



C.PP.S. Resources — 13

PASSIONATE PILGRIMS
A Sojourn of Precious Blood Spirituality

by
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C.PP.S Resources

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*Let us carefully read the wounds
of Jesus Christ
during these holy days
and let us discover in them
the haven of safety,
of peace and of victory.*

**Gaspar del Bufalo
28 March 1825**

Introduction

STAYING AWAKE ON THE HOLY WAY

We are pilgrims of the Precious Blood. We walk this highway, this holy way, together with other men and women — priests, brothers, sisters, associates, companions and candidates. This book is a guide for all who travel this path of Precious Blood spirituality. It is not a map, exactly, because I don't know the landscape of your heart. I only know mine. I only know where the rest stops and exits and places where I can sit down in the company of friends are for me. But each of us has his or her own map through the rugged terrain where this holy highway of the Precious Blood weaves and winds its way through pain and promise to the glorious destination of our dreams.

We have been this way before. The important thing to remember is this: stay awake. Though we are tempted at times to walk in our sleep, the blood of Christ awakens us to the reality of the suffering we will encounter when our eyes and hearts are open.

One such alarm clock for me rang early in the morning on October 31, 1992. The National Public Radio report didn't quite sink in: "Five American nuns murdered in Liberia." Then I remembered that the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Ruma have sisters in Liberia.

Barbara Ann Muttra, Agnes Mueller, Shirley Kolmer, Mary Joel Kolmer, and Kathleen McGuire — holy women, Adorers of the Blood of Christ, educators, health care workers, seekers of justice, makers of peace, shakers of the status quo, knew what it meant to be passionate pilgrims of the Precious Blood. They shook the tree of the cross hoping that the fruit of reconciliation would fall to the ground and scatter all around so that the people they loved and served in a country ravaged by civil war might taste and savor sweet peace.

These five women were friends of the cross. They knew the price of peacemaking and paid it with their lives. Believing they were citizens of the reign of God first, these women stretched out their arms on the cross and no doubt prayed that their precious blood would shake us from our sleep. Their deaths have awakened a world to the suffering of the people in Liberia. Their deaths have roused us to realize the risks we must take to live in God's reign.

Barbara Ann, Agnes, Shirley, Mary Joel, and Kathleen dare us to believe that the dawn of peace is breaking over the horizon and will soon pour into the windows of our souls.

The blood of these martyrs calls us to see there can be no peace without justice. Their blood calls us to hear again the cries and sighs of the poor. Their blood calls us to touch the wounds of the oppressed. Their blood calls us to taste the bitter sorrow of grieving family and community members so devastated by their loss. Their blood calls us to smell the scents of resurrection blossoming from the blood-stained soil of Liberia.

Like these sisters, we are pilgrims of the blood of Christ who are on a journey of proclamation through a land of promise and of pain. Though we have our own maps, our own experiences, we will also rely on those which will show us the way: the passion narratives and the suffering servant songs of Isaiah. We have made our way through this land many times before but this time we are asked to make this journey "fully awake." To sleep with the window to our soul open to surprise. To wake with the cross of Christ sitting squarely on our chest, so heavy we gasp for breath. To rise and look in the mirror and see the fingerprints of Jesus staining our bodies. To see that we are stained with the blood of the crucified Christ.

As servants of the blood, we are called to be awake to promise and to pain, to the outcasts and alienated, to anger and anguish. We are called by the courage of these martyrs to be aroused and awakened to the reality of Christ's suffering in our own lives and in our world.

Barbara Ann, Agnes, Shirley, Mary Joel, and Kathleen knew the price that peacemaking exacts from those who pursue peace with a passion. That is why Barbara Ann, Agnes, Shirley, Mary Joel, and Kathleen were Precious Blood people who wrapped themselves in garments of grace, stained by the blood of Christ.

On November 1, the feast of All Saints, we hear John's familiar vision from the book of Revelation. "Who do you think these are, all dressed in white? And where have they come from?" The answer now includes these names: Sr. Barbara Ann Muttra, Sr. Joel Kolmer, Sr. Shirley Kolmer, Sr. Kathleen McGuire, and Sr. Agnes Mueller. These women and countless others who have died in the country named for freedom, "are the ones who have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

The martyred adorers of Liberia have taught us how to walk the path of the Precious Blood. This book is dedicated to the memory of our martyred sisters and their companions. May their deaths disturb us enough to see how far we have to go to make the reign of justice and peace a reality in our world. May their lives inspire us with courage. May their names live in our memory so that when we are tempted to give up or give in, these martyrs will remind us to keep seeking, keep pushing, keep proclaiming the peace found in the blood of the cross.

In the spirit of Maria and Gaspar, the five adorers felt the passion of the blood and gave their lives in the name of Christ. Their blood becomes a seed of reconciliation in a country and a world crying out for peace.

We live a spirituality that speaks of a deep communion with suffering. It is a suffering that ends not in death but speaks with the force of an empty tomb. The lives of the five Adorers of the Blood of Christ and their companions shout to us with such force today. As we remember their courage, may we deepen our commitment to be pilgrims of the Precious Blood who live passionately the reconciliation won for us in the blood of the cross.

Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

6 January 1993

THIRSTY SOULS

A recent film, "The Fisher King," relates an ancient legend about the search for the Holy Grail. I believe the search and the symbol offer us an avenue for understanding our identity as pilgrims of the Precious Blood. Our search is colored by the blood of Christ. The symbol is the cup, the Holy Grail, from which we drink the new wine of compassion.

First, though, the legend. When the Fisher King was a boy, he was sent out to spend the night alone in the forest as a test of his courage to be king. During the night, he was granted a vision of the Holy Grail, the symbol of divine blessing, surrounded by great flames of fire. On seeing this vision, the young boy felt invincible. He was excited by the prospect of wealth and fame and fortune that would be his by possessing such a great prize. So he reached into the fire to take the Grail, but as soon as he grasped the cup, it disappeared. And his hand was severely wounded by the flames.

Something died in the young Fisher King that night. As the years went by, he became more despondent. Loneliness imprisoned him and despair stalked his every step. And his wound deepened.

One day a fool visited the Fisher King. "Are you all right," the fool asked. "Forgive me, your majesty, but you look terrible. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I am very thirsty," the Fisher King replied. So the fool took a cup from his bag, filled it with water, and gave it to the Fisher King.

As the king drank, he felt his wound healing. Suddenly he saw that the cup he was drinking from was the Holy Grail.

"Where did you find this?" the king asked. "My knights have been searching in vain for years for this treasure. How did you know where to find it?"

The fool just shrugged and said nothing.

"What wonderful magic do you possess then?" the king asked.

"I know no magic," the fool said. "All I did was give a drink to a thirsty soul."

The legend has many levels of meaning for me. At its most basic level, it shouts the spirituality of the Precious Blood. Like the Fisher King, each of us is wounded in some way. Whether those wounds are caused by an alcoholic and abusive parent or a repressive dictator; whether they are inflicted by the betrayal of a friend or a flogging by an enemy; whether they are left by a society of greed or a society of genocide; whether the wounds come from the loss of a loved one or the loss of a land, the pain is real and personal and profound.

A few years ago, I was giving a day of reflection on Precious Blood spirituality to a group of associates of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. I asked the group to reflect on that question of wounds. At one point, an older woman stood up and said, "You want to know where my wounds are? You will hear them as I try to remember what I was going to say. Growing old is one of my wounds. I am forgetful. I can't remember like I used to. And my hands shake so much that I can no longer be a Eucharistic Minister."

Her voice quivered. She told us how much she loved giving the blood of Christ to others and now because of her trembling hands, she is no longer able. Later, at the Mass to conclude the day, one of the Adorers who had planned the liturgy, invited this woman to be a Eucharistic Minister at the Mass. She brought the chalice to her, had a table in front of her to give her confidence, and just for a moment gave this woman the grace of being young again.

I would suggest to you that the Adorer at that moment, in that gesture, was meeting that woman in her woundedness. And living the spirituality of the blood of Christ.

By Your Wounds

Spirituality is learned in living experience. For people bathed in the blood of Christ, our spirituality is found first in our own experiences of suffering. In our wounds, we learn the tender compassion of our God. In the inventory of our own wounds, we find the call to live the spirituality of the Precious Blood.

Many events along the way have shaped my personal response to the spirituality of the blood of Christ. Certainly the most telling

was my brother's suicide in June of 1987. A few weeks after Ed's funeral, I left parish work and went to Italy for a meeting of formation directors from our congregation. Because the memory of Ed's death was so fresh in my mind and the grief so present in my heart and soul, as I walked on the path of St. Gaspar's life during those weeks — Rome, Giano, Sonnino — the spirituality came alive. It found a home in my broken heart. I could no longer keep it at arm's length. Here were the seeds of suffering. Here were the seeds of liberation.

Gaspar's devotion to the Precious Blood deepened for him when he spent years in prison and in exile for refusing to compromise his beliefs when Napoleon occupied Rome. In his own experiences of suffering and exile, Gaspar's compassion deepened and the formation of a religious congregation named for the Blood of Christ was conceived. He knew that the fire in his belly was his passion for the Precious Blood.

But Gaspar knew he could not live this passion alone. Like the prophet for whom the Word of God was a burning ember that burned a hole in his soul; no matter how hard he tried to keep the fire inside, he could not. Gaspar knew he had to let it out. So he gave birth to a religious community that would be a dynamic force for spiritual renewal both in the church and in the society.

This renewal flowed from the cross in the redeeming stream of Christ's blood. I believe our mission is one of reconciliation and renewal. A mission that is found in our own experience of the paschal mystery. We are to be those wounded servants who carry on the work of the reign of God that Jesus gave to his friends on the night before he died.

We don't do this alone but in the context of a caring, compassionate community. As people who gather "in the company of friends," we accompany one another in this journey toward true and lasting freedom found in the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

It is because we know our own pain, our own suffering, our own experiences of sorrow; because we know our own wounds, that we are called to share them with one another. We allow these experiences to motivate us to be with others in their pain, in their suffering, in their sorrow. And in doing so, together, we realize God's gift of redemption.

The Leaven Of Friendship

But in addition to the wounds, there is wonder. There is the cup of suffering and the cup of blessing. Remember that just as the word, "compassion" means "to suffer with," the word, "congratulations" means, "with joy." To be true to our identity as blood sisters and brothers, we are to recognize, embrace, and celebrate our own gifts and the gifts of each other. We see each other's gifts not as a cause of envy but as a reason for rejoicing.

As a Eucharistic people, the gifts we bring to the table become tangible signs of our identity. Our communion in the cup of suffering gives shape to our common life. Mingled here in the chalice are our tears and our fears. Kneaded in the bread are the toil and pain of our labor and our love. This is the leaven of our friendship. In the shelter of each other's care, we have the courage to share our pain. In the inventory of our own wounds, we hear our name.

Here is our common ground where we plant the seeds of our suffering and the seeds of our liberation.

We who have been baptized in water, in fire, and in the Holy Spirit; we who have been consecrated in community and baptized in the blood, are to bring these gifts of wounds and wonder to bear on our world. We are to water the lives of those who are parched by poverty and thirsty for justice with the stream of God's mercy and compassion. Like the fool in the legend, we are to give drink to thirsty souls.

We are to be on fire with the love of our God — raging infernos of hope to those in despair; flames of desire to those who have their dreams dashed; blazing torches of beauty and bounty that light up the dark night of injustice and oppression.

We are to be Spirit-filled communities alive with the Incarnation. The spirituality of the blood lays an awesome responsibility on us. It demands that we have the courage to look honestly at our own wounds, our own pain, our own scars. But it also means we celebrate with one another the small victories of justice and love that break forth on the landscape of our lives like shoots sprouting from dead stumps.

As people who claim the name of the Blood, we are to write that name in the language of our love. We believe that ever since Christ ascended from this blood-stained world of ours, we are called to let

the world see that God is still here and bringing us “near in the blood of Christ.”

The blood invites us to ask of ourselves, “Does my life reveal to others Christ’s reign of justice, peace, truth, and love?” More specifically for us, how is the dream of Gaspar and Maria given flesh in the way “we live and move and have our being?”

Our sacred search is about such revelation. We allow God to reveal a bit more about God’s self to us in the silence of our solitude. We create an atmosphere of anticipation where each of us can reveal to one another a bit more about the incarnation of God’s spirit, Gaspar’s dream, and Maria’s vision in our lives. It is about being in touch with our own wounds which God came to touch, to share, and to redeem. It is about celebrating the wonders of God’s gracious love present in our community. It is about trusting each other enough to share those wounds and wonders with each other. After all, as someone one said, “What is friendship when all is done, but the giving and taking of wounds.” There is grace in this exchange of gifts, this give and take — the grace that is God.

Creating Compassionate Communities

The future of the Church and of our congregations depends on the formations of these compassionate communities of adorers and associates, sisters, priests, brothers, and companions of the Precious Blood.

Being true to the call of renewal, our congregations have a unique responsibility to model for the larger church an inclusive vision of ministry that is nurtured and strengthened by small faith communities comprised of people willing to share their faith journeys. This means paying attention to the trembling hands of the old and quivering voices of the young. It means paying attention to gifts of all — gifts of experience that are discovered in the stories they tell.

In living this spirituality, we seek to integrate our experiences of God by creating an environment where each person can grow in his or her capacity to receive and respond to God’s gift of the spirit.

By their very nature, Precious Blood communities in North America, at least, will be counter-cultural. We are people who live on the edge. I believe the blood calls us not to live up to norms of society but to be willing to live on the cutting edge of society. We

are not called to be people who merely conform; rather, we are walking the trail of transformation. We are people who challenge and are open to being challenged. We are people who are willing to take risks and to initiate change — not just change for the sake of change but for the sake of renewal. As blood brothers and sisters, we are integrated and alive and dedicated to becoming fountains of mercy in a world thirsty for redemption.

Precious Blood spirituality is counter-cultural. How then does it become the motivating force of our lives as it was for Gaspar and Maria? Especially when there are so many contrary forces pushing and pulling at us from all directions; forces which seek to entice us to exit from the path of the Precious Blood. The answer is found in our own experience. Each of us has experienced pain and suffering. That is all we know — our own pain, our own loss, our own sorrow. But that is all we need to know. That is motivation enough to get involved in living the spirituality of the Blood. As Jesus said, “in my wound, in my pain, in my loss, you will be healed.”

This doesn’t mean we have to experience each and every pain our world has to offer to feel compassionate toward others. But it does mean we have to be courageous enough to feel our own pain. Even though the agents of advertizing advise us that “we don’t have time for the pain.” I invite us to take the time. Take the time for the pain for only then will we discover joy.

I am not suggesting that we wallow in our wounds since such an obsession with grief will paralyze us. But rather than placing a sterile bandage over our wound, may we instead get on with our lives by allowing the wound to breathe. By allowing the wound to breathe, I am convinced we will find the motivation to be ministers of healing and hope for others.

Packing For The Pilgrimage

Our pilgrimage is about to begin. Since we all know the risks of traveling without being prepared, what must we take with us as we embark on the path of Precious Blood spirituality?

Take risks. The risk to be dependent and daring; counter-cultural and courageous.

Take trust. The trust that God’s spirit which inspired Maria and Gaspar will continue to guide us.

Don't forget to **take memories**. The pictures of those who have taught us, loved us, challenged us, forgiven us. The photographs of those on whose shoulders we stand. But don't leave out the pictures of the young ones as well. The grandchildren and great grandchildren of our religious family. Those with whom we share the story of our past. Those who will remind us of our future.

Take hope. Put it in a place where it will be easy to find because we're going to need it. There are just too many forces seeking to steal hope. Pull it out often and protect it or else the journey will be too difficult.

When we take hope, we must also **take patience**. She is hope's twin sister. They go together. Hope will fade if patience wears thin. We will lose patience if hope grows cold. They keep each other warm, reminding us that the vision that beckons us on this journey still has its time.

Here's something I've already mentioned but it is easy to leave behind. **Take pain**. Since the journey will be filled with more than enough pain, this is one that we would rather leave home without. But if we do, then the wounds we encounter along the way will have no meaning.

Along with pain, also **take joy**. When the journey gets tough and tenderness stands aloof, take a sip of joy. The cup of blessing. Celebrate the enthusiasm that blazes within; the promise that remains even when close friends leave, visions get blurred, and maps get lost. Take a sip and enjoy the companions who stay and how the road gets wider to enable others — lay women and men, single and married, former members and future friends — to join us on the journey.

Don't leave home without love. **Take love**. This is the strap on the knapsack which enables us to carry the rest of our belongings. Love in the form of fidelity. But a fidelity found in people not institutions; in community not canon law; in compassion not compromise.

Take peace. The peace that springs like a fountain from blood-soaked soil. The peace that is born when justice overcomes oppression. The peace that is precious and potent and poetic and produces true freedom. The peace that is etched in blood on a cross and in the hands of a nail-scarred Lord.

And finally, **take dreams**. The dreams of how this world would look if we practiced reconciliation instead of revenge; fostered forgiveness instead of fear; dared to be inclusive instead of demanding restrictions; built bridges instead of barriers. Yes, take those dreams and press them close to our heart. Allow them to leave an imprint there. Follow them with a passion.

These are the essentials for our journey. They are light and won't wear us down. With these in our suitcases, we will be pilgrims who wander the streets of our world not aimlessly but with a purpose and with passion. We will carry with us memory and meaning; wounds and wonders; courage and compassion. We will take risks and make peace; we will call forth change in a world that yields painfully to change but hope and patience will be our companions. We will be men and women with wisdom who watch and wait and take time to browse the sky. We will be Precious Blood people of prayer who welcome God in our solitude and in the joyful sounds of celebration. We will be children joined in a holy communion who break bread with stranger and kin; who look into the cup of blessing and of sorrow and see the reflection of ourselves; and who stop every now and then to give a drink to souls thirsty for redemption.

