

On Wednesdays throughout the season of Lent this year, we've looked at different parts of the Body of Christ. We've looked at Christ's feet, hands, mouth, ears, eyes, and heart. Tonight, as we gather on this Maundy Thursday, we look at an essential part of the human body which is also a part of Christ's body. Tonight, we look at the Blood of Christ.

Blood is the fluid of life. When Cain killed his brother Abel, the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!"

As early as Genesis chapter 9, verse 4, God had spoken a solemn prohibition to humanity. God said: "You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood."

This restriction on eating and drinking blood is repeated in Leviticus 7:27 and again many other times. "Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from the people."

When the children of Israel were being led by Moses out of Egypt, they were protected from the plague of death by the blood of an unblemished lamb, as that lamb's blood was painted on their doorways. The Lord had told them: "The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt."

Blood was used in all the sacrificial rites in the worship of the tabernacle in the wilderness. The blood of a bull was sprinkled on the mercy seat, and on the horns of the altar, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. The bull's blood, that is, its life, was a substitution for the lives of the people who had sinned.

The New Testament Letter to the Hebrews summarizes the use of blood for reconciliation. Hebrews chapter 9, verse 22 says, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

It's not that much different for us in our attitude towards blood. Blood still carries the essential connection of life. A massive loss of blood almost always leads to the loss of one's life. Unless the flow of blood from an open wound is quickly stopped, the strength and vitality of a wounded person will pour out of them, eventually leaving behind a body devoid of life. The Red Cross publicizes its appeal for blood donations with this effective and accurate plea: "Give the gift of life—Give blood." Blood transfusions still save the lives of thousands every year. If and whenever you participate in a Bloodmobile program, that would be a good time to focus your thoughts on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the time when he gave his blood to save our lives.

But it may be harder for us than it was for the ancient Hebrews to identify with the notion that the shedding of blood can remove guilt of sin. What does the blood of a sacrificial animal have to do with our own sinful deeds, sins which use and abuse another child of God? Why slaughter an animal for my sins?

Even in the Old Testament—in the first chapter of Isaiah—this question is raised as God rejects sacrifice which is not accompanied by repentance. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 11 reads: “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?” says the LORD; “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.” Just a few verses later in that same chapter, in verses 16 & 17, God says what God would rather have people do. God says, “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” What God says here in these verses in Isaiah, sounds a lot like what Jesus tells his disciples in John’s gospel tonight. In Isaiah, God says, ‘Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean.’ Jesus says, “Wash one another’s feet.” In Isaiah, God says, “remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Jesus summarizes all of these things when he says, “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Yet the letting of blood serves a purpose. The letting of blood serves to dramatize the serious nature of guilt and sin. When we sin, we are breaking a relationship that God has established, whether it be our relationship with God, or our relationship with others. And when we sin and break those God-established relationships, we lose God-given life. It slips away. When we break God-established relationships, it is as though we’ve cut the skin of a living being, and blood is pouring out, and God-given life is slipping away. To sin means that you’ve killed something to which God had given life.

The blood of Christ, the precious life of Christ, is a very special kind of blood. For not only was Christ’s blood sinless and pure, unstained by hate and harm. Christ’s blood was also poured out voluntarily for us and for the sins of the world. Jesus offers his blood for us.

The same can’t be said for the animals that were sacrificed to God by the Israelites and the Jewish people. Animals never volunteered *themselves* for sacrifice. Never had a bull or a lamb *chosen* to carry the sins of sinners. Never had pigeons or doves *elected* to feel the pain and rejection of the sin which they did not

Judas recognized that the blood of Christ was sinless. In Matthew's Gospel, after Judas realizes that Jesus is going to be put to death, Judas says, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

Even Pilate, who condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion, admitted that the blood of Christ was pure, when he said, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves [that he is crucified]."

And so, Jesus was crucified.

When he had died, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

The sacred blood of Jesus, the life of God, drained to the soil of Golgotha beneath Christ's cross for the one purpose of displaying God's love for the world. The blood of Christ gives forgiveness of sins, just as Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."

Again, in Ephesians 2, we are assured that our relationship to God is restored by this bleeding Son of God. Paul writes, "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ."

This blood of Christ, sprinkled not on an altar for sacrificing animals but rather flowing freely from our Lord's side on a cross, this blood mysteriously gives us serenity in our souls. As we'll hear in our reading from Colossians tomorrow night, Paul writes: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."

Yet it is in the upper room, before his sacrifice on the cross, that the greatest shock and surprise is registered. It was there, that our Lord Jesus took a cup of wine, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

Jesus turns the ancient law against the eating and drinking of blood upside down. Jesus says to drink this blood, which is his blood, because this blood contains his life and gives us life. At the Last Supper, the first Eucharist, the first Holy Communion, Jesus gives his own flesh as bread and his own blood as wine precisely

And tonight, on this Maundy Thursday, we remember and do what Maundy means. Maundy comes from a Latin word that means “command” or “mandate,” and so tonight, we do what Christ commands us to do. We gather together to love one another as Jesus has loved us. And we experience this love of Jesus by being given the very blood of Christ, and we drink it, because it quenches our parched spirits. It gives us life in the midst of the death that we experience as a result of our sins.

In fact, in John chapter 6, Jesus taught that true life cannot be obtained without the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood. Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ”

Tonight, we drink the very life of God to revive our shriveled souls. It is this blood of Christ, this life of God which we swallow, that gives us the strength to love one another as Christ has loved us.