

The Blood of Christ

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Mother of God Prayer Meeting
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Advent

Why focus on the blood in Advent? The 14-pointed star at the cave in Bethlehem: Jesus had his passion in view from the beginning. "The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

In order to give his blood, Jesus had to first take blood, assume a life that was fragile and could be violently poured out. A step of very great humility. He took flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Blood forms a kinship bond. "I've got Irish blood." "He's got royal blood." "She's my blood sister." "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death" (Heb 2:14). We all have Jesus' blood, we are literally his blood brothers and sisters!

The Blood of Jesus

What is the blood of Jesus? His very life, poured out for us on the cross. *The life is in the blood* (Lev 17:11). Shedding of blood, even drinking of animals' blood was prohibited because blood is sacred.

The blood symbolizes the whole reality of the act of love in which Jesus died for us. Jesus' words, "It is finished," meant that the Father's will that divine life would be given to humanity was fulfilled, death was swallowed up in victory.

Why did Jesus shed his blood for us so painfully, to such an extreme? (John 13:1). One drop would have been enough. No textbook answer, only God can answer it in prayer.

What Does the Blood of Christ Do?

In our relation to God

- Jesus' blood is the blood of the covenant (Mt 26:28) - shed in sacrificial love, it seals once and for all the eternal covenant between God and his people. It fulfills and surpasses the Old Covenant, sealed with the blood of oxen (Ex 34:3-8).
- Makes atonement for sin (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:11-28), forgives sin (Eph 1:7; 1 Jn 1:7, Rev 1:5), redeems us (1 Pet 1:18, Ac 20:28, Rev 5:9), justifies us (Rom 5:7), reconciles us to God (Col 1:20). It fulfills the Old Testament blood sacrifices (Lev 1:5, 11; 16:11-12).
- Sanctifies us, makes all our works holy and pleasing to God (Heb 13:12, Rev 7:14).

In ourselves

- The blood of Jesus cleanses our consciences (Heb 9:14; 10:2, 14). The Old Covenant purification by blood of bulls and goats was partial and provisional; there was still a conscience burdened by sin. How much more is the blood of Christ: its cleansing is interior, deep and total. Our sins are finite; the value of his blood is infinite! (1 Pet 1:18f). If only we realized how cleansed our consciences are, how God has cast our sins from us as far as East is from West! (Ps 103:12).
- Gives us confidence of access to God (Heb 10:19-22, Eph 1:13). "*Therefore, we have boldness to enter*" (Heb 10:19). Previously only the high priest could approach God, only once a year, and only with blood. We should never think our unworthiness or sins can keep us from full access to the all-holy, all-merciful God (that only comes from thinking we *could* make ourselves worthy if only we were better).
- Equips us to serve God (Heb 13:20). No matter what our natural talents or failings, we are all equipped!

In regard to the enemy

- The blood of Jesus conquers Satan - we can claim the blood with authority against our adversary. The blood prevented the Destroying Angel from entering the Israelite homes marked with blood (Exod 12:21-30; Heb 11:28).
- Robs Satan of any grounds on which to accuse or condemn us (Rev 12:11).

Just as our blood (white blood cells) fights off germs which attack the body, so the blood of Christ is a weapon against the enemy who attacks his Body.

Drinking the Blood

Most of all, the blood is not just a concept to believe, but a reality to receive (Jn 6:53-59). *We drink the blood of Christ*. A great scandal to the Jews - the forbidden part of a sacrifice. The life is in the blood. We receive divine Life itself! "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:56). The blood gives us eternal life (Jn 6:54).

Ecumenical issue: even here we have much more in common than we might think. Not only the Catholic Church emphasizes the Eucharist. Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists, Orthodox, speak of the Real Presence of Jesus, many other churches are placing more emphasis on the Lord's Supper. We should ponder the scriptures, avoid either extreme: Catholics can overemphasize the physical reality apart from deep participation in faith, Protestants can overemphasize communion in faith apart from the reality of the Presence. Catholics can live without any awareness or experience of the power of the blood in their daily lives; Protestants can neglect Jesus' words about drinking his blood.

Blood brings oxygen to every cell of the body; it nourishes the body with the breath. Without the circulation of blood the body would quickly die from lack of oxygen. The breath of the Lord Jesus is his Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22). The blood nourishes us, his body, with the breath of his life.

From Theory to Reality

The blood purchased us for God. But sin and its effects still arise in us, keeping us from experiencing the Kingdom in its fullness. The blood cleanses the inner man, so our faculties can be alive to God.

Calling on the power of the blood. It's reliable, dependable, whether or not we immediately experience it. It doesn't depend on how we feel, e.g. whether we feel forgiven. We can pray the blood against a sense of condemnation, insecurities, anger, runaway thoughts, moodiness, confusion, fears, depression, divisions. We can pray the blood over troubled situations among our families, at work, in the world; against sickness, danger, etc.

Believing in the power of the blood: do we believe in the utter sufficiency of the blood of the Son of God to cleanse us from sin, or do we wallow in our guilt, hoping somehow to make up for our sin on our own?

Ancient icons show Mary under the cross with a chalice: she received with her whole being the divine life, the infinite mercy being poured out.

Follow-up

It is only as God vivifies these truths that they become life-giving. Prayer and Share Sheets are a tool to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit through prayer and scripture, that he might bring these truths to life in us. Do as much as is helpful for you. Not for the sake of completing the sheet, but for letting God give you revelation.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Heb 10:1-25. Why could the blood of animals not take away our sins? Why is the blood of Jesus completely sufficient to do that?
2. Ask God to speak to your heart through one of the scripture verses about the blood of Christ, and call this scripture to mind often throughout the week. What is God teaching you through it?
3. Read Mt 26:26-29 and Jn 6:53-59. (If you can find one, you could also gaze at an icon which shows the Mother of Jesus receiving the blood at the foot of the cross.) How can you personally come to a deeper interior receiving of the blood of the Lord which you drink at the celebration of the Eucharist?
4. Do you ever feel tempted to think that your guilt or failures can keep you from drawing near to God, even after repenting? What truths can you proclaim against that thought?
5. During the week, try praying the blood of Christ in situations where Satan seems to have a foothold. Are there any occasions on which you experienced a change (either in your own heart or in the external situation) after claiming the power of the blood?
6. Read and ponder Jn 13:1; 19:34 and Rev 5:9. In your own words, why did the Son of God go to the extreme of dying in agony on the cross when, as some of the saints say, one drop of his most precious blood would have been enough to atone for the sin of the whole world?
7. **Words from the Fathers of the Church**

8. "Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious that blood is to God, which, having been shed for our salvation, has set the grace of repentance before the whole world." St. Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 7.
9. "There is living water springing up in me, which says to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God... and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life." St. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans*, 7.
10. "And this food is called among us Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake but the one who believes that the things which we teach are true, and who has been washed with the washing for the remission of sins and unto regeneration, and who is living as Christ has commanded. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but just as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 66.