The journey begins. Take care.

For Reflection

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

Where are your wounds?

Our wounds have allowed us to **drink** from the cup of suffering. What wounds of your life call you to live Precious Blood spirituality?

How have you experienced Christ's reign of justice, peace, truth, and love? How does your life reflect the reign of God to others? Be specific.

How have you learned the language of the Precious Blood? Name those people who have been your teachers? Remember those experiences which have deepened your understanding of the Precious Blood and its meaning for your life.

What ingredients do you see as integral for the renewal of the church? What gifts do communities named for the blood of Christ bring to this enterprise of renewal?

How counter-cultural are you? Do you consider this a value? What specific changes can you make in your lifestyle that will allow you to be even more challenging to the world in which you live?

Day One

THE SCENE OF THE CRIME

The triumphant entry of Jesus into the holy city of Jerusalem marks the beginning of our journey. The crowd shouts, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of God!" But near the end of our journey, these same people will be shouting something else: "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

The mood of the crowd shifts dramatically from anticipation and adoration to anger and accusation. Yet carried in both cries, "Hosanna!" and "Crucify him!" is the same message: "Save us, we ask!" Our God responds, "Yes, I will." The crucified and resurrected Christ is the way God chose to save the world.

Imagine that bright clear day when the "city was stirred to its depths." (Matthew 21:11) This glorious entry into the events of this eight-day tour of a land of pain and promise stirs us as well. These events will move the deepest emotions within us. As we listen, reflect, pray and move in the spirit of this story, we will discover in our tears and fears, our anguish and anxiety, our frustrations and failures, our disappointments and daring, our betrayals and our belonging, our identity as servants of the blood of Christ.

"Who is this?" a voice from the crowd asks as Jesus rides into town. "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee," comes the answer. Who are we? We are servants of the one who saves us by the blood of his cross.

This is our name, our identity. A few years ago, I attended a Faith and Resistance retreat along with five members of my province. During the retreat, we reflected on the American dream and how it has become a nightmare for so many precisely because we have replaced Gospel values with the values of a culture that so often breed indifference. During one of the breaks of the retreat, a woman who was somewhat familiar with the Society of the Precious

Blood, came up to a couple of us and said, "Why don't you guys get with the times and change your name?"

We asked her what she meant and she said, "Well, you know change that name Precious Blood. It's so gory."

Perhaps the reason why the spirituality of the blood of Christ is so difficult for many to grasp is because our initial response to blood is a gasp — in horror or in fright. People faint at the sight of blood. Blood is seen so often as result of violence. And even though the Red Cross and blood banks advertise to the contrary, most people associate blood with death.

When my classmate and I were professed as members of the community, we used a phrase from Isaiah on our invitation: "When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood!" (1:15). One of our classmates from another community read that line, "with hands full of blood," and said, "Sounds like you guys have committed a crime."

Maybe we had. Or maybe that was our intent though we had not thought it through then. Maybe our profession to religious life was an act of conspiracy to commit a crime. A crime of compassion. As Dan Berrigan said on the first Faith and Resistance retreat I attended, "When death becomes the rule in society, healing is a crime."

Death stalks our world as the blood of thousands soaks the land in gang violence and ethnic cleansing, murder and mayhem of every sort. We shrink away in fear and terror; we fall back and close our eyes to the blood-soaked soil. In the summer of 1989, the world watched in horror at the events in China. The cover of *Newsweek* screamed, "Bloodbath." In May of 1992, the streets of Los Angeles erupted in riots and blood streamed in the gutters. The blood of the martyrs in China, in El Salvador, in South Africa, in Guatemala, in the former Yugoslavia, in Eastern Europe, and our own sisters in Liberia, remind us of the loss of blood, the loss of life caused by war and violence.

Blood Equals Life

As people marked with the sign of Christ's blood, we live in the tension between the forces of life and death. We believe that **blood is life**; that we have been redeemed by the blood of the cross. And yet

the evidence the world has to offer seems contrary to this belief. When we heard statements about "soldiers swimming in their own blood" as war in the Persian Gulf began; when we see the dried blood in the latest homicide in the city stain the sidewalk; when we listen to a friend who has just discovered that he is HIV positive, his blood infected with a deadly virus, our verdict must be that the forces of death have achieved victory. Death has crushed life. Our initial perception is accurate: blood equals death.

So where do we look for witnesses who will testify for life? How do we remain firm in our resolve that blood is precious not cheap; sacred not on sale? How do we live in this ever-tightening vise where violence seeks to squeeze the very breath and blood out of the spirits and bodies of our brothers and sisters?

Remember the story of the little girl who was dying of a rare blood disease? Her eight-year-old brother had recovered from the same disease some time before. The doctor told the boy that "only a transfusion of your blood will save the life of your sister. Are you ready to give her your blood?"

The boy's eyes widened in fear. He hesitated for awhile and then said, "Okay, I'll do it."

An hour after the transfusion was completed, the boy asked the doctor, "When do I die?" It was only then that the doctor understood the fear which had seized the boy. He had thought that in giving his blood he was giving his life for his sister.

Blood implies relationship. When blood is shed, relationship is shattered. But the blood of Christ shed on the cross restores relationship. Even as blood spilled in violence shouts that something has gone terribly awry in our human family, blood given freely and without fear can save another's life. Jesus gave his blood freely on the cross and so transfused the world with the very life of God. His blood reflects God's solidarity with humanity — an eternal blood bond that can never be broken.

Blood Stains

Because we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are stained by the Precious Blood. That word, stain, is important. We know what happens when blood gets on a shirt or skirt or handkerchief. It stains. It is set for life. No high-powered bleach will take it out. Blood stains.

I recall a classmate in theology school who was serving as a deacon at Mass for the first time. He was very nervous. Wearing an alb with very large sleeves, he reached for the book on the altar and his sleeve caught the pitcher of wine. The Precious Blood spilled all over the altar. The deacon's alb was forever marked with the memory of that embarrassing moment. Precious Blood stains.

Recall the last scene in the movie, Romero, where Archbishop Oscar Romero is murdered as he celebrates the Eucharist. As he raises the chalice at the consecration, he is shot. The director chose to film this sequence in slow-motion and in doing so provides an indelible image of Precious Blood spirituality. The chalice drops from the slain archbishop's hands which are raised to the heavens as he falls to the floor. We see the chalice tumble upon the altar as the Precious Blood splashes and spills. The blood of Archbishop Romero mingled with the Precious Blood of Christ stains our conscience. We then hear these words from Archbishop Romero:

I have often been threatened with death. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people. Let my blood be a seed of freedom and the sign that hope will soon be reality. A bishop will die, but the church of God, which is the people, will never perish.

Precious Blood stains. It survives. It is the seed of liberation. Among the questions which gnaw at servants of the blood are these: For whom is our blood such a seed? and Who have we stained with the blood of Christ?

Or are we like Pilate — safe, secure, and satisfied, seeking only to wash the blood of the innocent from our hands?

Remember the story. After interrogating Jesus and finding no fault with him, Pilate thought he had a way out of the dilemma. As was the custom on the occasion of the festival, he offered the people the release of one of the prisoners. They chose Barabbas. Pilate attempted to reason with the crowd, holding out hope that they would choose Jesus instead but they kept shouting all the louder, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" After awhile, he asked for water and washed his hands, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this man."

Pilate could wash his hand until they were raw, but like Lady MacBeth, he could never wash the blood away. Blood stains.

Feel The Pain

The spirituality of the Blood of Christ is a sojourn of sacred proclamation — proclaiming peace through the blood of the cross; of passion — being willing to suffer greatly for a single dream; and of promise — passing on the dream of the reign of God to the next generation. Pilgrims of the Blood feel their own pain for only then will they know the passion of Christ.

Jesus focused his life on a single goal, a single dream: the reign of God. This is our destiny: to awaken the world to the reality of God's salvation. We do this by not giving up or giving in to the violence in the world but by holding fast to the dream of God's reign. And to do this with passion, we must be willing to name and claim our own pain.

Pain and passion are intricately woven together. The play, Equus, by Peter Schaefer reflects this reality. The story concerns a psychiatrist who is treating a young man named Alan who has been sent to a mental institution because he gouged out the eyes of several horses. After working with Alan for several weeks, the psychiatrist delivers a stunning soliloquy to the young man's attorney who brought Alan to the psychiatrist for treatment. The psychiatrist talks about passion and how he had lost his passion for his life, his wife, his work. But how his patient, Alan, still had a passion. It may be misdirected and insane but it is still a passion.

The attorney pleads with the psychiatrist to take away Alan's pain. But the psychiatrist has come to realize that he cannot. Because if he took away Alan's pain, he would also take away his passion. And in doing so, Alan would simply lead a normal life.

To seek to removed pain from one's life also removes one's passion. This is Precious Blood spirituality in its essence. If we are afraid to feel pain we will be afraid to feel passion and so be content to live a normal life.

But pilgrims of the blood of Christ are willing to feel their own pain as a prerequisite for entering another's suffering. In this way we proclaim both the passion and promise of the blood. If we resist this invitation, we will simply be normal, average people who happen to belong to a generic religious community. And if we are aver-

age and generic, then we have no reason to exist as a religious community because we have nothing to offer the world.

No, as pilgrims of the blood, we insist that people feel the pain of this world. And that means we feel our own pain first. Otherwise, we will never experience passion.

Jesus came not to take away our pain but to gift us with passion. His passion. He invites us to drink from the same cup of suffering; to swim in the same bath of pain as he did. To be free enough to feel our pain and courage enough to name our passion. After all, Jesus came not to take away our pain but to gift us with passion. His passion.

Remembering the Way

On a Good Friday a few years ago, our formation community joined about 100 others in a "Way of the Cross" through the streets of downtown Kansas City. The walk provided fertile ground for remembering the death of Jesus and those, like Archbishop Romero, whose deaths are incorporated in the dying and rising of Christ. The walk encouraged me to focus on my own helplessness confronting the face of death; my fear in mending the torn fabric of relationship. One incident is etched in my mind which brought home clearly the limitations of the tomb.

We were walking downtown toward yet another "station of the cross" at the courthouse. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of a young man staggering along beside us. At first glance I thought he was just joining the crowd. But then I saw the blood. A streak of dried blood trickled down from above his eye to the middle of his cheek. He appeared to be drunk as he stumbled into the middle of the street. One of our group haltingly went to his aid. He asked the young man if he needed help. But the young man, with dazed mind and glazed eyes, shrugged off the helping hand and continued the journey near us. At times he stopped in the middle of the street as if to catch his bearings, even as the traffic rushed by on either side. Finally, we crossed over to the other side of the street but continued in the same direction.

When we crossed the street at the traffic light, there he stood: both eyes puffy, his face an inkblot of blood and dirt. As we stopped at the courthouse to pray, a middle-aged man who seemed familiar with the area and evidently was aware of a shelter or clinic nearby

where the young man could receive some medical attention, escorted the youth away.

The irony, of course, is that we were marching in solidarity with the people of El Salvador and Central America; with the homeless in our own city; with the victims of violence and poverty in our land. And here this bruised and bleeding young man appeared with us suddenly to become a living parable of how helpless we are. And how fearful.

This is the tension I feel inside in trying to live out the spirituality of the Precious Blood. I can walk with a group of a hundred or so to show my solidarity with the suffering people of our world — to show my conviction and parade my commitment so that secretaries looking out of office windows or lawyers rushing to court or shoppers hurrying home with the purchases might pause for a moment and ask, "What are they doing?" And maybe remember that it was Good Friday.

But when confronted with a living sign of the very brokenness I seek to heal, I stand helpless and afraid. The practicality of how to help him entered my mind. Where to take him? What to do with him once I breached my silence and betrayed my fear? But these fleeting thoughts were erased by an impotency brushed by the hand of fear.

Jesus was walking the streets of Kansas City on that Good Friday. He was wearing a flannel shirt spotted with blood, torn jeans and worn sneakers. The crown of thorns had ripped a gash in his forehead; the cross of violence made him stagger with fatigue. And I, unlike Simon of Cyrene, went about my business of remembering the passion and death of Jesus by forgetting his life.

The abandonment, helplessness, and weakness Jesus felt in the garden and on the cross was what I embraced on that Good Friday. There is nothing I can do about the death that surrounds me and the death that hovers over my brothers and sisters. There is nothing I can do, except, perhaps, to allow it to change me. To allow it to finally free me from the tomb of fear.

A Journey Of The Heart

Our vocation as people who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," (Revelation 7:14) is to love even among the ruins that so often accumulate around us. To love

in the midst of suffering. On the cross, Jesus stretched out his arms between heaven and earth to touch history with eternity. Our ministry of compassion flows from our identification with this Precious Blood and takes on the cosmic dimensions of redemption and the human implications of solidarity.

In October, 1991, I participated in a retreat with twelve Precious Blood priests and sisters from North America. We went to Guatemala to learn the language of the Precious Blood. We heard it spoken in the soft whispers and anguished shouts of prayerful petition from a people for whom pain is a constant companion. We felt it in the warm embrace of strangers who welcomed us as friends. We saw it in the poverty that plagues the people and in the natural beauty which encompasses this land they call "Eternal Spring." We smelled it in the garbage rotting in the streets and in the sweet aroma of tortillas baking on wood burning stoves. We tasted it in the tears of the terrified ones and drank it in the laughter of the children playing in the mud.

Fr. Barry Fischer conducted the retreat and other Precious Blood priests and sisters reflected with us on how the spirituality of the Blood of Christ comes to life in their ministry in this country which is filled with so much pain and poverty and yet, remarkably, still harbors hope and hospitality.

One story that survives in my memory from this retreat was our visit to the memorial of Fr. Stanley Rother. Santiago de Atitlan where Fr. Rother was assassinated more than a decade ago is a place where the spirituality of the Blood of Christ needs no introduction. My immersion in the blood and suffering of the people of Guatemala became real here and etched in my mind a memory I will never forget.

In the church, a man dressed in rags with twisted and clubbed feet, stood before the altar in fervent prayer. His words could be heard throughout the church. A waxed figure of the dead Christ entombed in the altar behind glass — a common figure in the churches we visited — listened to this man's prayer. He shouted as if to wake Jesus from the dead. But he knew, Christ was not dead. Christ was alive in the suffering of this one and the suffering of his people.

Christ is always present in a land where the paschal mystery is lived every day so it is no surprise that the passion of Christ is the

most predominant image. This is what must bring the people hope. This is what must sustain the people in the midst of their present poverty, oppression, and injustice. Resurrection may still be hidden in God's heart for them but they trust that as surely as dawn follows the night, resurrection will come. It will surely come. And when it does, their lives will again mirror the land of eternal spring.

We sat there in the church and Barry Fischer gave us a short reflection on conflict as a necessary consequence of living the Gospel. In Barry's telling of Fr. Rother's story, a friend of Rother's — a Benedictine priest from a nearby abbey — had a friend in the military who told him the priest was in danger. Rother immediately left the country. He went back to the United States but stayed only a few months. His heart was in Guatemala with the people.

So he went back to Santiago de Atitlan. He went back knowing he was a marked man. He went back knowing full well the cup he was about to drink: the cup of suffering and death.

In the light of Fr. Rother's witness, the question Jesus asks the James and John in Mark 10, "Are you willing to drink from the cup which I must drink?", illuminated the shadows of fear and doubt in my own life. Sitting there in church, I kept asking myself, Would I be willing to drink from this cup? Would I be willing to even take a sip? Fr. Rother drank fully, not leaving a drop. In giving his life to the last drop of blood, the chalice of his love overflows like a fountain of memory in the lives of the people.

The plaque with Fr. Rother's picture hangs on the wall in the back of church. It reads: "There is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." The monument is surrounded by tiny crosses with the names of those from the village who have been kidnapped and executed. In the floor beneath the plaque is buried Stanley Rother's heart. When his body was returned to Oklahoma after he was killed, the people of his parish requested his heart.

This is where Stanley Rother's heart, in life and in death, remains. It is with the people he loved and for whom he gave his life.

The Bath Of Pain

Jesus asks us, "Can you be baptized in the same bath of pain as I?" I have been baptized in water but not yet in blood. A bath of pain frightens me. Give me the warm waters of convenience and comfort not the cold streams of compassion and courage. One can-

not tread water in a bath of pain. One must either sink or swim. But if one learns to swim with the suffering ones who swim beside you, one will find how warm the water becomes. One will discover that this bath of pain is really a river of redemption.

This is the obvious danger, the most frightful dilemma, facing those of us who aspire to live the spirituality of the Blood of Christ. It is very much like standing on the shore of a lake. Its crisp, cool waters beckon, but we hesitate because to jump would be a shock to our system. But the only way to find the liberation of the Precious Blood is to take the risk and take the leap in this bath of pain, this sea of scarred and sacred remains, this river of redemption.

This is the hope that is carried within the womb of our Mother Earth. I saw it flourish in the rich, lush, verdant landscape of Guatemala. But even more, I saw it etched in the eyes of the people who live in harmony with the land. Here the spirituality of the blood speaks with power. This is sacred ground for the land and the people shout "holy." Though death stalks their path, they will not yield to despair. Though family members disappear, they will not abandon the search for justice. Though friends are executed, they will not give in to the temptation to give up. I believe Fr. Dan Berrigan had it right when he said, "In the face of persistent evil, we are not allowed to give up. If I could read the silence of Jesus as he makes his way toward his execution, that is the look he turns on us: We are not allowed to give up."

