

FIRST IMPRESSIONS BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (B)
Exodus 24:3-8 Psalm 116 Hebrews 9: 11-15 Mark 14: 12-16, 22-26
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTE:

We have posted another essay by Sr. Brenda Walsh, OP, “Preaching Hope in a Time of Despair.” Go to www.judeop.com and click on “Dominican Preaching.”

Even as ten and eleven year old kids we recognized the significance of blood. Our family members would stress the importance of family loyalty by reminding us, “Blood is thicker than water.” I wondered why they felt a need to remind us of the obvious; of course blood is thicker than water. But as years went on I realized the point they were making: your family’s blood flowed in your veins and created bonds of loyalty and responsibility with others who also had that blood. You were a member of a family; you shared the same blood.

We kids picked up on the significance of blood ties because when we wanted to express our “undying friendship” for one another, we made a blood pact. In a solemn ceremony one of us would take out a pocket knife and each of us would put a cut in our thumbs. Then we would press our thumbs together, commingling our blood with our new and forever blood brothers. Now we had each others’ blood flowing in our veins, we would be brothers “forever and ever.” To tell you the truth, I don’t know where even one of my former “till-death” blood brothers is right now.

I hear echoes of what my family and we kids said about blood in today’s readings. In the Exodus reading Moses just gave the people the Law and now the people respond by accepting the covenant God wants to make with them. The ancient peoples had a way of making a formal and binding pact or covenant by sealing it in blood. God had initiated this covenant and the people were expressing their desire to live up to their part in it. Through the blood ritual God and the people were bound together in a communion of lives. The altar was sprinkled with blood to represent God’s involvement. The people were sprinkled to express their union with God and each other. Blood represented life and God is the giver of life; the people are the recipients. The animals sacrificed were an offering to God; the

“peace offering” would be shared by the community.

You can see, can't you, the ties between the former covenant and the one we have in Christ? His self-offering, the meal we share with one another, is our “peace offering.” It unites us with each other and our God. From ancient times our Eucharist has been called a “feast,” a meal that celebrates, like the Israelite peace offering to the Lord, the gift of life we have from God.

In today's gospel, when Jesus offers his disciples the bread, he is offering them his very self. “This is my Body.” Jesus' offering of the cup and his words, “This is my blood...” – recall what Moses said and did for the people. God has not broken the covenant God established with the people and now brings it to completion in Christ's offering himself for our food.

I can't prove or explain how Christ is present in the gift of bread and wine which is being offered to us today. But I can understand that this meal is an ultimate expression of his love for me and us. This comparison pales....but, I recall what we kids did to show our friendship, we joined our bloodied thumb with one another. We wanted to be blood brothers forever; we had mingled our blood. Well, we certainly were sincere and earnest, but like a lot of even our best human efforts, our “forever promises” ended and we went our own ways. At this Eucharist God shares Christ's life with us and that union in blood will never end. He is always our “blood brother.” Blood is thicker than water. Blood – life – our lives are mingled with Christ's and one another's.

Because Jesus consistently gave himself, especially to the needy and least-favored in society, the politically-connected religious people had him put to death. His sacrifice wasn't just his death on the cross – his whole life was a gift of himself to humanity. Jesus willingly gave his life for us so that we might have life and share it with others. We are not only receiving the Body and Blood of Christ today in the bread and wine, we are also committing ourselves to Jesus' way of life.

But who among us can say we have lived up to what this meal signifies? How often have we fallen short of the life Jesus offers us in this meal? Jesus offers his life freely, while we shrink back from the many small and sometimes, large deaths discipleship requires. But the more we come to eat and drink, the more Christ continues to form us into his body and blood to be given for our world. We eat, we

drink and in doing that, we express our willingness to give our lives so that Christ can, through us, share his life with others.

The “2009 Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons and Weekdays” (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, page 218) suggests it would be appropriate today to commission and bless Eucharistic ministers. It also recommends that today would be a day to bless those who serve meals to the poor, give shelter to the homeless and visit prisoners – for these activities also express our love for Christ in the Eucharist. Fr. Robert Waznak picked up this theme – of recognizing the many people who do a form of Eucharistic ministry – in a homily he titled, “Let’s Make Everyone a Eucharistic Minister.” Giving our lives in Christian service is a way of making Christ’s true presence tangible in our world.

