

Solemnity of the Body & Blood of Christ, 2018 (June 3)
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
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When I was in the 4th grade, there were some fellows in my class with whom I had a strong friendship. We got along very well.

One day, one of these boys said, “at recess, let’s become blood brothers!” It sounded kind of exotic, so we all agreed.

When we got to the playground, we agreed that there must be a ‘right way’ to become blood brothers. One boy had seen it on a TV show. You promised to be friends forever. You and the other fellow cut your fingers, and held your fingers together so that your blood would intermingle.

Someone else said that you had to swear to keep it a secret. And that after you were finished, you had to spit on the ground. We all liked the spitting part!

So we agreed on the ritual. We promised to be friends forever. Then one of the boys said, “Does anyone have a knife?” And, since we are all Boy Scouts, every one of us had a little pocket knife. (If we were kids today, we would each need a felony lawyer at this point!)

We made little cuts in our fingers, and squeezed a drop of blood. We mixed our blood. (Again, if we were kids today, we’d be taken to the hospital for a blood-borne pathogen test!) We swore eternal friendship. We spat on the ground. Several times.

When we finished, we knew that something *important* had happened. We were a little band of “blood brothers.”

Do children still do this? (Perhaps there is an app on the phone where children become blood brothers and sisters electronically?)

Back in 4th grade, even before I studied biology, I knew that *blood meant something*. To share blood, the way we did on the playground, symbolized a serious promise to share life.

It was an understanding as simple as boys on the playground. It is an understanding as old as human religion itself.

To share blood is to share life.

Today's first reading is full of actions which may confuse us. Moses and the people of Israel are gathered around Mt. Sinai. God had freed them from slavery. God had protected them. God provided water in the dessert. God had repeatedly shown the people: "I am here with you, I will not let you down."

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, he taught the people about the covenant relationship between God and them. Through his actions, God had taught them that he could be trusted.

Now the people were called upon to live holy lives. God gives them the Ten Commandments. These commandments are instructions for holy living.

When God says, "Do this," it's because God knows we will be happy if we do it. If God says, "Thou shalt not," it's because we will NOT be happy if we do that!

It's like the parent who says to a child – "don't touch the hot stove." The parent says, "don't do that" because the parent knows that the child will be harmed if they touch the hot stove! When God gives us commandments, it is for the same reason – God loves us, and wants us to be well.

Ancient Israel understood this, and trusted the God who had freed them from Egypt.

So after Moses taught them God's commandments, they all shout, "we will do everything that the Lord has told us!"

Here's where it gets exotic. Moses orders young bulls to be sacrificed. Half of the blood is placed on an altar – that blood is given to God. Then Moses takes the other half of the blood and *sprinkles it on the people!*

(Remember that, the next time you complain about the way I get you wet when we do the sprinkling rite. It could be worse!)

Blood on the altar. Blood on the people. What's going on? The sharing of the blood symbolizes the covenant friendship between God and God's people. It is a sign revealing that they believe that God is with them. They are promising to stay in a right relationship with God.

These ancient people knew what those boys on the playground knew – when you share blood, it's a promise to share life. God would always be there for them, and they would pay attention to how God was alive in them.

Blood is about life.

As the Letter to the Hebrews points out, there comes a time when God shows Israel something *new* about blood and life.

Jesus comes along. And he *bleeds*, on the cross. His blood is about life.

During his public ministry, Jesus revealed how much God loves us, and how faithful God is to us. The disciples trusted Jesus, and loved Jesus.

After he bled on the cross, some of them understood... this is a new and everlasting covenant between God and the people. The dying and rising of Jesus forgives our sins, and saves us from death. His bleeding is about a life that does not end. If we listen to him, we will find joy. He is alive, in us. His blood tells us that.

As he dined with his disciples on the night before he bled and died, Jesus took bread, and instructed to us to sit at the table and share that bread, in his memory. "This is my body, given for you."

Then he took the cup of wine. They all drank from it. And he said, "this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for the many." There's all that language again! Blood. Covenant. Sacrifice. Love. Friendship. The promise to be present.

Jesus does not *sprinkle* us with his blood. He asks us to *drink* his blood, in a sacramental way, at this table.

Blood is about life.

When he asks us to drink of the cup, he is telling us that he wants to be alive in us. "Drink it, my blood, my life. Take my life within you. I want to be alive in you. I want you to know that you are not alone. The covenant is forever, my friendship with you if forever, I am with you, forever."

The blood of Christ is about life, a joyful, generous life now and forever.

Blood is about friendship and life. At least, it *should* be.

On this feast, we celebrate how the Body and Blood of Christ give us meaning, purpose and life.

But we are surrounded by situations where blood is about revenge, hatred, mistrust.

Think how much human blood is spilt because of fear.

The shooting victim in a Richmond neighborhood. The stabbing victim in a school. The pedestrian run over by a terrorist van. The victim executed by Isis – or by the Commonwealth. The innocent child who bleeds to death in the abortion clinic, the innocent child who starves due to human indifference. The addicted neighbor who takes their own life.

There is much blood on the world's hands. And it is NOT the uniting blood of brothers on a playground. How can the world change?

Well, when God entered into a relationship of friendship and covenant with Moses and his people, God said that he was going to bless the *whole world* through them.

In other words, the people who had become blood brothers and sisters of God were supposed to take the love and life of God which they'd been given, and share it with the rest of the world. Thus, the world would slowly learn to stop shedding innocent blood, and learn instead to live in covenant harmony with each other.

That is still God's plan. We who become blood sisters and brothers with Christ, are called to take the life and love of Christ which we experience in this cup, and share it with the rest of the world. And the world will slowly learn that the shedding of innocent blood, the shedding of a neighbor's blood, the shedding of an enemy's blood, will never bring lasting peace.

To know, love and serve the Lord – that is where peace is found.

To eat his flesh and drink his blood – that is where life is found.

He is here. We don't need a knife on a finger. We need hands willing to reach out and take the cup of life. Drink his cup of friendship and covenant. Blood is about life.