilled dream. I can't say for sure, but I'm certain Martin Luther King Jr. was somehow very much in touch with Moses, Jesus, and God's dream for the world, a dream that is still unfulfilled. Here's only a portion of his famous "I Have A Dream" talk he gave on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be

revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (Is. 40:3-5). This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

Blood is always a sign of love. Blood is also, and always, a sign of sacrifice. Somebody loved us so much that they were willing to sacrifice their time, their effort, their money for us, etc. Whenever we share in the Cup at Mass, we say “yes” to the dream, God’s dream, that someday we will all be one.

~Fr. Phil