Jesus invites us to drink from the same cup of suffering that he has; to swim in the same bath of pain as he did. To be free enough to feel our pain and courageous enough to name our passion — just as Stanley Rother did.

If we feel such passion for the blood of Christ, we will not give up or give in. We will live a spirituality that speaks of a deep communion with suffering. A suffering that ends not in death but speaks with the force of an empty tomb. We follow this trail of tears and of blood and discover that it leads to life. A life that is eternal.

Love Among The Ruins

The Precious Blood of Jesus invites and challenges us to love in the midst of suffering. Amid the violence and evil that so often immerses our world in hate and pain, the blood of Christ offers us a gate, an entryway that leads to life. And "since we have confidence

to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us," the author of Hebrews writes, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." (Hebrews 10:19,24)

Jesus is the passover lamb who does not "pass over" but immerses himself in the pools of blood so plentiful today. Jesus invites himself into our pain. We welcome him in our wounds.

Can we see the pain endured by our brothers and sisters and stand with them in hope, taking their pain as our own? Can we see this pain burn away our complacency and inspire us to create a new covenant of love in the blood of Jesus? Can we see in the chalice the reflection of our tears and fears? In this chalice is our redemption. In this chalice we see the reflection of our faith that even in the most desperate, dangerous, and dehumanizing experiences of our lives, there is the reality of redemption. In this chalice, our God is united with us in Jesus who invites us to drink the vintage wine of liberation.

Our God encourages us to bring our experience of pain and suffering, alienation and despair, to the community of faith. To pour our grief, our hurts, our longings into the one cup. And to discover there are not answers, but love; not cures, but compassion; not magic, but a miracle of real presence.

This is the chalice of our communion — with self, with God, with each other, all people and all creation. I am convinced that the only way we can connect the blood of the chalice, the blood of the cross, the blood that is poured out in our world today is to allow God to make the connection for us. To allow God to bridge the gap we so often see between the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the world.

The Passion Of Our Founder

St. Gaspar, the founder of the Congregation of the Precious Blood, certainly made this connection. He saw the Precious Blood of Christ as the animating and energizing force of his life. He was a social activist, an architect of social change and justice in the post-Napoleonic era in Rome.

Pope John XXIII, who shortly before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council went to the tomb of St. Gaspar to pray, once spoke to a Catholic Action group, an organization working for social

justice. He told them that St. Gaspar "can well be numbered among the forerunners of your movement."

Gaspar was born on January 6, 1786, the feast of the Epiphany. Named after the three astrologers, Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar, Gaspar's father was a gambling man who moved from job to job often squandering the little money the family had. At the time of Gaspar's birth, he was working as a cook in the palace of Prince Altieri. Annuziata, Gaspar's mother, was the driving force behind Gaspar's life. A simple woman of profound faith, she probably wore out her rosary beads praying that her husband would come to his senses and stop gambling. And that her son, Gaspar, would become a saint. The image of Annuziata is one evoked by the holy women of Scripture. Like Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Annuziata raised a son who would become a fiery preacher of God's Word.

A sickly child, Gaspar's health throughout his life was never very good. Especially during the years of Napoleon's occupation of Rome when Gaspar was sent into exile. Yet in his physical weakness, Gaspar found strength. In his infirmity, he discovered the healing power of Christ. It was this recognition that seemed to surround all that Gaspar did in his life. A weak and fragile man, he knew he could do nothing on his own. It was the power of God's grace and love that provided his energy source.

Gaspar was a serious student though not a particularly gifted one. Instead, his talents were in other areas. When he was 18, Gaspar exhibited one of his greatest gifts; organizing for action on behalf of the poor. Together with some of his classmates, he ministered to the marginalized by offering religious instruction to peasants who came to Rome to sell their hay; catechetical preparation for orphans and children of the poor; and a night shelter for homeless.

Less than a year after Gaspar was ordained a priest in 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded and suppressed the papal states. In June of 1809, Pope Pius VII was arrested and sent into exile. Gaspar, who was canon at the Roman Basilica of San Marco, was brought before the local authorities to take an oath of allegiance to the emperor. Napoleon claimed he had a right to control all the activities of the priests and religious. Gaspar refused to take the oath.

"I would rather die than take such an oath," he said. "I cannot. I must not. I will not."

Gaspar's conscience would not allow him to compromise his beliefs and so rather than appeasing the authorities, his act of civil disobedience resulted in exile and later imprisonment. It was during these years when his devotion to the blood of Christ deepened. In the solitude of his cell, and in conversations with his spiritual director, Fr. Albertini, Gaspar meditated on the suffering, passion, and death of Christ.

Meanwhile, back in Rome, one of Gaspar's friends, Fr. Bonnani, with whom Gaspar had worked before his exile, was gathering some of the clergy who remained in the city into a community to provide spiritual and apostolic aid to those suffering under Napoleon's repression. Gaspar's vision was to wed the spirituality of the Precious Blood with the concept of a community for apostolic works of mercy. This sacred union gave birth to the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood dedicated to proclaiming "peace by the blood of the cross." (Col. 1:20)

Napoleon was defeated in January, 1814, and Gaspar was free to return to Rome. He had spent four years in exile but these years deepened his devotion to the blood of Christ; his compassion for the suffering of others; and his desire to continue the works of mercy and renewal to which he dedicated the rest of his life.

Signs Of These Times

In retrospect, it is remarkable to consider how similar Gaspar's time was to our own. At one point he wrote regarding the signs of his times, "Alas, what a sad picture we see before our eyes! I weep in God's presence when I see the miserable state of affairs in our times." Some of these signs included the philosophy of Enlightenment which questioned traditional values and doctrines and tended toward individualism; the French Revolution, Napoleon's tyranny and its aftermath; and political upheavals. Gaspar denounced the terrorism that engulfed the papal states and traced its cause to the introduction of compulsory military service during Napoleon's occupation. He decried the "prevalent lust for wealth and personal rivalries" that marked his age.

When Gaspar returned to Rome, chaos and turmoil reigned. But because he had been a part of the depths of life, he was changed

forever. Now his preaching was colored by experience and his words became powerful instruments of healing. His devotion to God's Word was contagious. The fire that burned within his heart sparked a flame of devotion in others as he conducted missions and renewals throughout Rome and the surrounding area.

Gaspar's spirituality of the Blood of Christ spilled out of the sanctuary and into the street where people were dying, homeless and alone. His spirituality overflowed into the hill country to bring back the brigands imprisoned by anger and greed. His spirituality flowed like a stream of mercy to the accused and guilty. His spirituality leapt like a fountain to refresh and the hope in people who had so easily compromised their faith during Napoleon's occupation of Rome. His spirituality soothed the sick and the dying with a gentle reminder that they were not alone.

For Gaspar, this quality of love flowed like a river of reconciliation where others might walk and drink and bathe and be refreshed and redeemed.

An itinerant street preacher, Gaspar's words were rooted in the saving act of Christ on the cross and so he carried a crucifix close to his heart. His words and witness became like wings to lift the burden of sin from those who heard him. He called people to reconciliation; to restore the right relationship with God and others. The most dramatic example of this was his work among the gangs of outlaws that were terrorizing the papal states at the time. Bandits were holding up carriages, robbing and beating travelers. Fear pervaded the countryside. Though the government sent special military units into the hills to capture the terrorists, still the violence continued.

Confronted with this persistent and painful problem, Gaspar said the answer lay not in force and punishment but in love and religious instruction. Armed with the crucifix as his only defense, Gaspar personally sought out the bandits, talked with them, and gradually won their trust and confidence. He converted many and opened the way for a series of missions that helped restore peace and order to the region. Along with this, as he drew upon his own experiences in prison, Gaspar worked for reform in the Roman penal system.

Gaspar preached the message of the crucified Christ. This was a spirituality that found a home in the hearts of a suffering people.

But more than offering sympathy or simple commiseration, it sought to change attitudes and social structures that allowed such suffering to exist. The courage of confrontation is a catalyst for such social change and without it the fullness of compassion can never be achieved.

Seeing The Face Of Christ

The spirituality of the blood of Christ, the spirituality of St. Gaspar, speak with force — the force of the cross — today. It is a spirituality of compassion; a solidarity with the poor and oppressed; a thirst for justice and peace; and a longing for reconciliation that seeks to inspire its students to be reservoirs of hope. To be a disciple of the Precious Blood today is to stand with those with whom Gaspar would stand if he were alive today. It is to stand with those of Matthew 25: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the ill and the imprisoned. This implies that when we stand with those who are on the margin of our society, we are no longer in the center ourselves. We allow those with whom Jesus identifies to pull us out of our cozy and comfortable cocoons into the real world where pain and suffering is ever present.

The world then becomes our living room. And we are the guests of the poor. In the parable of the Last Judgment, God doesn't ask how many times we missed Mass on Sunday. God isn't concerned about the rules we broke or the rubrics we failed to follow. Instead God asks us how compassionate were we? How willing were we to go to the depths of life to see God in others? How wide were our eyes, how open our hands to the presence of God in the world?

Living this spirituality is not to ask, "When did we see you?" but rather to see with eyes ablaze with enthusiasm and energy, hope and hospitality. To see in each and every one the face of Christ.

Like Gaspar, we stand convicted in the blood of the cross. But the question is this: Are we guilty of the crimes of indifference or guilty of the crimes of compassion?

For Reflection

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-25

Name and claim the tensions pulling at your life. What are the forces of death pushing against you? How are you responding?

Reflect on what it means for you to "love among the ruins"? What are some experiences in your life when you are called to such love?

How does the suffering of others move you, change you, affect you, make you afraid? How does your own pain and suffering change you?

What are the signs of these times and how do you respond? What does Gaspar have to teach you about your response?

What does Gaspar's stand in refusing to take the oath of allegiance to Napoleon tell you about the decisions of conscience required of you today?

Name your passion.

Day Two

THE BLOOD OF THE POOR

The Precious Blood of Jesus pulses through the passion narratives. It is Christ's blood that moves us to compassion, to a concern for justice, to hope even in the midst of suffering and death. The spirituality of the blood of Christ speaks of communion. And compassion and communion are the two primary colors that when mixed together give us a third: hope.

With such hope, we seek to fashion an inclusive community that reflects not only passive concern but active witness for all peoples — especially the poor, the abandoned, and those traditionally left out of the circle of community we call church. We do this by living our passion for the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

Our next stop on our journey is a small house in Bethany. This story illustrates how name, Precious Blood, defines our passion, our purpose, and our call to be inclusive. The story involves the encounter between Jesus and the woman who anoints his feet with precious oil shortly before he dies. In John's Gospel, this woman is identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. But in Mark's Gospel, her name is not mentioned and yet Jesus says "wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory."

The power of name. The miracle of memory.

Recall the film, Dances With Wolves, which reflected how much Native Americans have to teach us about life, reverence for creation, respect for values, and love of family. And about the power of one's name. Remember the main character, Lieutenant John Dunbar. When he first sits down and talks with the Sioux holy man, they ask each other their names. The holy man is called, "Kicking Bird." But when the Lieutenant pronounces his name, Kicking Bird thinks he says, "Dumb Bear" instead of Dunbar. As the film prog-

resses, John Dunbar is given a new name by his new family, the Sioux. One day, Kicking Bird comes upon Dunbar playing in a field with a wolf that had wandered near his encampment. This was a friendly wolf who came looking for food. After awhile, like a boy and his dog, the wolf and the soldier trusted each other enough to frolic in the field. When Kicking Bird saw them playing, he named Dunbar, "Dances with Wolves."

How powerful and full of wonder it would be if we called one another by the meaning of our names rather than the name itself. For example, my name is Joseph which means "Increasing Faith." If I take that meaning seriously, I would certainly realize how challenging it is to live up to my name.

Or, perhaps we could call each other by our actions. Like the Native Americans, we name each other by what people see in us and see us do. Then we would have names like:

Good with children;
Cares for her parents;
Forgets not his loved ones;
Teacher of children;
Eyes of great wisdom;
Poet of pain and promise;
Lover of nature;
Companion of the abandoned;
Prophet for community;
Seeker of dreams;
Singer with soul;

We come to know who we are in the name we are given. We cannot take the name for ourselves. The name must be a gift. A gift freely given and freely received. And we spend the rest of our lives living up to our name:

Adorer of the Blood of Christ;
Pilgrim of the Precious Blood;
Beloved of God.

That last title is the first one we are given in Baptism. This is our identity and our call: we are the Beloved of God.

This is why I like Mark's account of the anointing at Bethany. We are not told the woman's name but we remember her because of her action, her care, her compassion. We might call her, "Anoints with Love."

Model of Inclusive Community

Mark's passion story begins here with Jesus being anointed for burial. In fact, Mark's passion is framed by stories of women and their fidelity to Jesus. "Anoints with Love" takes the risk, breaks the jar, and pours the expensive perfume on Jesus amid scornful looks and angry muttering, "What a waste of money!" At the conclusion of Mark's passion, it is the women who go to the tomb to mourn and continue their search for "the way, the truth, and the life."

What is striking about this first scene in Act One of Mark's passion is that Jesus finds himself in a familiar setting: in the house of an outcast, "Simon the leper." (Again, name equals identity. Simon is identified as an outsider.) By the very fact that she is a woman, "Anoints with Love" is also an outcast; or, at the very least, an unwelcome guest at a "men's club meeting." That tension between the outcasts and the inner circle, the outlaws and the insiders is a prevalent theme in Mark's Gospel. Here we see the tension evident. The disciples, seeing "Anoints with Love" pour this expensive perfume on the head of Jesus, become indignant because that luxurious item could have been sold and the money given to the poor. After all, Jesus so identified himself with the poor that the disciples' outrage at this "waste" sounds reasonable.

In practical terms, the disciples are right. But in poetic terms, they miss the point. Jesus is about to die. This ritual of anointing is an important moment of prayerful attention. With the knowledge that he is about to be betrayed and denied by two of his closest friends, this woman breaks through that ever-tightening circle of fear with a gentle gesture of love. What insight, what care, what kindness "Anoints with Love" shows toward Jesus! Her heart, her mind, her soul are focused on Jesus. That is why it is a model of discipleship and a memory of compassion that will never be forgotten. Jesus insists on this as an example of the good news that must be preached. We are to live in the manner of "Anoints with Love." We are to model her memory. We are to pay attention to the outcasts among us. We are to see in them the face of Christ. Living such a model will insure an inclusive vision of community.

Upon reflection, then, we can see how by not naming this woman Mark gives us a poetic parable about loving discipleship. In

her action is her identity. The same can be said for the name John Dunbar receives, "Dances with Wolves." In his name is his identity: lover of nature, caretaker of creation, willing to make friends with those who are supposed to be his enemies, open to new possibilities; not afraid of being alone but longing for intimacy. Loyalty, compassion, reverence, and respect are qualities that capture John Dunbar's new birth with the Sioux. When he is given a new name it captures his baptism into his new religious family.

The story says it takes courage to go beyond the frontier where enemies and friends are neatly divided for purposes of war and forge a new peace. An inner peace that frees him to dance with wolves.

An Open Door

Gary Jarvis, a priest in my province who died in 1988, was a person who found this quality of peace and so nurtured courage in me. His involvement with the Witness for Peace in Nicaragua; his arrests for acts of civil disobedience; his hospitality in offering sanctuary to the victims of violence in Central America gave me and my brothers in community a taste of courage. I once asked Gary how he came to such a commitment and he said simply, "Joe, the blood of the poor stops at my door."

The blood of the poor stops at our door. In that reading from Isaiah I mentioned earlier (Is. 1:15-20), the prophet says that when we spread our hands in prayer our "hands are full of blood." Whose blood?

- the blood of South African blacks yearning for freedom;
- the blood of the homeless sleeping in the streets of our cities;
- the blood of those dying alone with AIDS because of our fear;
- the blood of the migrant worker who labors for low wages and risks his life because of pesticides that poison his system;
- the blood of the children who seek sanctuary in our hearts and in our homes;
- the blood of the young mother who cradles her child as she shuffles slowly through the soup kitchen line;
- the blood of the worker locked out of the factory;
- the blood of the farmer exiled from his land, his life.

Their blood is on our hands. Their blood stains our apathy and colors our indifference. Isaiah commands us to wash their blood

from our hands, not to remove responsibility in a Pilate-like act of cowardice; but to wash away our inactivity in a Christ-like act of courage: "Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Isaiah 1:17)

These are the helpless and the outcasts; the oppressed and injured; the neglected and abandoned; the forgotten and unforgiven. These are the ones to whom we are sent. The blood of the poor leaves a trail to our door. Their blood stops here.

The prophet calls us to conversion, to commitment, to reclaim the covenant won for us in the blood of the cross. As people of the blood, we are to have an open door policy towards all. Our nail-scarred Lord challenges us to rekindle the memory: "Whenever you do this, remember me." We who are redeemed through the blood of Christ, are charged with the responsibility to re-member; to reconcile those members of the Body of Christ who have been forgotten. As Paul writes: "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:12-13) By embracing this responsibility to keep the doors of our homes and hearts open, we invite those left out by society or church to draw near to us. In this spirit of hospitality, we forge a new genesis; a new creation; a new beginning of hope for our time.

When Blood Boils

Because there are so many on the outside looking in, welcoming the outcast and stranger into our midst will affect our world view, it will engage our emotions. If our ministry means more than simply sharing the misery of the abandoned and alienated, we will become angry.

We have heard the expression, "He made my blood boil!" This is a common description of anger and rage. Boiling blood. Time to turn down the heat. What happens when blood is allowed to boil without intervention? Does it turn to steam, like water? Or does it solidify and harden like plastic?

