



MISSION AT THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

St. Therese, the Little Flower, looked for her place in the Body of Christ and decided it was to be love. I look at our place as CPS and think of Blood! It may be that my medical background may contribute to what I think blood says to us.

Symbols can have different meanings in different cultures. For example, the heart may mean love or courage. But blood is a universally understood symbol and speaks of life and death. Blood is very concrete and its meaning is universal.

The theme of *World Mission Day* 2017 is "Mission at the heart of the Christian faith." What a calling it is to be Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood! Blood truly is a symbol of our missionary vocation.



Of all the organs in our body, the one which is so readily shared is blood. And this can be shared while we are alive without risk to the donor! Organ transplants are very complicated and rejection is always a fear. But blood, of which there are only 4 main types (I am simplifying for this presentation), can be given to anyone or almost anyone, depending on the blood type. Blood transcends race, sex, religion, culture, nation.

In the Old Testament, blood was sacred and belonged to God as "life is in the blood." Indeed, in cases where blood has been lost, water/saline only goes so far. There are times when a patient has lost a great deal of blood and, to buy time, has received lots of IV saline, but it is blood that is needed, and waited for.

Today we are called to be that gift of life to the world. We seldom think of our blood, or anyone else's, until it is being lost. Blood is hidden and goes about its work without fanfare. It carries life to every part of the body, and, very importantly, is very flexible. Indeed, the red blood cell must squeeze through the smallest vessels and adapt its shape. That is the problem with sickle cell anemia. The cells are misshapen and are not flexible and thus cannot squeeze through these small vessels.

Our Founder, Abbot Francis Pfanner, wanted us to be flexible and adaptable. To go to every part of the world. Pope Francis invites all to be missionary disciples and to bring life to the margins, to the peripheries. These are not necessarily geographical areas, but can be people right in our midst.

Let me illustrate the three functions of Blood, and how they relate to being a missionary in our world. Their “ministry” is to:

Transport, protect and regulate.



1) Transport

Transporting oxygen and nutrients to the lungs and tissues

Blood carries all kinds of good things, to nourish and support the body. Life-giving oxygen and nutrients are brought to every cell in the body.

What do we bring to support life, to nourish the spirit of others, to care for the whole body? Waste products are brought to liver and kidneys. What is harmful, what can threaten life, must be removed, or cleansed? What are the things that can overwhelm a person, can discourage them, can be an obstacle to life, bodily and spiritual? The Precious Blood cleanses us from sin. We are to work to eliminate injustices, illness, poverty, addictions; the list can go on. Where are we in this struggle?

2) Protect

Platelets clot blood at sites of injury, and cells and antibodies fight infection.

Injury, wounds: These call for the “Medic!” the first responders in the battle field. Like Pope Francis says, the church is to be a field hospital, to be where the action is, where people live and struggle, where life is lived. The white blood cells throw themselves into the battle and even give their lives to save the body.

Hemorrhaging must be stopped. Platelets and other coagulation factors join as one to preserve life. Each has a role, but each works in unity with the others with one mission: Save the body. Protect and preserve life. Guard and defend. It is the sickest, the injured, the vulnerable, that call forth the massive response of these little soldiers. That is where the church needs to be, where we must be, in the areas of most need.

But even with our own weaknesses and wounds, like blood, we still flow.

The cells in sickle cell anemia are deformed and do not function as they should, but they still have a protective function. One would think that natural selection would have eliminated the gene a long time ago, but it was found that sickle cells had a protective value against malaria. So even what seems useless at best, certainly not a good thing, has value. How like us flawed human beings. We may fail to be that Most Precious Life-giving Blood of Christ, but still we are to be that blood which flows and brings some little good and joy and healing to others.

We are called like the apostles to do our part. “Feed them yourselves.”

3) Regulate

Blood has a role in controlling body temperature, keeping it at an even level. Is this not the kind of balance that our Benedictine heritage calls us to? Balance in all things, action and contemplation, pray and work. AND is the operative word.

Blood flows... Everywhere! No other organ in the body is so mobile. The effects of various organs may be felt in other parts of the body, e.g. neurotransmitters, but blood goes to every part of the body. Like Abbot Francis said, we are to be the “flying squads.”

At Mass we offer bread and wine: bread is the ordinary, the staff of life, the fruit of labor, the human condition. But wine! That is celebratory! We think of feasts and joy and the “spiced wine” of the Song of Songs. Wine is sparkling, and it is this that is changed into the Precious Blood. It brings joy to everyday life, the Joy of the Good News, of God’s love for us. Are we like good wine?

Blood is a sign of unity. We think of blood as one entity when in fact it has many components: red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, clotting factors, etc. As the song says, “We are many parts, we are all one body/one blood.” Out of every tribe and nation, we are called. We all have blood, and it is red! (Unless in Kentucky, where they bleed blue). Blood unites all humanity in a way that nothing else can. So much blood has been shed from the dawn of time, and yet it is not blood which divides us. If we have anything in common, it is blood. And the Blood of Christ is also to unite us. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart.” Eph. 2:13-14. Jesus is the Universal Donor; Jesus is the missionary par excellence. “Go out to all the world ...”

We do not end the story of Jesus with His crucifixion and death but with His Resurrection. What better picture of this than the Lamb standing victorious. We see an outpouring of blood, but still the Lamb stands, ready and alert. As CPS we are to stand ready to go where we are sent, where we are called. In the midst of this world’s suffering and pain, we are to “practice resurrection in places of crucifixion.”¹ That is our message of hope, our message of joy. We proclaim that suffering and death have been conquered. In the midst of sorrow, there is joy.

We cannot explain a mystery; we can only experience it. Mission is at the heart of the Christian faith and from this heart, Blood flows to bring life, to bring hope, to bring joy.

1. *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us*
A People’s Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia pg. 42 (Adapted from Wendell Berry)

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