We hear, in the words of the Eucharistic Prayer today, the reality of the sacrifice we are part of: God has made a self-offering to us by sending the Son. We in turn make our own self-offering to God. Our gifts are transformed; but not just the bread and wine. We who receive them are also changed as we are brought further and further in the divine life.

QUOTABLE

We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need, we will be recognized as true followers of Christ (cf. John 13: 35; Matthew 25:31). This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged.

—Pope John Paul II, in “Mane Nobiscum Domine,” (28).

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today’s Gospel reading:

While they were eating Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, “Take it, this is my body. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them and they all drank from it.

He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant,
which will be shed for many.

Reflection:

Jesus’ sacrifice wasn’t just his death on the cross, his whole life was a gift of himself to humanity. By receiving the Body and Blood of Christ today in the Eucharist, we are asking for the nourishment and strength, indeed, the very life of Jesus, to help us do what he did – to offer our lives as a gift to those we are called to serve.

So we ask ourselves:

How are the daily sacrifices I make like the ones Jesus made?

How does my life reflect the true presence of Christ in the world?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“We will do everything that the Lord has told us.”

1. *(Exodus 24:3)*

"Whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink... he will surely not lose his reward."

(Matthew 10:42)

Food Stamps

If we are honest with ourselves, we’ll probably admit to having looked judgmentally at the purchases of someone in line at the store who was paying for their groceries with Food Stamps. Food Stamps are the currency of the poor and they are a blessing for those who receive them. Many of us can live our lives and avoid contact with such harsh realities. We don't have to know what it is like to need Food Stamps and we don't need to imagine what it would feel like to be judged as we purchased food for our families.

Did you know?

§ A new report shows that **FOOD STAMPS** help slow recession in all 100 NC

counties. Since the start of the recession, North Carolinians have received \$1.6 billion in food stamp benefits. These payments, in turn, have generated \$2.8 billion in economic activity across all 100 of the state's counties. Absent food stamp benefits, the state's economic woes would be worse.

§ Food stamp benefits help low-income families and households struggling with a dramatic loss of income make ends meet. Because most benefits are spent quickly at groceries and area stores, the payments also help to maintain local economic activity.

§ The importance of food stamps benefits is growing as the recession worsens. Since the start of the recession, the number of households receiving food assistance has increased by 21 percent.

§ If everyone who receives Food Stamp assistance were gathered in one place, they would form a metro area almost as populous as Charlotte.

The above facts can be found at: *(NC Budget & Tax Center*
<http://www.ncjustice.org/?q=node/267>.)

What can I do?

· When you see someone paying for groceries with a Food Stamps card, smile at them and do not judge.

If Legislative Issues are of interest to you, please consider volunteering on Sacred Heart's Social Concerns Committee to help the committee and the parish be educated and active in supporting just legislation.

Volunteer in one of Sacred Heart's outreach ministries serving the poor. Once we know the poor by name, we judge them less harshly and care more about legislation which affects them.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space

several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

Jamie L. Smith #0376917 (On death row since 5/10/96)

Robbie D. Locklear #0246186 (5/14/96)

Archie L. Billings #0471315 (6/5/96)

---Cental Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available:

"First Impressions Preaching Reflections: Liturgical Year B." Begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

"Liturgical Years A, B and C." Reflections on the three-year cycle, with **Year B** updated.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: www.preacherexchange.com and clicking on the "First Impressions" CD link on the left.

2. **"Homilias Dominicales"**—These Spanish reflections on the Sunday and daily scriptures are written by Dominican sisters and friars. If you or a friend would like to receive these reflections drop a note to fr. John Boll, O.P. at Jboll@opsouth.org Or jboll@preacherexchange.org

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews, daily homilies and other material pertinent to preaching.

4. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Dominican Friars of Raleigh, N.C. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to fr. John Boll, OP at the above email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below.

Make checks payable to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://preacherexchange.com/donations.htm>

Thanks you and blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA
P.O. 12927 Raleigh, N.C. 27605 (919-833-1893, ex 224)

judeop@Juno.com