Blood is not heat resistant. Boiling blood moves one to action. Outrage at injustice must be released in actions of confrontation and compassion. Or else, boiling blood evaporates into thin air. Or hardens beyond the point of ever being broken.

Either way, passion dies.

In the anguish and aftermath of the war in the Persian Gulf, I was invited to give a number of talks on the bishops' peace pastoral and how Catholic Social Teaching and the principles of the just war theory could be applied to the war in the gulf. At one of these sessions, after I had presented a portrait of Jesus the peacemaker who taught us how to live and how to die but not how to kill, a woman raised her hand and asked, "If you say that Jesus resisted violence at every turn and met violence with nonviolence, how then do you explain the cleansing of the temple?"

I told her that my understanding of what Jesus did in the temple was a good example of righteous anger. The Precious Blood of Jesus boiled at seeing how the poor were exploited. Jesus was outraged because he was passionate. He threw things, turned over tables, screamed and yelled, "Get them out of here!" This was no milktoast but the messiah who was deeply and passionately in love with people. He had so much love for the poor, that he was willing to turn the temple upside down to prove it.

Jesus was willing to dance with danger and death to open the eyes of others to the redeeming love of the cross.

As people named for the blood of Christ, our hearts have only one focus: the cross of Christ. As Paul writes to the community at Corinth, this is what we preach and this is what we live: Christ crucified! It may seem folly to some; ridiculous to others; a stumbling block or an absurdity. But what do we see when we look upon the cross? If the temples of our hearts are cleansed of all distractions, we see in the folly of the cross our forgiveness. And standing in the shadow of God's mercy, how can we withhold forgiveness to another?

The cross, this ridiculous symbol, is our redemption. This instrument of execution is our entrance to eternity, the door to our dreams.

The cross, this absurdity, is the absolution of our sins.

The blood of the cross gives us our identity. Names us. Claims us: "We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."

If we are faithful to that message, at times we will feel our blood boil. And when that happens, as I hope it does when we see injustice and oppression, racism and sexism and all the other "isms" that have seeped into our collective systems, we will want to turn over a few tables, turn a few heads, shout and scream a little to get the attention of others — and our own attention as well — who would rather glide through life without ever sensing the need to be changed.

Precious Blood needs to boil every now and then.

When our blood boils instead of just simmers, compassion takes the place of the complacency that has settled in our souls.

When our blood boils instead of just simmers, we forget caution and have the courage to cling to the cross.

When our blood boils instead of just simmers, we live up to our name.

When Blood Runs Cold

There is another expression about blood that we use or hear from time to time: "She made my blood run cold." Fear is the cause of this blood reaction. And fear, if it persists, chills the system and results in a stalled heart.

Ice cold blood is not very useful for the enterprise of justice. True, blood is stored for awhile in cold temperatures but must be warmed before a transfusion. It must be body temperature or else the person receiving the blood will go into shock.

When our veins run cold because of fear, our precious blood will lose its value. Inactivity will result. Paralysis will replace passion. Death will come quickly.

We are aware that in the wake of the HIV virus, there has been a great fear about giving or receiving blood. A couple of years ago, The Kansas City Star ran a story about the blood supply in the metropolitan area. "Blood called safer than ever" was the headline of the article which documented the fact that "each year about 26,000 people in the Kansas City area are so sick or injured that they need a blood transfusion." But this "gift of life" comes with a risk.

"Since the emergence of AIDS more than a decade ago," the article stated, "the safe, hospital-clean image of blood flowing into a vein to restore health has been shattered."

Fear is the most harmful disease that poisons our precious blood. In a society as sick as ours; in a culture so preoccupied with death, a transfusion of precious blood, risky and dangerous as it may be, is the only remedy.

Some folks are so fearful about the possibility of receiving blood from a stranger, that they set aside some of their own blood in case they need surgery. Before elective surgery, for example, a patient will donate a few pints of his or her own blood for use later. The main reason for doing this, a doctor explained, is that "clearly, you are getting your own blood, so you don't have to worry about diseases."

From a medical viewpoint, this practice of storing one's own blood is safe. But from the standpoint of spirituality, it is extremely dangerous. Because of fear, we turn only to ourselves and fail to reach out to others — or allow others to reach out to us.

Blood that is not used by the patient who stores his or her own blood is thrown away. How precious can blood be if we can so easily waste it?

Blood has a shelf life of 35 days. How long has our blood been on the shelf because of fear?

As Mark's story of the anointing at Bethany reminds us, the woman we call, "Anoints with Love" lived up to her name by focusing her attention and energy on the one she loved who was about to die. As we look out upon our world and our relationships; upon those who are dying and those who are about to die, can we be motivated by the same love? Can we anoint their bodies with care; soothe their souls with compassion; calm their fears with the courage of our presence? When we do, our blood will not run cold but will pulse with power.

Blood is too precious to keep to ourselves; too precious to waste; too precious to store on the shelf.

Followers Of Christ

To be a follower of Christ today means to be poor. Jesus identified himself with the outcast. Quoting his favorite prophet, Isaiah, Jesus' mission statement becomes our mission: "The Spirit of the

Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. (God) has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19) We are to announce to all those who fear they have fallen out of favor with the government, or with the church, or with the society, to announce to them the good news that they are God's favorites.

A few years ago, I listened as a missionary from Nicaragua told a group of us of the murder of some of his parishioners by the contra forces using guns and ammunition "Made in the U.S.A." He echoed a familiar refrain but one that has particular relevance for anyone seeking the way of the blood. "Hearing the Gospel has a lot to do with the feet," he said. "It depends on where you stand. If you stand in the mud with the poor or if you stand on the plush carpets with the rich."

The oppressed, the marginalized, the outcasts have pulled us, sometimes kicking and screaming, from the plush carpets and spacious halls to stand with them in the mud and blood that soaks their feet. We make a difference in bringing the light of the Gospel and the leaven of God's reign upon our world when we stand with the poor. When we live in solidarity with those who are oppressed. When we huddle with the masses that endure injustice.

And when we gather around the table of Eucharist in the company of our friends, then we see the blood that is on our hands. We raise our voices to the God of life. As we do, we bring with us the blood of all who yearn to be free from oppression, injustice and economic violence. We bring them all — the plea of the orphan, the cry of the widow, the lament of the lost — we bring them all to the table of Jesus and find we are not alone.

As we lay them there, along with our lives, we see that the blood stops here. The precious blood of the poor stops here at our altar and mingles with the Precious Blood of Christ to break down the barriers that keep us apart.

"Precious Blood" is the name we claim. Other titles, "Followers of Christ" and "Beloved of God" also reflect our identity and commitment. Our challenge is to live these names by being people who transform the fear of our world with the courage of the cross.

People whose loving service offers a transfusion of life in a world on the edge of death.

For Reflection

Scripture:

Isaiah 1: 15-20

Ephesians 2: 12-13

Luke 4: 18-19

Mark 14: 3-9

Who are the neglected and abandoned in your life? Whose blood is on your hands?

If others gave you a name that captures who you are and what you do, what would they name you?

Give names to some of your closest friends which describe what they mean to you.

Reflect on how righteous anger is a necessary ingredient in developing a compassionate heart.

What makes your blood "run cold"? Identify your fears.

Day Three

THE MEMORY OF GOD

There will be few stops along the way that equal the pain of this one. At the outset, we are in a good and happy mood, surrounded by people with whom we have shared life. For three years, we have been gradually unravelling the mystery of this man from Nazareth who is able to heal people with the touch of his hands and live with an eloquence deeper and richer even than his words. Tonight, we are reclining with him and some of our friends, sharing a meal and celebrating a ritual of remembrance. The stories of our ancient past are being told. The events of the last three years are remembered as well. It is a serious ritual but every now and then — as when one recalls the story of the enormous catch of fish that almost pulled two boats under water — laughter erupts.

But then the mood turns very serious as the one who is the focus of our attention and the stillpoint of our love grows "deeply troubled." (John 13:21) And when all is said and done, the pain of this moment will seem unbearable.

On the Night He Was Betrayed

To put the pain in some kind of perspective, here is a modern story that captures the mood of this devastating moment in our journey.

Maria is in her late 70s. She lives with her invalid husband, Joe. A devout Catholic, Maria went to Mass every day, spending at least fifteen minutes before Mass kneeling in front of the statue of the Blessed Mother. But since she fell and broke her hip five years ago, she doesn't venture outside very much. Maria still spends many hours praying the rosary beside the statue of Mary her children gave to her for Mother's Day many years before. A single silk rose stands guard beside the statue. Unlike Maria's memory, the silk rose never fades.

Every First Friday one of the parish priests brings Maria and Joe communion. Maria lives from one First Friday to the next, preparing the candles, the white linen table cloth, and the small bottle of holy water on the Thursday before the priest is due to arrive. Though he only spends a few minutes with them it is enough for Maria. Every now and then, when her mind wanders while she's praying the rosary, Maria thinks how often she took Holy Communion for granted when she was receiving the Eucharist daily. Now that she receives Eucharist only once a month, it means so much more to her. Still, she wished there was a way for her to receive communion more often.

One particular Friday, the priest asked Maria and Joe if they would like to receive communion every Sunday. Maria's eyes beamed. "Of Course, of course!" But Joe remained silent. He rarely spoke. When the car accident crushed his body ten years before, it also crushed his spirit.

"Maria, I must tell you that the parishioners will be bringing you communion," the priest said. "We have many Eucharistic ministers in the parish who have volunteered to bring communion to our shut-ins after the Masses on Sunday morning."

For a moment, the joy disappeared from Maria's eyes as she remembered how she used to switch lines during communion to make sure she was in the one where the priest was distributing. She never understood many of the changes in the church, especially that one. But the thought of receiving communion every Sunday was so strong that it loosened the grip her old ideas held on her mind. "Oh, Father, that's okay," she said. "It's still Jesus no matter who brings Him."

George and Juanita always receive communion side-by-side ever since they made a Marriage Encounter a few years ago. They were excited when the pastor asked them to bring the Eucharist to the sick of the parish on Sunday. Many years before, George was in business with Joe. They were the best of friends and had built a very successful hardware store. But in the many years of their friendship, George was never aware of Joe's penchant for gambling. It had become such an obsession that Joe no longer was wagering nickels and dimes but large amounts of money and merchandise. Maria had been aware of Joe's love for the poker table and

had taken the problem to the Blessed Mother every morning in her prayer.

One morning, as George and Joe were in the store, George noticed how silent and depressed his friend seemed. When he tried to ask Joe what was wrong, he turned away. But later in the day, George found out what had happened. In a big-stakes game the night before, Joe had put the store on the table — and lost. Even though George fought for his share of the business, the people Joe lost to were not the kind you take to court. When they won something and wanted it badly enough, they took it. No questions asked. No answers given.

The loss of the store was tragic enough, but George was able to find another job. What he never regained was his friendship with Joe. He could never let go of the feeling of being betrayed by his closest friend. He was never able to forgive Joe. Even when Joe was paralyzed in the car accident, George refused to show any sympathy. "He deserves it," Juanita heard George mutter under his breath.

On the first Sunday that the Eucharistic ministers were to bring communion to the shut-ins, George looked at the schedule. His heart dropped. Maria and Joe were the first names on the list.

"I can't do it," George told his wife. "I won't do it. I'll just call Father and tell him to get someone else."

Juanita tried to calm him down and convinced him to go along with her. He could sit in the car while she visited Maria and Joe.

That morning at Mass, the priest spoke about the new ministry that was beginning in the parish and the commissioning of George and Juanita that would take place after communion. George kept his head bowed during the entire homily.

Then, as he knelt during the Eucharistic Prayer, he heard words he had heard a thousand times before, but heard them really for the first time: "On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and gave You thanks and praise. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take this all of you and eat it, this is my body which will be given up for you.'"

George started to cry. "On the night he was betrayed" rekindled the memory. Juanita looked at him and wondered what was wrong. She would ask him after Mass for just then she heard the words, "Do this in memory of me."

Juanita stopped the car in front of Maria and Joe's house. They had been there so often in the past but this was the first time in ten years. For a moment, George stared through the walls and saw their children opening Christmas gifts with Joe and Maria's children on Christmas Eve. When Juanita touched his arm, it startled him. "I'll just be a minute," she said.

"No wait," George reached out and held her hand. "I'm going with you."

Maria answered the door. Her look of surprise was buried in Juanita's shoulder as they embraced. George followed a couple of steps behind as Maria led them into the living room. The candles were glowing on the table next to the sofa where Joe was sitting, his eyes staring straight ahead.

"Please, sit down," Maria said.

"Oh, Maria," George's voice choked back the years of pain. "I'm sorry. I'm so very sorry." Then he went over to Joe and sat beside him on the sofa. He put his hand on Joe's shoulder and said in a whisper, "Hello, old friend, it's been a long time."

And they celebrated Eucharist.

Bearing The Unhearable

Let's be absolutely clear about this: there is nothing positive about the experience of being betrayed. When confronted with the betrayal of Judas, the feeling of being assaulted and violated pushes Jesus to say, "Hurry up! Get it over with!"

But the important lesson comes in our response. Betrayed by Judas and predicting Peter's denial, Jesus continues to love. He shows us that love is more powerful than betrayal. In John's Gospel, Jesus defines the meaning of love in the midst of betrayal:

I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you are my disciples: Your love for one another. (John 13: 34-35)

When a close friend has betrayed a confidence and told others something you wanted no one else to know, can we still love?

When the community we joined has changed so radically that we don't even know it anymore; or changed so slowly that we are

impatient with the pace; either way, feeling betrayed, can we still love?

When someone we've known for a long time suddenly refuses to speak to us, can we still love?

We all know how easy it is to harden our hearts when we've been hurt. But fidelity to our identity as pilgrims of the blood means we are willing to love even when we have been betrayed. It means we have learned the most difficult lesson life has to teach us: healing can only flow from a heart that has been broken open.

This is how people will know we are people of the Precious Blood: when they see us, betrayed and broken, with bruised egos and hurt feelings, still capable of loving those who hurt us. Still willing to go the extra mile for those who have betrayed us. Still willing to love even when all we seem to be doing is losing.

Do we love like this? Perhaps that's not the appropriate question since few of us know very much about this radical kind of love. The more pointed question is, are we willing to learn?

Our deepest pain comes out of our most significant relationships. When a person with whom we have shared our very self, the deepest longings of our heart, betrays us; when a person with whom we have entrusted that which is most fragile and vulnerable in us breaks the bond of trust we have established over the years, we are devastated. Shattered, we wonder if we will ever feel whole or holy again. Will we ever be able to trust another human being again? Will we ever be able to love like that again? Will we ever be the same again?

If we have experienced betrayal at the hands of a close friend, we know the pain is almost unbearable. Almost. Because as with any other experience we encounter in our lives, we know we do not bear it alone.

Our companion in this dark alley of anguish is Jesus. Jesus was "deeply troubled" as he reclined at the table with his closest friends. He had just washed their feet in a symbolic act of service and explained to them the importance of what he did. Jesus has just shared a very intimate moment with his disciples. It is in this inner circle of intimacy that the seeds of betrayal are planted.

Can we see the puzzled look on the disciples' faces when Jesus announces that one of them is about to betray him? Who would do such a thing? Jesus has changed their lives. He has given them new

meaning and new hope. He has taught them about love and forgiveness and faith and prayer and even though they were still novices, they were ready to profess their belief. They had left everything to follow him. Who would throw all they had been through away — all those moments when miracles made them realize this was no ordinary rabbi but at the very least an extraordinary prophet. They had seen blind eyes be opened and withered hands stretched and crippled legs dance. How could one of them betray this man who showed them and everyone he met such remarkable love?

What a terrifying and tender moment when the youngest asks Jesus to identify the scoundrel. The beloved disciple leans against the chest of Jesus and whispers the fearful question of identity. Which one of us will turn you in? Which one of us will set you up? Which on one of us will betray you?

We all know the identity of the betrayer now. But the disciples were still in the dark. Remember, the text says, "It was night." Darkness still pervaded their minds and hearts. And for one, the darkness was eternal.

A tiny crust of bread, the bread of friendship, was the clue that uncovered the identity of the betrayer and captured the cosmic dimensions of disaster.

Paintings of that Last Supper scene often show John sitting next to Jesus but Judas at the far end of the table. Can we imagine, though, that Judas was sitting on the other side of Jesus so that he did not have to reach across the table to offer Judas the morsel? After all, Judas was the one entrusted with paying the bills. He would be the one to tip the waiter. Judas was the one whom Jesus trusted enough to take care of the group's finances. And we heard evidence how fiscally responsible Judas was when he argued that the expensive perfume used by "Anoints with Love" could have been sold and used for social outreach to the poor.

Betrayal does indeed take on cosmic proportions. When we have been betrayed by one whom we love and trust, it seems the whole world comes crashing in upon us. Betrayal shatters the established order of our lives and chaos returns to the abyss of our hearts. We are unable to think straight as all our thoughts whirl around endlessly trying to find a safe place to land in the deep darkness of our souls.

Betrayal inevitably leads to a long, dark night of the soul.

When Judas is unmasked as the one who would betray him, the Gospel says he went out into the darkness. But Jesus stayed inside in the light and speaks of glory.

In the middle of the night, at the darkest hour, Jesus talks about glory. Though his heart is deeply troubled by what has just taken place, there is tenderness in his voice as he tells the disciples that it won't be long now. But, he says, "Where I am going, you cannot come."

No, we can't go where Jesus is going. Not yet. For we have not as yet learned how to love as he loves. We have not yet learned how to forgive without condition as he forgives. We have not yet learned how to change the darkness of betrayal into the light of glory. As Jesus tells Peter, "Later on you shall come after me." But not now. Not yet, There is more we have to learn. And we will have to learn the hard way.

