

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson  
**Sunday 6th June 2021 - Corpus Christi - The Most Holy  
Body and Blood of Christ**

Readings (Year B): 1st: Exodus 24:3-8. Psalm: 115. 2nd: Hebrews 9:11-15.  
Gospel: Mark 14:12-16. 22-26.

We all know the importance of blood to keep us alive. We speak about life's blood. We know blood and the samples of our blood tell so much about our health. When we lose too much blood we become weak and eventually die. From earliest times blood was used as a symbol of death. We speak of shedding blood. The number of stabbings, usually the young on the young, the shedding of blood, is a great tragedy of our age.

The readings for Corpus Christi for Year B give more prominence to Blood. The reforms of Vatican II joined Corpus Christi with what used to be a separate feast 'The Precious Blood' to become Corpus et Sanguis Christi: the Body and Blood of Christ.

Westminster Cathedral is dedicated to 'the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This is represented by the blood red columns of the Norwegian granite near the main West Doors. The visitor entering between these columns is reminded of the salvation won through the Precious Blood of Christ poured out in his sacrifice on the cross. The exterior central panel over the great arch of the main entrance in Latin translates as '*Lord Jesus, King and Redeemer, save us by thy blood.*'

A Latin hymn we know as 'Glory be to Jesus, who in bitter pains, poured for me the life- blood, from his sacred veins. Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies; but the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries.'

Judas confessed he had betrayed innocent blood. Pilate washes his hands saying 'I am innocent of this man's blood, see ye to it, and the people to a man shouted back 'His blood be on us and on our children.'

In the 1<sup>st</sup> reading: the ancient Israelites believed that life itself was contained in blood – blood therefore belonged to God alone, which is why even today a devout Jew will never eat any meat that is not completely drained of blood. As such, blood was revered as life and as a means of

purification. Hence during the ritual Moses splashes half of the sacrificed animal's blood on the altar, a symbol of God, and then sprinkles the other half on the people.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading this understanding of the sacredness of blood is key to the theology of the letter to the Hebrews. The crucified Jesus is both priest and victim whose blood cleanses us of our sins and seals a new covenant between God and those he calls in Christ. St Mark links his account with the Passover background. For him the very day the Passover lambs were sacrificed. The blood of the Passover lambs smeared on the door post so the angel of death passed over the Israelites doors.

Does some of this also help you understand what Our Lady was doing in Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of Christ" when after the scourging Mary takes towels to soak up the blood of her Son. We know from St John blood and water flowed from the pierced heart and side of Jesus, water and blood and body all symbols of life-giving to his Church, formed from his side, and his body and blood to feed and nourish his faithful.

As the Old Covenant between God and Israel was sealed through sacrificial blood poured out on Mt Sinai, so the New Covenant between Christ and the Church is sealed through his own blood poured out in the upper room on Mt Zion. The blood of Jesus is forever a sacrament of his divine life for those who receive him in the Eucharist.

At the present time the chalice sensibly has had to be withdrawn from communicants. That as you know was the case for many centuries, and no doubt was for similar reasons, during epidemics, and 'the poisoned chalice' will have played a part. The Church teaches that since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species, communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace. But 'the sign of communion is more complete when given under both kinds, since in that form the sign of the Eucharistic meal appears more complete.

But nothing can removed from us the joy of revering the body, blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus in his Sweet Sacrament Divine.

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