

**Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ – Year B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – June 3, 2018**  
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When I was growing up, a kid getting a cut or a skinned knee while playing in the backyard or on the playground was a fairly common occurrence. A parent or another adult would help you wash it off, put a bandage on it and send you on your way. Then they would grab a cloth, wipe up the blood, and the incident was over. All of that changed in the 1980s. With the re-discovery of blood-borne pathogens, bandaging a wound and cleaning up blood became a major procedure involving latex gloves and sometimes surgical masks. A little blood from an NBA player can shut down the game for 15 minutes while people in haz-mat suits come out to clean the court. It seems that blood, these days, is treated more cautiously than nuclear waste.

While we understand the science behind the caution, blood is, I'm afraid, getting a bad rap. Yes, blood can carry dangerous bacteria or viruses, but blood is also life-giving. People who are injured or facing surgery depend upon donated blood. Some time ago, I lost an old friend to a blood disorder he had been fighting for many years. His life was extended for so long by blood transfusions – blood generously donated by people like you and me. Blood is a precious gift because blood means life.

We hear a lot about blood in our Scripture passages today. In our first reading from Exodus, Moses sprinkles the altar and the people with blood – symbolizing the mutual covenant between God and Israel. Even for ancient peoples – especially for ancient peoples – blood meant life. To the Israelite people, blood represented the God-given life force of an animal or of a human. When they were sprinkled with the blood, with the life-force of the sacrificed cattle, all of Israel understood that they had entered into a life-and-death relationship with God. If they would keep the commandments of the Lord, then the Lord would preserve them and guide them through the desert to the promised land. Their covenant with God was a covenant of existence. With God, they had life in a land flowing with milk and honey. Without God, they were promised nothing but slavery and death. This Mosaic covenant – as it came to be called – this covenant between Israel and God marked with blood was a covenant of survival. Israel understood that their very survival, their very life was in the hands of God.

Good Jews that they were, this allusion was not lost upon the Apostles at the Last Supper. When Jesus proclaimed a new covenant not in the blood of an animal but in his own blood, the Apostles certainly understood that Jesus was raising the

stakes on the old Mosaic covenant. Oh, there were similarities, to be sure, but there was one essential difference. In the Mosaic covenant, Israel promised God fidelity and God promised Israel existence, survival, life. In the New Covenant, we also promise God our fidelity, but in Jesus, God promises us not life, but everlasting life. We are promised not mere existence and survival, but eternal happiness. When Jesus offers his disciples, offers us the cup of his blood, he is offering us the cup of eternal salvation. If the Apostles did not appreciate that at the Last Supper, then perhaps they began to fathom it the next day. Pierced by a lance, blood and water flowed from the side of Christ, from the heart of Christ. This mixture of the human and the divine was the fountainhead of the Church. In the ultimate sacrifice, the one eternal sacrifice, Jesus offers us his life-force, his spirit in water and in blood. The same covenant, the same blood he had offered to his Apostles the night before. The same covenant, the same blood he offers to each of us at every Mass.

Do we understand this covenant offered to us? Do we understand why we celebrate this feast? Each Sunday, each day, Jesus invites us to enter anew into the new and everlasting covenant. He invites us to approach the Table of the Lord and to share in his Body and Blood. He offers us the life-force poured out for us on Calvary. He asks us to stand before the throne of the Lamb and to give thanks. Sadly, many of us do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, in the life-giving nourishment of his Body and Blood. We could not believe it, for that's the only explanation. You see, if we did believe in the Real Presence – if we truly took the Eucharist to heart – then we could not tear ourselves away. Nothing short of illness would keep us from actively participating in the Sunday celebration. The Eucharist would not be something we do when nothing better comes along. There is nothing better. Here, heaven and earth unite. Here, Jesus offers us his spirit, his life. If we truly understood that in each Eucharistic celebration Jesus is offering us his life, offering us eternal life, then we would be unable to imagine our life without it.

While we now treat blood with some appropriate precautions, it is a fact that thousands of people are kept alive each day by transfusions of donated blood. When will we recognize that we have no hope of eternal life without Jesus, the ultimate blood donor? When will we fully embrace the new covenant in his blood?