

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ      June 14, 2009      "B"

Imagine if we were to advertise on all the media that at next Sunday's 5/9/11 o'clock Mass, there would be a great miracle: that the wine would actually turn into blood--for all to see. This space would be overflowing with the curious.

It turns out that that actually happened--in Italy. Way back in 1264, in an Italian town called Orvieto, priest was saying Mass. We are told he was having problems believing in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Anyway, after the Words of Institution, the priest spilled a bit of the wine which had become the Blood of Christ. He tried to cover his blunder with the corporal--the white square cloth on the altar--only to have the corporal covered with circles of blood in the shape of hosts. I was able to see that bloodstained corporal in the big church at Orvieto in Italy, and I mention it because that miracle of the wine-become-blood influenced Pope Urban IV to establish this Feast of Corpus Christi later that same year of 1264.

"This is my blood of the covenant," said Jesus. Jesus "entered with his own blood," says the Letter to the Hebrews. Why blood? Long before transfusions, blood was life: you lose it, you die. Drinking blood was forbidden, because it was sacred: it belonged to God.

We heard in the Book of Exodus that when Moses came down the mountain with the Commandments, the Israelite people said, "We will do all that the Lord has told us." So Moses had this bizarre

ceremony to mark the occasion: lots of young bulls were slaughtered and their blood was poured into large bowls. Half the blood was poured on the altar, which represented God; and the rest of the blood was sprayed onto the people. Imagine them standing, warm animal blood dripping from their faces. God was entering into a covenant with the Israelites. God promised never to forget them, and they promised always to obey God's commandments. And the people said, "God, if we forget that we belong to you, if we ignore your laws, *may what happened to those bulls happen to us too!*" (And I should add that at the Dedication Ceremony of our new church, our new altar will be consecrated by Archbishop Pilarczyk. He will cover our new altar, which represents Christ, not with blood but with Sacred Chrism--a special oil that represents Jesus.) [pause]

1300 years later, on a hot spring night in an upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth took a cup of wine, gave it to the disciples and said, "This is **my** blood of the covenant." It was a New Covenant. This time the blood was not of an animal, but of Jesus Christ, and this time the people were to drink the blood.

At Holy Communion, when we drink the Blood, we are renewing the covenant with Jesus. To drink from the Cup is to say, "Jesus, I choose You to be my God. And I solemnly promise to do all that You ask of me!" We take a sip from the cup and say in our heart, "Jesus, I belong to you!"

Some churches have altar calls on Sunday morning: "if you feel moved to give your life to Christ, please come forward." Catholics do

that at every Mass! It's called receiving Holy Communion!  
Remember the miracle at Orvieto, Italy--where the wine actually  
became blood? The miracle will happen in a few minutes; it happens  
every Sunday.

We don't drink from the Cup casually, our mind somewhere  
else. We're not drinking wine at all. No, we are renewing our  
Covenant, the Covenant that Jesus created by shedding his blood on  
the Cross.