Our faith in Jesus may make our words bold. We may say, like Peter, "Lord, I want to follow you now! I will lay down my life for you." But when the inevitable push comes, we will fall back to the old ways of living, the old ways of holding on to our hurt.

Jesus knows better. He knows that no matter how hard we try, our human nature still strangles our loving response. Still, he gives us hope that one day we will be able to follow him. "Later one," he says. It is the promise that one day we will know how to love like Jesus.

The Path To Glory

This path to glory on which we embarked at our baptism is not without its dangerous curves and terrifying turns. This path, though paved with good intentions, is not without its potholes. And perhaps the most difficult stretch of road of all is when we come to the boulders of betrayal that are placed in our way. They take a toll. They demand a detour. They invite us to exit and find an alternative route.

But here in this Last Supper scene, Jesus blazes a new trail. The new map he provides offers no exit. Pay the price, he says. And

the price is this: to be grateful for the suffering caused by the betrayal. A steep toll indeed.

This takes a remarkable surrender of faith. But remember, it would not have hurt so much if we had not loved so much. If we can be grateful for the ability to have loved like that, we will see the glory that Jesus is talking about. We will see the first streaks of dawn over the dark horizon. We will sense order coming back into the chaos. We will find new meaning emerging from the emptiness.

When we come to that moment of forgiveness, and even more awesome, the moment of gratitude, we will discover a new way to love.

This is radical grace. It is the grace that George received at that Mass when he heard the words, "On the night he was betrayed," and remembered that Jesus gave his very self, his body and his blood, to his friends on the same evening he was betrayed.

It is the same grace I read about in a newspaper story some years ago about a married couple whose only son was murdered by a young man who was about the same age as their son. This young man was convicted and sent to prison. The couple sat through the trial and saw that justice was done. They did not call for the young man's death in payment for their own son's life. They realized that the old law of "an eye for an eye," a death for a death, would do nothing to solve the vicious cycle of violence. Instead, they began visiting the young man in prison. Over time, they began the arduous process of forgiving him for taking their son's life.

This couple's forgiveness disarmed the young man. They continued to see him, visit with him, and pray with him. He became a model prisoner and became eligible for parole. And you know what this couple did when this young man was paroled from prison? They invited him to live with them in their home!

I don't know what else to call this kind of forgiveness than grace. Radical grace. The kind and quality of grace that can come only from God. A grace that is freely offered but must be received before it can take effect. And to receive it, we must believe it is possible. That it really is possible to love in the manner of Jesus. This Jesus who from the cross echoed the words that span the centuries and fall on the hearts of those who believe: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

At every Eucharist we celebrate the mercy of God that leads to glory. Just as Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, broke bread and poured wine in the company of his closest followers — one of whom betrayed him; another who denied he even knew him; and the rest who fled in fear — we are challenged to live a quality of love that leads to forgiveness. Or else we would have forgotten the words Jesus spoke that night: "When you do this, remember me."

After ten years of holding on to the hurt caused by Joe's betrayal, George finally was open to the grace that freed him to forgive. The grace had always been there, but until he heard those words at the Eucharist, he had put limits on his love. Finally, the memory of what Jesus did gave him the freedom to embrace his old friend.

They celebrated a "holy re-union" and found a measure of glory.

Extravagant Forgiveness

Pilgrims remember where they have been but never forget their destination. When Jesus asks God to forgive those who were killing him, we hear the extravagant nature of God's forgiveness. Remembering the mercy God has shown to us who even today pound nails into the body of Christ will challenge us to extend mercy in our relationships with others. We are to have a long memory when it comes to God's forgiveness of our sins but a short memory when it comes to the ways in which we have been hurt by others. Often though, once we are healed amnesia settles in. We don't remember mercy. Why else would we cling to old wounds, old hurts, old angers? And the tighter we cling, the more we squeeze out mercy.

From the pulpit of the cross, Jesus gave a homily on forgiveness with very few words: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34) Tracing these words in the actions of our own lives, we do not nurture anger toward those who persecute us but extend compassion. We forgive our brothers and sisters from our heart and allow the hurt we have harbored too long to flee.

The model of such mercy is found in the words, "Do this in memory of me." The challenge is to remember and so become the living memory of God's mercy and compassion. A memory that breathes love even in the suffocating and stagnant air of betrayal.

For Reflection**Scripture: John 13: 21-38**

Bless someone who has betrayed you. Hold them in prayer.

Our spirituality shouts of reconciliation. Think of those with whom you are broken? What would it take for you to be reconciled with them?

How have we, keepers of God's Word, God's gifts, God's talents, betrayed God?

How has God's grace been visible in your life? Remember a time when you were forgiving. A time when you experienced the forgiveness of another.

Today, pray for someone who has hurt you.

*Day Four***AN EXPLOSION OF PRAYER**

The wound inflicted by betrayal is fresh in our minds as we begin another day in our pilgrimage of pain and promise. Again today we are reminded of how hideous the experience of being betrayed truly is. For thirty pieces of silver, Judas sells out his friend. For a few silver coins stained with innocent blood, a dream is aborted. At least for today.

This stop along the way reminds us that there are people in pain today who cannot be cured by powerful prescriptions or a sympathetic smile. There are people in pain today whose wounds are so deep, so vicious, no antiseptic or bandage will help. There are people in pain today, in hospitals and prisons, living on the streets and in sanitariums, around the world and around the corner, who are so desperate, so lonely, so hungry, so hopeless, so ashamed, they have forgotten the meaning of joy.

For these people, life has no meaning.

For these people, death has no fear.

For these people, there are no answers.

The passion and death of our God is our invitation into suffering with and for others.

In a world as wounded as ours, this is the only answer.

In a world as weary as ours, this is the only word that will rouse hope in us: Jesus. That name becomes our prayer for in the pain and agony, misfortune and mayhem, impatience and ineptitude, disobedience and disgrace of our lives, God is there whispering a word that will rouse us. A word that will heal us. A word that will transform us.

The suffering servant, Jesus, enters so completely into our human condition, our pain and panic, our woundedness and weariness, that we find not only sympathy but a savior. Not only empathy but eternal compassion.

For pilgrims of the way, the focus is always on the compassion of God. We see the suffering Son of God but also see through the suffering to the love that abides and never fades.

Jesus knew that God's love, infinite and personal, does not come without pain. So Jesus took on our human condition as its most basic and unberable state: becoming a slave. Our slave. He took our sins upon himself; he took our wounds inside his heart; he took our stripes upon his back. And in return he gave us back our future.

By his wounds, we are healed.

By accepting death, death on a cross, Jesus accepts our death and plants the seeds of life.

The blood of the cross empowers us to love without limits. With our eyes focused on that cross, we learn how liberating love can be.

This God of ours sees our suffering and weeps.

This God of ours sees our fears and whispers, "Do not be afraid."

This God of ours sends the Son to bind our wounds and walk with us on the path of our pain.

In our prayer, we open ourselves to the presence of our crucified God who creates in us the space to embrace the cross and believe in a God who fashions our freedom on forgiveness. This quality of prayer was brought home to me at that small chapel near El Salto in Guatemala. There I discovered how the prayer of God's faithful ones has the power to level mountains of fear and lift the lowly to high places.

In Harmony With Creation

In Tukurú, three hours north of Guatemala City, Precious Blood Fathers Gerardo Lemus and Marco Tulio and a pastoral team of seven ministers in this mountainous region where beauty beckons one to believe; where the Q'eqchi culture calls forth a harmony with the land; and where poverty punctuates the lives of the people.

Fr. Lemus told us that there are 46 villages served by the parish with more than 12,000 Catholics. Once a month, 80 catechists who serve the people in the villages come to Tukurú to meet with one another and the parish team for formation and reflection. The catechists are chosen from the community. The priests travel to each of these villages at least once a month to celebrate Eucharist.

There are 27 fincas (coffee plantations) in the area where workers earn about \$1.00 a day. "Sometimes the fincas are chained shut to keep the priests out," Fr. Lemus said. "If a landowner says you cannot celebrate Mass, you can't."

On our first morning in Tukurú, seminarian Darío Caal gave us input on the Q'eqchi culture. The Mayan culture, of which Q'eqchi is a part, is centered in the universe. "We see ourselves related to the universe," Darío said. "Unlike the Western world view where 'man' is the center of the whole universe and which leads to domination of other cultures, the Mayan world view is that we are part of the universe so we do not seek to dominate."

The Q'eqchi have a deep reverence for all of creation. "Earth takes on a sacredness," Darío said. "Mother Earth is blood of our blood. God has a way of ordering the universe in a gentle way."

This relationship that exists among all creatures and all of creation is expressed through rituals which "are centered in harmony." There is not a word in the Q'eqchi-Mayan culture for "eternal life" since "life/death is a circle. There is an on-going idea of eternity," according to Darío.

After Darío's talk, we left for the mountain village of El Salto to celebrate Mass. Loaded in the back of a cattle truck, we set out on a narrow, winding road up the mountain. The steep slopes showed off their splendid green wardrobe in the spring sun. Little huts, tucked away in a hill or camouflaged by the scenery, seemed to await us around every turn. The people we passed smiled broadly and beautifully.

The trip took about an hour. When we arrived, the people were waiting in front of the small white church set on a plateau overlooking the scenic view which included the waterfall which gave this place its name ("El Salto" means "jump"). As Mass began, we crowded into the tiny church. Incense filled the air. As Darío had pointed out, incense and candles are sacred symbols to the Q'eqchi. The women were dressed in festive garb — brightly colored blouses and skirts made from a variety of fabrics. The elders of the village led the procession. Dogs roamed freely in the church.

Celebrating Eucharist in this sort of setting was striking. Here were people who came down dirt paths worn by the feet of their ancestors to this sacred spot on a plateau. They came to pray and to celebrate. When the time came in the liturgy for the "prayers of the

faithful," there was a spontaneous explosion of prayer. Unlike the North American ritual where a lector reads some pre-planned petitions, here the people began to speak in a low, hushed whisper. Slowly, the whisper grew louder until the entire church was buzzing with prayers. Then, without a cue from anyone, the sound grew softer until silence filled the church. These were indeed "prayers of the faithful" that filled our hearts, minds, and imaginations. How could they not reach the ear of God?

After Mass, we went to take a closer look at the waterfall that ruptured the lush landscape. We walked a trail and found a pool, blue and clear, formed by the rushing waters. Here we sat and rested awhile. We sat in silence for a long time and listened to the sound of the roaring waters. The beauty of this spot and the sound were stunning. This was a garden of peace; a place where eternity seemed to touch time. A number of children from the village joined us. Some of the boys swam as we prayed. There was no hurry, no rush. Peace was found in the sound of water crashing against rocks, the smiles of children swimming, and the colors of the trees and bushes that guarded this sacred garden.

One of the seminarians cleared a path for us up the mountain and we continued our journey toward the waterfall. When we finally reached the place just below the falls, I had a sense of what baptism means: the power — raw and real — of water rushing down the side of a mountain and making everything it touched green and new. We were showered by the waters crashing on the rocks below. We were drenched by water made holy in the stream of life. With the sun hitting the mist, a rainbow design reminded us of hope's rebirth.

The rushing waters of redemption at El Salto reminded us of life in the midst of death. There is so much poverty and pain, so much suffering and injustice in Guatemala, but this holy place seemed to mirror the hope we discovered in the hearts and lives and eyes of the people who welcomed us. Accustomed to terror and violence, still they affirmed life.

Prayer: The Music of God

The people we met in Guatemala have met death face to face and still feel the stirring of life within them. This would not be possible without absolute trust in the fidelity of God. On our journey through this terrain of tragedy, our prayer becomes pivotal.

On our way this day, we pray the words of Psalm 69. Notice how it begins:

For your sake I bear insult, and shame covers my face.
I have become an outcast to my brothers and sisters,
a stranger to my mother's children. (vv. 8-9)

The sense of estrangement is blatantly honest and so is the reason for it. The one who prays this psalm "bears insult" for God's sake. The one who prays this psalm experiences separation from loved ones because of her faith. The one who prays this psalm accepts despair and death "because zeal for God's house consumes me." (v. 10) Her passion for God has led to this moment of pain.

Foreshadowing the experience of Christ on the cross, the psalmist prays:

Insult has broken my heart, and I am weak,
I looked for sympathy, but there was none;
for comforters, and I found none.
Rather they put gall in my food,
and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink

(vv. 21-22)

Abandoned. Forsaken. Alone. Loneliness leaves a bitter taste in the servant's mouth. One would assume at this point that this is a eulogy for the vanquished victim. But listen to the prayer:

I will praise the name of God in song,
and I will glorify God with thanksgiving:
'See, you lowly ones, and be glad;
you who seek God, may your hearts be merry!
For God hears the poor,
and God's own who are in the bonds God spurns not.'

(vv. 31,33-34)

New life emerges from a broken heart as the servant learns to dance to the music of God's love. New dreams get a chance as the servant awakens to the presence of God even in the pain. New hope is born as the servant discovers life in death.

The prayer of the psalmist teaches us how to dance and to dream and to live again. When we learn how to dance, to dream, to live, we learn how to pray. In prayer, we discover our identity as

pilgrims of the blood who are willing to suffer for God's sake. In prayer, we find out who we are in the heart of God.

This attitude of abiding trust in God was evident the afternoon we arrived in Tukurú. We heard the sound of marimbas coming from the parish hall. Three men were playing a delightful song to welcome us. Their musical gesture left not only a memory but a metaphor. There is a gentle rhythm of life that makes the music played in the lives of the Gautemalan people. Not even the sound of gunfire or the screams of the tortured can drown out that music. This melody of hope sings in their smiles and is echoed in their eyes. I've seen it; I've heard it; I believe it. I hear the music they are trying to teach me and I know it is the music of God.

Prayer Amid Amazing Disgrace

Dancing and prayer have something in common: if one is too self-conscious, one cannot dance and one cannot pray. It is not that we do not know how to pray; often times, our trouble with prayer is that we are too self-conscious. When we are self-conscious we can't dance and we can't pray.

Do we imagine that Jesus was self-conscious when he prayed from the cross? Though he was naked, he was conscious only of God and those who huddled close to his feet.

Do we think the servant was self-conscious when he prayed;

God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame. (Isaiah 50:7)

No, when we are truly at prayer, we are not self-conscious but aware only of God's presence in our pain, our shame, our frustration, our fear.

Prayer leads us out of ourselves and into God. But it takes practice. We cannot expect to walk this pilgrim's path of the Precious Blood without having prepared for the trip by completing some spiritual exercises. For example, if we are afraid to pray because we might get distracted and be unable to concentrate, we will never pray. We only learn to pray by praying. The process is like the famous novelist who was invited to speak to a class of aspiring writers at a university. The students anxiously awaited the wisdom of this wordsmith. He stood at the podium and said something like

this: "You want to be writers? Then go home and write." And then he left.

Do we want to be prayers? Then go home and pray.

By practicing and preparing our minds and hearts to pray, we develop the skills that will allow us to lose ourselves in the music of God. We will be grace-full and fluid in our prayer because we are no longer self-conscious but God-conscious. This is the only kind of prayer that can bring us healing. This is the only kind of prayer that will free us from shame. This is the only kind of prayer that will allow us to know what the servant meant when he wrote: "See, God is my help."

Two of my mentors in this kind of prayer were a married couple I met when I was a deacon. Bernard and Mary were in their 70s and always sat in the front pew every day for Mass. When Bernard was very ill many years before, Mary nursed him back to health. By the time I knew them, it was Bernard's turn to take care of Mary.

They were always there well before the 8:00 Mass to say the rosary. They listened to the homily intently and Bernard was generous in offering feedback.

Bernard and Mary stand out in my memory as people who lived the servant's song, "God is my help." They were known to be "saints" of the parish because of the love that radiated in their relationship and glowed on their faces. Being called a saint while one is still alive is dangerous and Mary and Bernard never took the label seriously. They just lived it with a large dose of humility and grace as they cared for each other and those around them.

Bernard played the piano and Mary the harpsichord. I went over to their house now and then to listen to their music. In their younger days, they played for weddings and a variety of events. By the time I knew them, their skills had diminished but they still remembered the songs and played them for me.

When I left the parish, they gave me a priceless gift: a homemade cassette tape of their music and some of Bernard's favorite stories. One of those stories was about an old violin.

It was battered and scarred and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while to waste much time on the old violin. But he held it up with a smile and said, "What do we want to start the bidding at folks?"

There was a dollar bid and then two but when the auctioneer went for three, there was silence. Then, from the back of the room, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow. He wiped the dust from the old violin and tightened the loose strings. Then he played a melody pure and sweet.

When the music ceased, the auctioneer continued. "What's the bid for this old violin?" As he held up the bow, a voice cried, "A thousand dollars." And then two thousand. Three thousand once, twice, going, going, gone!"

The people cheered but some of them said, "We don't quite understand. What changed its worth?"

It was simple, really. All it took was the touch of the master's hand.

Bernard and Mary's lives were in tune because they had been touched by the Master's hand. They were the instruments upon which God played a melody of hope and love. They surrendered their lives to each other and to God and so touched my life and those around them with this prayer we call the music of God.

When our lives seem out of tune, battered and scarred by sin and shame and ready to be auctioned off to the lowest bidder, think of that old violin and Bernard and Mary and their music of faith. And then listen to the melody of God's mercy playing in our hearts.

Prayer: The Trail of Blood

The question that Barry Fischer kept asking us during our time of retreat in Guatemala finds its home here as we reflect on the prayer that frees the suffering servant to sing even in his shame. It is a question that stalks our every step as Precious Blood pilgrims; a question that haunts our every hope: "Where is the blood leading you?"

"Being missionary means being led by the blood — wherever the blood calls us to go," Barry said. "This is conversion! "Are you willing to let the poor put a belt around us and lead us where we'd rather not go?"

One of the places where the trail of Precious Blood spirituality led us during our time of retreat in Guatemala was the village of La Labor. Sr. Kris Schrader, an Adorer of the Blood of Christ from Ruma, gave a few of us a tour of the area. We walked through a val-

ley, jumping across streams, stopping every now and then at the homes of catechists from the parish.

One woman we visited was making tortillas for Sunday brunch. The family and some of their neighbors had gathered in the small, dark kitchen to visit and prepare for the feast. Family ties seem very important here. This was reinforced later in the week when we stayed in Solála, a small town near Lake Atitlan. There was a young boy, Pedro, who with his brother hastened to make beds and prepare the rooms for our large group that descended on their tiny, family-run inn. Pedro's energy and enthusiasm in making us feel welcome more than made up for the damp and drab conditions of the rooms.

On our journey with Kris, we also met a medicine man whose gift of healing — with leaves, herbs, and the touch of his hands — is renowned in these parts. He is a very humble man who lives with his family in a very simple cement block house by the side of the river. With his gift he mends the broken people of La Labor.

On that Sunday evening, with the mountains silhouetted against a gray sky, beauty encircled us as we celebrated with a festive meal the commitment of two Precious Blood seminarians ordained earlier in the day. Later, a group of young musicians and singers from the parish serenaded us on the porch.

In all of these experiences, I was evangelized by the poor and suffering of this sacred land. I saw the conditions in which so many of the people were forced to live. The poverty and pain is real here. One is not able to cover up the scars left by oppression and injustice. Yet, just beneath the surface disfigured by fear there is beauty. The people here live in communion with the land. They seem to know what we have not yet learned: that our Earth Mother was here before us and she will be here long after we die. Therefore it is necessary to treat our Mother with reverence and respect. In Guatemala, there is promise even amid the poverty; honesty amid the hovels; simplicity amid the squalor. This is life at its most basic reflecting the communion God desires to have with Her children. How God's Precious Blood must boil with anger and outrage at how Her children are being treated in this land of eternal dreams.

No, the time of retreat did not teach me to praise those who live in poverty. One should not praise a fact that seeks to destroy the dignity of human beings. The vast majority of the people in

Guatemala have no choice. Poverty is a reality that has been institutionalized by an unjust system. What is worthy of praise is the basic choice the people here do make. The choice for life, for harmony, for hope. Their faith is in a God who walks with them on the trail of tears. It is not a superficial faith that says, "Well, if we just endure this present crisis, there will be better days ahead." No, their belief is found in a savior who walks the road of suffering with them. Though resurrection may still be hidden in God's heart, they will not give in to the temptation to give up. For even now the seeds of liberation are being sown in the hearts of those who believe and who will not yield to despair.

At the concluding prayer service back at San Gaspar on our last night together, one of the sisters read a reflection on the theme, "threatened by the resurrection." Those words summed up well the ten days in October I spent on retreat in Guatemala. At every turn, I was threatened by the sounds and sights and smells and tastes of Guatemala and her people. Threatened to believe in life. Threatened to embrace the reality of the blood. Threatened to profess my faith in a God and a people for whom hope is eternal.

Do Not Be Ashamed

It is this hope that guides our pilgrimage and guards our prayerful hearts. As we pray with the suffering servant and the psalmist, can we hear Jesus telling us: "Do not be ashamed"? Perhaps that phrase is even more important than the one we hear so often in the Gospels, "Do not be afraid." For you see, shame is a part of our experience. How often did we hear the phrase, "Shame on you" when we were growing up? The phrase could be better expressed, "Shame in you," because that's what shame does. We feel it deep inside. If it were just "on us" — on the outside — this shower of shame might be easily washed away. But often we are baptized "in" shame and it sinks into our very soul.

What the prayer of Jesus, the song of the servant, and the prayer of the psalmist teach us today is that shame holds no power in us. Look closely and we will discover dignity in the servant. There is decency and a love in his eyes that pierces the shame in our souls with mercy.

This is the spirit we must recapture along the way. In our common life, we must stop shaming and blaming one another. We do it

so easily, as if it is second nature to us. A comment here; a sarcastic slice there. We need to stop it! We need to stop the shame! Ban the blame! And listen to the servant! Look at the servant!

Our dignity screams: I am a human being! I am made in the image of God! I shall not be disgraced! I will not be ashamed!

This is passionate prayer. There is purpose and power in prayer like this because it's prayer that invites an active, visible response: to treat others with respect, dignity, and grace.

So this day, as we stop along the way, we stop and listen to the prayer of the passionate pilgrim:

You can cut me down and slander me.
 You can drag my name through the mud.
 You can ignore me.
 You can ruin my reputation and try
 with your lies
 to destroy me.
 You can beat me, betray me,
 even pluck my beard.
 You can spit in my face
 but I will not be disgraced.
 I will not be put to shame.
 Because God is on my side.
 And with God on my side,
 resurrection will be mine.

For Reflection

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4-9

Jesus invites us to suffer with and for others. Whose wounded life has called you to compassion and prayer?

The Mayan culture urges us to remember our call to be in harmony with all of God's creation. Think of the gentle ways that God's love is visible to you in the environment. How do you affirm life and the gift of all of creation?

Have you borne insult for God's sake? When have you stood to challenge a lie?

We learn to pray by praying. Pray!
 Where is the blood leading you?

whispered to myself, "may the foot powder I used this morning still be effective!"

"This pair of shoes looks like you," the clerk said with a smile. They were black loafers. She knew in my profession I wore various shades of gray and black. I tried them on and noticed the difference right away. They were comfortable. "And they'll be even more comfortable when you break them in," she said.

The first pair I tried on were the ones I walked out of the store with. "You're easy to please," the man who bought me the shoes said.

"No, just embarrassed to spend a lot of time trying on shoes."

Dusty Feet

Peter was embarrassed to have Jesus, his teacher and Lord, wash his feet and I know why. Pride. That's it. Pride that hides behind the mask of humility. "You will never wash my feet!"

But Jesus pulled the mask away rather quickly. "If I do not wash your feet, you will have no share in my heritage," Jesus said.

"Well, if that's the case — give me a bath! Give me the works! Wash me clean from head to toe!"

How often do we find ourselves falling into Peter's pit of pride? We are the priests, brothers, and sisters — the professional religious; we are the religious education directors and teachers, the nurses and doctors, the mothers and fathers. We are the ones who are supposed to be serving others. It's pride, pure and simple. Too proud to let another wash my feet for fear my feet might stink. Afraid the other might notice I'm human.

Too proud to allow another buy me shoes.

I recall the story of the priest who is called to the bedside of a young man who has attempted suicide. The priest has had a long and tiring day. He had encountered so many people with so many problems that he was literally drained of energy. The priest had been about washing the feet of so many; drying their tears; stooping to serve them in their need, that he was exhausted. He could find no words of comfort or consolation for the young man who had tried to take his own life. The priest knelt at the young man's bedside. He saw the bandages on the young man's wrists, the blood seeping slightly through the cloth. He didn't know what to say, so he

Day Five: Early Evening

THE SACRAMENT OF LIBERATION

One of the hazards of holy haste is smelly feet. But then, feet have a lot to do with faith. After all, it's where we stand that makes the statement. It's where we walk that makes the difference.

Recently I was giving a parish mission. One of the people who was coming to the mission took me out to lunch and during the course of our conversation, asked me if I could spare a few minutes afterwards to run an errand with him. "We have one more stop to make," he said.

He pulled his car into a slot outside a shoe store. "My wife and I want to give you a gift," he said. "We want to give you a new pair of shoes. And we want you to pick out the pair you want. Please, we want to do this for you rather than just give you a gift certificate because we know you will buy a cheap pair of shoes if we gave you money."

He was right, of course. I always go to one of those discount shoe stores when I need new footwear. This friend and his wife must have been watching my feet when I preached that week because they noticed I was coming out of the cheap black shoes I was wearing! They were falling apart but I figured they had a few more miles on their tread before I had to change them.

This man is a chiropractor so he knows the value of a good pair of shoes. Take care of the feet and the rest of the body will be grateful.

So I went in the shoe store with him. Now, there are a few things I like to do less than try on a new pair of shoes. One of the reasons I go to the discount places is because they are self serve. That way I don't have to worry about offending the senses of a salesperson if my feet stink! But here I was, sitting in this shoe store, having the salesperson measure my foot. "Please God," I

said this: "I need you. I need you to pray for me. I need you." Then he buried his head on the young man's chest and wept.

The young man who earlier in the day saw no reason to live now had the tears of a priest soaking his shirt.

"I'm sorry," the priest said as he raised his head.

"Father," the young man whispered. "It's okay. You are the first person who ever said he needed me. I've never felt needed by anyone in my life."

In emptying himself that night, the priest saved the young man's life. The young man saw a reason to live — somebody needed him. The footwasher had his feet washed by the bandaged hands of one who finally felt needed.

At his last supper, Jesus needed to wash the feet of his friends. He needed to show them that love's service begins and ends on our knees. He needed to give them an example to show them what Eucharist means.

It means being broken for others. And it means allowing another to be broken for us.

It means drinking from the cup of blessing and of bitterness and passing the cup around.

It means pouring out one's life in love's service and being humble and open and empty enough to drink in the experience, the compassion, the care of another.

"On the night he was betrayed," Jesus broke the bread of friendship, passed around the wine of compassion, washed the feet of his followers, and celebrated his passing over from this world to the next. A rite of passage that forever forged the bond of love. Jesus showed this love, gave this love, and received this love "until the end."

The Courage To Be Changed

I recall an episode from the television series, *M*A*S*H, when the doctors of the 4077th were operating in bitterly cold weather. The only way they could keep their hands warm and their fingers flexible, was to rub them together in the steam rising from the wounds of the soldiers on whom they were operating. Father Mulcahey saw this and reflected, "How can anyone see this and not be changed?"

The hands of the healers warmed by the wounded. How can we not be changed?

The eyes of the victim offering forgiveness to the oppressor. How can we not be changed?

The whisper of the dying gives courage to the living. How can we not be changed?

How can we look at the smile of gratitude from the little girl in the soup kitchen line and not be changed?

How can we hear the memories of the older members of our community, broken-hearted and feeling betrayed by the changes in the church and in religious life and not be changed?

How can we touch the hand of a young man dying, his body ravaged with AIDS, and not be changed?

How can we celebrate the Eucharist and not be changed?

We can if we avert our eyes, cover our ears, and close our hearts. We can if we allow fear to be our friend and wave goodbye to courage. We can if we permit caution to conquer compassion, complacency to consume commitment, timidity to triumph over tenderness.

But as pilgrims of the new covenant, servants of the blood, we are called to be transformed in the blood that seals our relationship with God and each other forever. This covenant of blood is found first in the Hebrew Scriptures when Moses splashed half of the sacrificial blood on the altar and sprinkled the other half on the people. (Exodus 24:6-8) In this symbolic ritual, Moses cemented the relationship between God and the Israelites.

Jesus personalizes this covenant by writing his own name in blood and giving it to the disciples — and to us — to drink. No longer the blood of first born bulls, Jesus gave the disciples his own blood. "This is my blood," Jesus tells them. Think of it. Blood is life. Jesus is giving to us his very life — the force that energized him, motivated him, moved him into action. How can we not be changed?

Marked For Life

Like our ancestors of old who celebrated the blood on the doorpost and lintels of their houses, in the Eucharist we celebrate our passover from death to life. The doors of our hearts are stained with

the precious blood of the one who bent low to wash the dusty feet of his friends.

Like our ancestors of old, we are "people in flight" — fleeing the darkness of sin and death and racing toward the promised land of light.

Like our ancestors of old, we remember, celebrate, and believe in the return of the one whose path we follow.

This pilgrimage will lead us into the night, into the garden, into the courtyard, into the courtroom, and finally out of the city to a lonely hill where a cross marks the spot.

We are on pilgrimage and along the way we know there are more than enough feet to wash, hands to hold, hearts to mend, and dreams to keep. But at this stop on our journey, we also remember that there are many who need us to need them.

Remember, it is in our common need that God finds us.

This is indeed a holy communion — a sacred bond that can never be broken. Oh, we may stretch it, bend it, even discard it because of our infidelity and fear and failure to love, but God never will. God will remain faithful even if we don't.

And God will continue to call us back to relationship.

That's the remarkable thing about covenant and about his blood that binds us together. It's not just between God and me; it is also between you and me. We are blood sisters and brothers. This covenant causes us to be changed, to be transformed, to be agents of transformation. We are challenged at each and every Eucharist to be messengers and midwives of the reign of God in our world today.

The invitation to be changed is inherent in every Eucharist. Changed forever. We can never be the same for we have been splashed with the blood of the new covenant. Even more, we drink this new covenant. We allow it to become a part of our lives, pulsing through our bodies and racing through our veins. This is an intimate union — com-union — between God and us. How can we not be changed?

Each Eucharist opens new avenues and possibilities for us that allow us to experience . . .

- . . . in the wounded, warmth
- . . . in the dying, life
- . . . in the hungry, hope
- . . . in the broken-hearted, understanding

- . . . in the forgotten, memory
 - . . . in the bewildered, wonder
 - . . . in the forsaken, friendship
 - . . . in the enemy, love
 - . . . in the victim, forgiveness
 - . . . in the condemned, mercy
 - . . . in each other, compassion.
- How can we not be changed?

Breaking Bread With Outlaws

These Eucharistic implications are underscored by the reality that in the Gospels, Jesus is often eating in "bad" company. The tired, old jokes about the in-laws coming to dinner and having to endure the ordeal of a few hours with the mother-in-law who manipulates and the aunt who gossips may still get a laugh now and then. But it seems from the Gospel stories that Jesus rarely ate with in-laws (except maybe Peter's mother-in-law now and then). No, Jesus felt more comfortable with the outlaws — those "outside the law." He broke down barriers by putting food between himself and the outcasts of the day. Jesus accepted their hospitality and so invited himself into their lives. In doing this, he celebrated not in "bad" company, but in the "company of friends." And what they celebrated together was the mercy of God.

Once again we are confronted with the reality of Jesus' radical approach to relationships. Look at the people Jesus calls his friends: the "tax collectors and sinners" (probably public sinners like prostitutes) who were despised by society. The tax collectors sold out their own people to the Romans who occupied the land. They betrayed their own blood to save their own skin and pad their pockets. The prostitutes, whose immoral lives were in public view, sold their bodies for profit if not for pleasure.

These are the people Jesus calls friends. As we continue to reflect on this in light of our own personal and communal lives, what astounding ramifications we discover. Who are our friends? How inclusive is our circle of friendship? Do our friends include the marginalized of our society? Those who have been pushed to the fringe or over the brink? Those who have been locked out of our minds if not our churches because of scandal? Does our circle of relationship include those who are unmarried but living together or the divorced

who remarry "outside the church"? Does our circle include gays and lesbians? Does our circle include those on whom society or church has cast as stigma, a "scarlet letter"? Are these included in the company of our friends?

For whom are the doors of our church, our community, our hearts closed?

This is the stillpoint of our continuing conversion in love. Jesus was most comfortable with the outcasts, the poor, the broken, the shunned. He broke bread with them, listened to their stories of struggle, poured some wine, and by his presence and gentle conversation reminded them that they were loved.

The Eucharist calls us to widen our circle of compassion.

The Liturgy Of Liberation

This meal of memory we celebrate was for Jesus his last will and testament of love. Jesus gathered his closest friends to celebrate the passover. He himself would be passing over, but before this was going to happen, he wanted to enjoy the company of his friends and tell the stories one more time; to celebrate the hope that was alive in his heart even as the darkness of denial and betrayal was closing in around them. This was the in-breaking of the reign of God. The bridegroom was present at the feast: eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.

Every meal shared in a moment of crisis is a reflection of this Last Supper that Jesus shared on the night before he died. Every Eucharist we share is a memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, but even more, it is a reaffirmation of our faith and hope.

I recall the story of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre who, during the Nazi occupation of France, were hiding out in a basement. As the Nazis were getting closer, they made a decision. Even as they feared for their lives, at the moment of their most serious danger, they went out and bought wine and cheese and so affirmed their hope in the future.

Each Eucharist offers this quality of hope. Each Eucharist is a celebration of our liberation. At each Eucharist we stand on the threshold of freedom. Like our ancestors in faith, the Israelites, who were rescued from slavery in Egypt and started their journey with a meal, meticulously prepared and yet eaten in haste, our journey of faith begins with a meal. As the doorpost of their homes was

covered with the blood of a lamb to signify they were God's people, so our lives are washed in the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and the sins of all the world.

The sacrament of the passover when God saw the blood on their doorpost and spared the chosen ones and led them out from the yoke of oppression to the freedom of sons and daughters; this sacrament becomes our passover as well. It is our liberation from our slavery to sin and our dance with death.

But our liberation is not only from the physical constraints and fears we experience in our lives. Even more, it is a freedom from the hunger we feel for God. Our spirits are nourished in the meal of the new covenant. Jesus becomes for us the food and drink for our journey toward freedom.

Our remembrance becomes the unambiguous sign of the love God has for us in Jesus. Every time we drink this cup and eat this bread, we proclaim with our lives the freedom won for us in the sacrifice of Jesus.

People Of The New Covenant

The question becomes: How free are we? Free enough to be changed by the body and blood of Christ? Free enough to leave the table, ready and willing to become the body and blood of life for our world? Our souls yearn to be filled with this bread and precious wine. But once filled, do our lives overflow with love for others?

Liberation begins when we have the courage to sing the song of freedom amid the deafening silence of oppression and the clanging sounds of chains; when we sing the song of freedom amid the roar of guns and the fear of justice; when we sing the song of freedom even as the clouds of hate hover close to the earth.

We can sing that song because we receive the food of freedom that nourishes our empty spirits and heals our broken hearts. Because we drink the blood of the new covenant that makes us new. New, not just different or a variation of the old, but entirely new people. How many of us still continue to cling to the old routine that deadens our days? Like a favorite sweater, worn with age but so comfortable that we are reluctant to give it away, we hold on to old patterns of sin, of compromise, of silence because they are comfortable.

To be people of the new covenant means to be alive with newness. To recapture and renew the first covenant God made with us at the beginning of creation. To see everything and everyone as fresh and new — a reflection of the communion of all creation.

As people of the new covenant, we don't have to invent or imagine something new but simply recapture the ancient truth of relationship. That moment when God saw everything God made with creative mind and heart and hands and said: "It is very good." Jesus came not to abolish the old covenant but to transform it, to fulfill it, to make it new again. Jesus is the new covenant precisely because in his life, death, and resurrection the dawn of creation happened a second time. We are re-created in God's image. We are made new — brand new children of freedom who are willing to cast aside the old clothes of compromise and put on a new garment of grace: the clothes of compassion.

The Eucharist confronts us with a radical and revolutionary decision. By gathering to remember, by receiving the body of Jesus broken for us, we commit ourselves to be broken for others. By drinking the blood of Jesus poured out for us, we commit ourselves to pour out our gifts and lives so that others might live. As people of faith, we commit ourselves to go forth as one people, healed of all division. Though our wounds and scars may still be visible, we are now ready to be wounded in love for others.

We are ready and willing to get down on our knees and wash the feet of others as Jesus did on the night before he died. John, by using a living parable in the context of Eucharist, gives us a symbol of service. This dramatic example of Jesus liberating humanity from the sin of indifference inspires us to do the same.

In this way, we become like that man who had dinner with his friends on the night before he died so that they may have life, so that they may have love. And though he died, his song of freedom lives on. We are that song. As people of the new covenant, as people of the most precious blood, as people of life, may we sing it loud, sing it clear, sing it for the whole wounded world to hear.

The Eucharist forges forgiveness and healing. The compassionate carpenter from Nazareth was drawn to broken people. Just as a carpenter takes rough planks of wood and shapes them into beautiful furniture, Jesus transformed broken lives into whole human beings. He sat down and ate and drank with those people we so often

push away from the center of our lives. His gentle compassion held their brokenness. The heat of his spirit melted their shame. The fire of his love released them from pain and forged a future. Still today, Jesus sits down at table with us — to break the bread of friendship and pour the wine of the new covenant. And somewhere between the stories and the memories of the day, he offers us salvation.

How can we not be changed?

As we step out of our shoes to wash the feet of each other, we will know this much: we need each other on this pilgrimage of our common pain. Then, when we put these shoes back on again, get comfortable in them because our journey is only a little more than halfway complete. We have many miles to go before we sleep.

It is getting late. So, before we go out to the garden, we might want to try on a new pair of shoes. Perhaps our pilgrimage has made our souls wear thin. Don't worry, we will break them in by walking in love's service. We know that these shoes will catch a few tears and be scuffed by rocks. We know that these shoes will be stained with blood and dulled by sorrow. But we also know and believe that by the end of our journey these shoes will shine again — polished by the light of resurrected love. We know that when we finally reach our destination these new shoes of ours will have one purpose: dancing. Dancing to the dawn of redeeming grace.

For Reflection

Scripture: Exodus 24:6-8

Luke 22: 14-21

Reflect on how the Eucharist can or has opened new avenues and awakened new possibilities in you.

What implications does Jesus' table fellowship with outcasts have for you? For the Church?

For whom are the doors of our church, our community, your heart closed?

Reflect on a meal you have eaten in a moment of crisis. For example, after experiencing a tragedy, many do not "feel like eating." A friend says, "Please, you must eat something." What thoughts and feelings were going on in your mind and heart?

How does the celebration of the Eucharist affirm our hope in the future?

What does it mean for you to be "alive with newness?"

Day Five: Night

ANGUISH IN THE GARDEN

It is night. The garden is quiet save for the sounds of weeping and sleeping. A thin veil of clouds covers the full face of the moon. Like a shy bride about to be betrothed, she smiles nervously upon the face of her beloved.

It is night. The darkness creeps upon three men who are fighting a losing battle against the forces of slumber. Their friend has gone ahead a few feet to fall hard against a large stone. He lays his head upon the rock and his tears tap the last pillow his head will ever touch. "Stay awake with me," he pleaded with his friends. "Watch and wait with me for the hour is near." But sleep wins out. It's been a long day, a longer night, with bottles of wine to remember the good times gone by. The wine soaks the minds of the three young men as their heads bob, up and down. Their eyes close and then open quickly. But the wine has made them too heavy. Sleep is a welcome companion. It closes their minds to the sounds of weeping.

It is night. There isn't much time now. In the distance the sound of feet slashing the brush and breaking the twigs signals they are getting closer. The garden is becoming brighter with the light of their burning torches. "Father," the young man sobs, "there must be another way. Surely it doesn't have to end this way. I am too young to die! There's too much to do yet. You know these people — so many broken ones reaching out to me for you. God, they need me. They need you. We can't abandon them now. Three years isn't a very long time. I was just starting to break through their doubt, their fear. Please, God, just a little more time."

It is night. The young man listens to the silence. He looks up but sees only the linen-like clouds hiding the stars, obscuring the sign he is looking for. A sign, a star perhaps, like the one his Father told him had peaked the night he was born. But there is no response in

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the stars tonight. Only tears. "I don't know if I'm strong enough to take the pain," he whispers to the rock as he buries his head in his arms. "I mean, I've had some rough things happen to me lately but those were nothing compared to what you have in store for me now. Isn't there another way?"

It is night. The steps of those carrying torches trudge on through the darkness. They are close now but not close enough to awaken the three friends whose dreams are ready to turn a corner and take a different path.

It is night. "It won't be long now. I don't know if I'm ready, Father, but ready or not, they have found me. Old Judas knows me well. He knew I'd be here. Maybe I should have tripped him up and went to another spot for evening prayer tonight. It doesn't matter, really. What does matter is that we've been over this before and this is the way we had worked it out from the start. The plan seemed so good then but that was a long time ago. Before the pain became so real. Before the friendships became so deep. Before the people started to believe. Now, I just wish there was more time to do even more miracles for folks who need to be forgiven and trusted. But even though I know you're listening; even though I sense the tenderness in your heart and the sadness in your soul, I know you are not going to change our plans now. Still, if it be your will, you can let this cup pass my lips tonight so I won't have to taste the bitterness it holds.

"But your will, not mine, be done."

It is night. It is time. The young man lifts his head and pushes hard against the stone to raise himself. He wipes the tears with the sleeve of his well-worn tunic still moist from being brushed in the basin as he washed the feet of his friends earlier in the evening. Friends who now sleep a few yards from him, unable to fulfill his invitation to watch and to wait. But now their guard duty is over; their watch complete. It is time for the changing of the guard. The soldiers are here.

The Prayer Of An Anguished Heart

Jesus took the risk to invite James, John, and Peter into the garden to pray with him. He invited them to enter into his brokenness, his anguish, his pain, his confusion, his fear. The fact that they fell asleep takes nothing away from the invitation. Remember,

it was night. The darkness which surrounded them reflected the night that was within them. but their drowsiness does not detract from their initial willingness to enter the garden with Jesus. They were tired. It was late. They fell asleep. Let us not be too hard on them. Who of us has not fallen asleep now and then when we have been invited to pray, to stay awake, to watch and wait? Our spirit is willing but our bodies are tired.

We remember that these same three were invited by Jesus to go to the mountain with him where they witnessed the transfiguration. Then it was easy to stay awake. Something exciting was happening right before their eyes. There was Jesus and Moses and Elijah all meeting together on the mountain. It was a glorious moment — one that these three wanted to savor and keep. Then they wanted time to stand still. They wanted to pitch some tents and camp out on the mountain of glory.

But now they found themselves in the garden of sorrow. It is easier to sleep when all hope seems gone. In this garden grew plants of pain; flowers of anguish. There were no clouds of glory or brilliant lights. No neon signs to keep them awake. No stunning displays of dazzling divinity. Here they found the heart of humanity. The sacred heart. The broken heart.

When pain becomes more than one can bear, the advice is: get some rest, you'll feel better in the morning.

What is so human and so holy about this invitation to the garden of Gethsemane is that Jesus wanted his closest friends to share his brokenness, his sorrow, his pain. He invited them into the deepest cavern of his character. Just as on the mountain he invited them to catch a glimpse of his glory, now in the garden he wanted them to sneak a peek at his pain.

When another invites us into the chamber of sorrow, we will never escape without being changed. When we welcome another into our garden of pain, we say, "My heart is filled with sorrow to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake." (Mark 14:34) We don't expect her to say any words that will comfort us or recite any message of condolence. We only desire that she stay with us, remain with us, remind us that we are not alone.

When we take the risk to respond to the invitation of another to enter her garden, we tread softly, gently. We know words have no meaning here. Only love and presence speak with tenderness here.

A good friend who has suffered deeply and experienced great losses in her life, now makes it a point to go to those who are grieving in her parish after the death of a loved one. She is motivated to do so by her own sense of loss and grief. Recently, she told me that when someone says to her, "I wish I could go and offer my sympathy," she replies, "How can you not go?" This woman has been to the garden herself and she knows the pain. Even more, she knows how important it is for someone else to share the pain. That is why her ministry of grief-sharing has become second nature to her.

There will be many moments on our pilgrims path when we will be invited into another's garden. Tonight, Jesus takes us into Gethsemane to learn a little more about grief, about prayer, about love. Jesus invites us to pray not from a heart that sings but from one that screams.

In the garden, Jesus invites us to love not in the winning but in the losing. And when we learn a little bit more about this quality of love, we will be able to invite others into our garden when the pain is impossible to bear alone. We will learn how healing can only come from a heart that has been broken.

The Arrest

We stand in the garden where the soldiers are armed with clubs and sticks and swords to arrest this man who would be king. Their torches light up the night like a hoard of fire flies moving in slow motion in a dense forest. They surround him, their anger and fear unmasked by the dim light of their slow-glowing torches. One of them — a friend of the one who would be king — steps forward out of the crowd. He carries nothing in his hand — no light, no club, no sword. His hands are free to embrace the one who would be king. In this gesture of friendship is the sign of betrayal.

The rest of the crowd moves closer. One of the man's companions who had been sleeping is now wide awake and draws a sword to protect his friend, his king. One of those who came to arrest him takes one step too many and loses his ear.

"Stop," the young man says. "Put away your sword." And with the skill of a surgeon and the gentleness of a family doctor, he puts the ear back in place. The soldier stands in awe, his spear drops ever so slightly. How can he point it at the one who made him whole again?

It is night. Judas, his eyes blazing with fear and anger and indignation, stands before the young man and their eyes meet — like old friends who have not seen one another for years and sadly discover they have so little in common.

"Rabbi," he says softly. "I'm sorry, but there is no other way. You have betrayed the cause. I have no choice but to betray you. To stop this madness once and for all."

It is night. "Do what you have to do, friend," the young man says quietly, never allowing his eyes to leave the face of Judas, hoping his eyes would hold Judas in a loving trance and he'd have one last chance to change his mind, his heart. But Judas will not allow his eyes to linger long upon the young man's face. Instead, he inches closer and kisses his cheek. The young man's fate is sealed with a kiss.

"A kiss, old friend?" But before the young man can finish, the soldiers grab him. The three companions struggle to get him free but are pushed away by the guards. There would be no armed resistance tonight, the young man has already made that clear. Those who live by the sword, die by the sword. Those who live by love, die because of love.

The soldiers form a fortress around the young man and march him toward the city. The three friends stay behind, frozen in their fear, as if the ground has reached up and grabbed them, holding them back, tightly.

One struggles free. "I'm going to follow them, are you coming with me?" But the others shake their heads slowly, sadly. "But we can't let him go like this! Come on, let's at least find out where they are taking him."

The others are silent. "Okay, you go and tell the others what happened. I'll follow them at a distance and check back with you when I find out where he is."

The others nod in agreement.

It is night.

The Circle Of Healing

In every culture, in every faith tradition, there are those medicine men and women known for their gift of healing. They are people of the Great Spirit who become channels of God's healing grace to those who stand outside the circle of community.

Jesus was the messianic medicine man. Throughout the Gospels — and in this scene in the Garden — Jesus was quick to heal. In this instance, he healed the severed ear of the soldier, the enemy, one of those who had come to arrest him. As people who believe that healing is possible because we have been redeemed in the blood of Christ, we are to be for all peoples channels of blessing and healing. Even those we so easily label our enemies.

Jesus taught us quite clearly that violence only gives birth to more violence. It is impossible to stop this vicious cycle, this ferris wheel of inflicted wounds, unless people join together and shout, "Stop!" The circle of violence will remain unbroken until enough people say, "Enough!" We have seen evidence of bringing violence to an end as evidenced by the growing resistance to the war in Vietnam that brought United States involvement at least to an end. We saw what happened in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s when enough people joined together in peace to tear down the Berlin Wall.

Yes, there is evidence to support the view that what Jesus did in the garden has been practiced now and then. And yet, we know all too well that just because the United States was no longer involved in Vietnam, people kept dying. We know too well the conflicts that have results in Germany — and the rise of neo-Nazism — in the years following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the thawing of the Cold War. We know well the violence that continues to plague Bosnia as ethnic cleansing and massacres of Muslims become almost daily reminders of the violence in our world. A violence that is found first within our own hearts.

We know what our first instinct is when we have been hurt: fight back. Most of us resist this impulse and yet for many of us this feeling of revenge continues to gnaw at us. If we don't take aggressive action, many of us resort to passive-aggressive means to "get back" at the "enemy."

What Jesus' seminar in the garden seeks to teach us is that if the poor will be with us always then it is a sure bet that violence will always be with us. Unless, we resort to radical remedies such as seeking to heal the wounds of the one who hurts us. We will not be able to reach this level of full-fledged medicine men and women until we first understand the motivation behind the actions of those who seek to take our lives. We will never graduate from the garden

until we go deeper and confront the underlying values (or lack of values) that seek to keep us divided, separated, and distant from one another.

In the garden, Jesus teaches us through his action that our lives are to be a constant discovery of the dignity and dreams of all peoples; a deep and abiding awareness of the wounds and fears of others; and a sense of wonder and gratitude for the healing that has happened in our lives.

Our spirituality continues to challenge us to widen the circle of our compassion to include all. We are to live as explorers not of a new world but of a "new heavens and a new earth." A new heavens and a new earth that rise from the ashes of our own wounds, fears, prejudices and pride.

In that one gesture of replacing the severed ear of the one who has come to arrest him, Jesus offers us yet another example of the inclusive vision of humanity. In the garden, we are encouraged not to act on our first impulse and resort to violent resistance; instead, we are invited to learn a new way of resolving conflict. By listening, learning, respecting, and reverencing the dignity of the other. By going deeper and trying to see the goodness, the image of God, in the one whose face is filled with so much fear and anger. Only then will we be able to live the legacy of healing Jesus shows us once again in the garden. Only then will we be able to stop this maddening-go-round of violence. Only then will we be able to break the circle of evil and ensure that the circle of healing remains unbroken.

The Trial

The one who drew his sword in defense of his king follows the crowd at a distance. The night is cold so he huddles next to the fire, covering his head with his hood more to keep his face hidden than his head warm. Since he has been a close associate of this would be king, he worries he might be recognized.

His sword is still stained with the blood of the one whose ear he severed. Since that was the only act of resistance, everyone around the fire is talking about it. There are conflicting reports.

"How's Malchus?" an old man asks.

"He'll be okay but he's got a nasty hole in the side of his head."

"I thought the guy put the ear back," another says.

"Yes, I heard that too," murmurs one who warms his hands. "Just picked it up off the ground and put it back where it belonged. I never heard anything like it. But now at least Malchus will hear better and have something to tell his grandchildren!"

A few smile slightly at the pun. The fireside chat continues. At first, their concern over Malchus and the various accounts of what happened distract them from noticing the new face at the fire. A face that looks vaguely familiar. A face almost hidden by the hood pulled low on his face.

"Where have I seen you before?" a young woman asks, trying to place the stranger. But the man is silent, pretending he doesn't hear the question. He stares at the fire, his memory frozen as his mind tries to focus on his friend standing trial inside the courthouse.

The man who would be king stands at the defendant's podium. He stands alone — no court appointed attorney to defend him. No lawyer would take the case. Witness after witness comes forward to recount some of the things they heard and saw while watching the defendant the last few months. One tells of his barging into the temple and in a fit of rage, overturned tables and scattered money everywhere.

Another relates his speech that day he raided the temple and tells how he was going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. There is a gasp from the crowded courtroom when the curious visitors hear this. Whispers of "lunatic" and "crazy prophet" and "misguided martyr" filter through the chamber.

"Order!" The judge bangs his gavel. More witnesses are called to testify and each one tells a story more unbelievable than the previous one. At the end of each testimony, the gavel sounds and silence is restored.

It does not seem to matter that the stories are embellished or in some cases invented. It does not seem to matter that there is a pattern of inconsistency in their reporting. It does not seem to matter that the defendant stands silently throughout the prosecutor's case, refusing to cross-examine the witnesses. One can tell from the gallery that this would be king would be examining his cross soon enough.

Finally, the defendant takes the stand. The gallery, the jury, the judge, all are surprised that this man, known for his poetic use of language and spellbinding preaching style, is silent before his ac-

cusers. Nothing the prosecutor asks generates a response from the defendant. Frustrated by the defendant's defiant silence, the judge asks him point blank:

"Are you the Messiah?"

The man who would be king turns slightly and looks into the judge's eyes. The courtroom is still, breathless, waiting for the defendant to finally breach his silence. In a firm, confident and utterly clear voice, the man who would be king says, "I am."

Bedlam breaks loose. There is an uproar, the sound of which this cathedral-like courtroom has never heard before. The young man has sealed his fate. He has admitted his guilt. Case closed. He has blasphemed the most high. He has broken the most basic commandment!

But in the back of the courtroom, an elderly man, a noted Scribe and wise scholar named Joseph, who is standing near the door, is silent. Those two words, "I am," reminds Joseph of Moses' encounter with God. When Moses had asked God to reveal God's name, the voice said, "I am who am." The scribe is struck by the clarity of this young man's voice. Something resonates deep inside Joseph but he cannot identify the feeling.

When order is finally restored by the judge's booming gavel, the young man speaks again. "And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God."

The courtroom erupts again, exploding with rage. The judge tears his robes. The guards surround the prisoner to protect him from the storm of people jumping from the gallery, lunging from the front row, each one hoping to get a hand on him. Chaos reigns. No gavel could calm the crowd and restore order now. Shouting over the din, the judge screams, "What further evidence do we need? You have heard the blasphemy! What is your verdict?"

Those surrounding the fire in the courtyard hear the sounds of screaming coming from inside the courtroom. "Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!" is the cry. They know the man who would be king is finished.

They know the sentence is death.

And so does the young man's friend sitting there by the fire. He knows it is over. He knows he should leave while he has the chance. But he had promised his friend he would stay with him until the

end. Through thick and thin. Though everyone else might be deserters, he would remain faithful even if it cost him his life.

The Silence Of The Lamb

Fulfilling the prophet's prediction, "like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:7)," Jesus stood silent before his accusers. Where is his passion to fend off these false accusations? Where is his brilliant defense? Does he believe this is a "no-win" situation so why try to fight the establishment?

Though he does not make an impassioned plea for his life, his inner strength and few but measured words shout with conviction to those willing or able to hear. Drawing from reservoirs of peace deep within, Jesus reflects for us that passion does not necessarily mean courtroom theatrics that will draw rave reviews. Passion is also found in stillness.

When one lives the truth there is no need to speak the truth. When one is sure of one's cause, one does not feel the need to browbeat others into submission. When one is sure of the rightness of one's life, one is not shaken when others seek to prove one wrong.

Jesus spoke his truth in simple terms: "I AM." His silence stuns us to realize that when we are unjustly accused or falsely identified or wrongly punished, a silence conceived from knowing who we are and for what we stand is the best defense.

How do we survive such interrogation? How do we cope with such lies? How do we handle being punished or even tortured for what we believe? In the same way the one who was taken prisoner and beaten ruthlessly. The only way he survived the brutality was to look into the eyes of his persecutors and imagine how they might have looked as children — before their zeal for death took hold of them. He imagined these who were beating him playing in the streets of their hometown with childhood friends. Playing catch or running with kites. When he saw them in his way — as children — he found it impossible to hate them.

His silence unnerved his captors. His silence broke their vicious spirit. His silence which offered no resistance but was not passive but rather an active desire to see the good in them, held them in a moment of recognition. And they recognized their own face: the face of evil.

The silence of the lamb will awaken in time insight — the wisdom to see within and to recognize not the face of evil, but the face that is good, holy, honest, peaceful. The face of truth.

The Denial

Promises are fragile in the face of fear. He stands to leave or to find another fire, but he does not get far. One of those who has studied his face for a long time finally places him at the scene of the crime. "You were with him," she says. "You were with that one who would be king."

Promises are made to be broken. "I do not know what you are talking about." He should stop right there and move on to another spot in the courtyard. But he has a history of never knowing when to keep his mouth shut and so he invites further interrogation by saying, "What are you getting at?"

Realizing his mistake and not wanting to wait around for the answer, he moves toward the gate of the courtyard. But now, against the backdrop of darkness just before dawn and the sound of a rooster crowing in the distance, he knows his cover is gone. The others follow him. A servant girl, a friend of Malchus whose ear had been severed in the garden, was standing only a few feet away when his ear was cut off. Her apron is splattered with Malchus' blood. There is no doubt in her mind. "This man is one of them," she says.

One of them. Not one of us. One of the radicals. One of the revolutionaries. One of the subversives. One of the criminals. Guilt by association. The promise moves farther back in his mind, teetering now on the brink of no return.

Still they keep coming after him, following him around the courtyard. Some who had been inside to watch the trial are now coming out and notice this group of people following the one whose head is still covered by a hood. They see a man, a friend of Malchus, come and pull the hood back. Now, there is no doubt.

"You are certainly one of them."

The promise is now dead, drowned in a torrent of curses and screams as he swears, "I do not even know the man you are talking about."

He runs through the gate and into the night. As the people inside the courtyard return to the fire to keep warm, they hear the rooster crow again.

And so does he.

He stumbles and falls heavily to the ground, tripping over his broken promise. His heart is now scarred by the prediction of the would-be king: "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times."

What they say is true: it is always darkest before dawn. Morning's first light hovers over the horizon. He grasps for a rock and weeps.

Shattered Promises

How do we experience Peter's betrayal of his friend? What does Peter's denial that he even knew this man he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with for years touch inside of us? What range of emotions do we feel?

Promises. Vows. Oaths. Written or spoken, they carry the weight of both words and commitment.

A young woman stands before a group of women with whom he has fallen in love. Freely fallen. In love with their charisma, their spirit, their foundress, their history, their spirituality. She is ready to give birth to an idea, a promise, an oath that has been stirring inside her womb for years. The word is, "Yes." This is where I belong. These are the people with whom I belong. This is the place. For this dream, I will give my life.

But what happens when the dream can no longer breathe? What happens when the Spirit is smothered by sarcasm and second-guessing? What happens when commitment is crushed under an avalanche of compromise?

She weeps. She runs. She falls to the ground.

Married couple. Priest. Religious. Any and all who have made commitments; who have stood on the world's stage before family and friends and said, "Yes, this is how I can love the best." What happens to them — and us — when that love has grown cold?

Older religious who have experienced the dramatic upheaval of the last thirty years; who were raised and trained in a way of life that no longer seems relevant to the world or to the younger members of the community. What becomes of their dreams then?

Weeping. Wailing. Falling. And the anguished cry, "Whatever happened to fidelity and obedience?"

Peter's allegiance to Jesus was strong until he confronted face-to-face the possibility of death. Only then did he race away.

Isn't that what happens to all of us? To each of us who one day stood before others and boldly declared as Peter did, "I will never leave you!" When we come face-to-face with death, we flee. We run. We weep. All natural and necessary reactions to our encounter with dreams that have been consumed by the years and turned to ashes.

When a person leaves a community, a religious family, the priesthood, a spouse, do we believe they are denying their loved ones or betraying their commitment or abandoning their dreams? Or do we believe they have come to a deep experience of ashes, of death, and in order to rise again they must leave? Otherwise, they will die, living out the rest of their days in bitterness and pain.

Could this be what Peter was feeling as he fell to the ground and wept? Could this be what those who dreamed their life would be different experience when they come to the realization that the very life they are living is killing their dream?

At this moment they are faced with a choice. In the words of a friend, they have to decide: Do I say yes to the commitment I made once upon a time or do I say yes to life?

What Peter experienced that night when he turned his back and ran away is similar to those who have come to that moment of decision when they must choose between life and death. There is a stumbling, a falling, a weeping as they pray among the ashes of dying promises. But then there is a rising, a rejoicing, a racing toward the tomb to discover that death is gone.

We all know that our story does not end with Peter weeping on the ground. We all know where Peter finds his life, his dream, again. But it seems necessary that at times in our lives, we have to weep in the dust before we discover our dream reborn.

We have all experienced unkept promises. We have all fallen a time or two in the debris of dashed dreams. The challenge is to follow Peter's principle:

1. acknowledge the ashes;
2. weep and mourn for the death of a dream;
3. be still for awhile and listen to the darkness;

4. race to the tomb and find it empty of death and full of life!

Following this process will assure us that we will not judge those who have left; we will be more certain of why we have stayed; and we will see even amid the ashes, the passion to race toward life.

Even though it still might be night.

For Reflection

Scripture: Mark 14: 32-52

When have you been invited to wait and watch with Jesus?

When have you been invited into the garden of a friend's life to share brokenness, sorrow, and pain? Who have you invited into your chamber of sorrow? How did they bless you?

Those who live by the sword, die by the sword. Those who live by love, die because of love. Remember a time when you lived by the sword; a time when you struck back in vengeance at another who hurt you. Remember a time when you lived by love.

Reflect on a time when a friend has asked for your support. Did you stand with her through thick and thin? Did you remain faithful to him?

What are some things you have had to die to in order to rise again? How did you acknowledge the ashes? How did you weep and mourn the death? Can you still hear the darkness of that time? Can you still touch the wound?

Day Six: Around Noon

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE GALLOWES

The hour of execution is near. Three groups of people, each with different agenda, gather outside the prison gates. One group prays and sings to protest the use of capital punishment. Another group is here to protest the protestors. They are here to support the execution. A third group includes many teenagers who are here because they are curious. They have no strong feelings for or against the death penalty. One teen sums up his presence by saying, "I just came to see if the street lights dimmed when they pull the switch."

All of us, in some way or another, fit into one of these groups. All of us stand in the shadows of the gallows. But I would guess that most of us fit into that third group. We are, more often than not, curious bystanders. We are disciples of Simon.

He came from out of town, Cyrene to be exact, and was curious to see what was causing all the commotion. When he fought his way to the front of the crowd, he saw the man. The convicted criminal, bloody and bruised, carried the instrument of his death, the cross, on his back.

Just for a moment, Simon was overwhelmed with pity. But since he did not know the man, he presumed he was guilty of some horrible crime and was paying his dues to the state by his death. Whatever this man had done, it must have been terrible. Why else would he warrant such a public display of anger and outrage? Having seen the man, and not wanting to get involved in the scene, Simon began to move on and mind his own business. But in the shadows of the gallows, on the way of the cross, one cannot mind one's own business.

One of the soldiers grabbed him. "You there, help him with the cross." The soldier pulled Simon from the crowd and then pushed him hard toward the prisoner, almost causing Simon to fall against the cobblestone street.

When he regained his balance, Simon turned to protest to the soldier. "You have no right . . ." But with the soldier's spear pointed at Simon's belly, the man from Cyrene stifled his protest. He turned and looked into the sad eyes of the one whose back was bent under the heavy weight of the cross.

He looked into his eyes. That was the key. Simon could no longer remain neutral. His anger at the soldier for pushing him into this mess drowned in the sorrow welling up inside. He picked up the bottom of the cross and helped the man carry it up the hill.

Simon of Cyrene, the curious visitor in the city that day, is thrust against his will into the grim reality of a death march.

Standing In The Shadows

Standing in the shadow of the cross, we cannot remain neutral. The shadow cast upon us beckons us to decide. Are we people of life and light or are we people of death and darkness? Like Simon, we may start out as curiosity seekers, but a push or a shove shatters the illusion of neutrality.

In the passion and death of our lives, the shadow of the cross looms large. But remember, the shadows are caused by light. The shadow of the cross is caused by the light of resurrection. To deny the cross, to fail to look into the eyes of the one about to die, is to deny the hope of resurrection.

Simon became the shadow of Jesus. He was his companion on the way to crucifixion. We stand in the shadow of the cross and the shadow of Jesus. We stand in the shadows of the gallows of our day waiting to be born.

The young teenager who was curious about whether or not the lights dimmed when the switch was pulled, would have found his answer on Golgotha. Not only do the lights dim, the light goes out completely. Darkness hovers over the land as the storm clouds gather and the earth shakes.

Simon, still standing nearby, sees the death of the one he helped carry the cross, and hears the Centurion say, "Surely, this was the Son of God."

We might have said the same thing if only we had looked into his eyes.

The Way Of The Cross

The way of the cross is our way. But we are not compelled to follow Jesus on the way of suffering. Our future hangs on the tiny word, "if." Jesus said, "If anyone wants to follow me . . ."

So what do we gain by denying our very self, taking up our cross, and following in the way of Jesus?

Or, better yet, what do we lose?

We lose a letter: "I." We lose the sense that the world revolves around me. We lose our identity as a child of the world.

By taking up our cross, we lose our life.

When we truly follow the suffering Christ on the way of the cross, we kill that part of us that is self-centered and anxiously seeking self-gratification. If we are able to do such violence to ourselves; to truly allow our selfishness to be killed, then we will confront life with no reservations. We will be prepared for the sufferings of our world and finally understand how the world is redeemed from suffering only through the acceptance of suffering.

In today's world, all road signs point to Golgotha. That is our destination as pilgrims of the blood.

We realize, of course, that Jesus alone can carry the world's burdens. None of us are expected to repeat what happened on Calvary. None of us can offer ourselves for the sins of the world. Only Jesus, the Son of God, can do this. Did do this. In his suffering, he redeemed the world. And following Jesus in suffering is indeed liberating because Jesus once and for all atoned for the world's sin by his death on the cross.

Rather than taking all the pain of the world upon our shoulders, we are content with walking in the company of Jesus and walking side-by-side, in solidarity, with those who suffer in our world today.

The suffering of this world must be carried if it is to be overcome. And our great hope is that no matter how heavy the suffering may be, God bears it with us and so it becomes bearable.

The Narrow Road

In October, 1991, when I went to Guatemala with a group of Precious Blood sisters and priests from North America, we saw the signs of struggle etched in the faces of the people from the local village. This was poverty like I had never seen before. There were no

paved roads — just ragged dirt trails winding through narrow pathways. Tin-roofed houses stood shoulder to shoulder with no space to breathe.

The Church at Santa Rosita resembled many of the churches we saw throughout our visit. There were many statues which the people carry in processions at various times during the year. The most striking was a figure of Christ lying in a glass-enclosed tomb near the sanctuary. There was also one of Christ, dressed in a purple robe, falling for the third time. In a land where suffering is so present, is it any surprise that the passion and death of Christ is the most predominant image?

But we saw something else, too. Walking the streets we were struck by the faces of the children. As we walked to the cemetery where Fr. Bill Franz, a Precious Blood missionary who died in 1990, is buried, children were playing in the street. They greeted us with smiles and stretched out their hands to walk with us awhile. The children laughed as they played with homemade kites made of plastic bags and shredded newspaper. Young boys played soccer on the plaza outside the church while old women carried large baskets of clothes or fruit or groceries on their heads. I saw hope where I expected despair. There was laughter where I anticipated tears. There were welcome smiles where I expected frowns of resentment.

After Mass that first Saturday evening in Santa Rosita, we went two-by-two to the homes of parishioners. Precious Blood Father Ray Zarate and I went to the home of a young man named Augusto. His wife welcomed us at the door and had tamales and tea ready for us. She then went into the other room to care for their 10-month old son, Dávid. Ray speaks some Spanish and struggled to keep the conversation going. Here the barrier of language was most apparent but the food placed before us began to chip away the barricades of culture, language, and history. Certainly the warm welcome of Augusto and his wife burned a hole in the wall that sought to separate us.

Augusto is a plumber. He, his wife, and their son live in these two small rooms with a tin roof over their heads and a crumbling concrete floor beneath their feet. They have a kitchen table surrounded by four chairs and a small propane gas stove. Since I am a child of a North American culture which so often equates material possessions with happiness, I wanted to ask Augusto if he was happy. But I

had my answer in the universal language of his smile as he offered another tamale.

Life is sacred here. The land is sacred here. I had the sense this is "holy ground." From the coffee plantation we visited with its small shacks where the workers lived in absolute poverty to the chipped cement floor of Augusto's small home, the land shouts, "Holy!"

So I tread softly with silent memory. The land challenged my dreams. The blood called me to life. What do I believe? Where do I stand? For those ten days in October, at least, I stood on holy ground and walked the way of the cross.

The Crucified Christ

We have arrived at ground zero. Our walk, for now at least, is over. We have arrived at Golgotha, the place of skulls, where sinners, saints, and saviors meet their end. We stand speechless before the crucified Christ. We are amazed at how he looks, covered with wounds and bleeding sores. His eyes are dazed from the countless beatings; his back raw from the scourging; his face glazed with streaks of dried blood that trickle down from the crown of thorns. We want to turn away, to shield our eyes from this horror, "so marred was his look beyond that of a human." (Isaiah 52:14) But something draws us back to take another look.

He suffers in solitude but not in isolation for this single act of courage, this victim of capital punishment in its most cruel and inhuman form, will redeem the world by his suffering.

Look at him and feel the tension between seeing and believing. There are at least three layers of tension we must experience before we can truly make the connection between what we see and what we believe.

The first is seeing life where we expect death: "If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendents in a long life, and the will of God shall be accomplished through him." (Isaiah 53:10)

The second layer of tension is seeing dignity where we expect disgrace: "He was spurned and avoided by others, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity. One of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities he bore, our suffering he endured." (Isaiah 53:3)

When we reach the third layer of tension, deeper still, we see people gather where we expect them to scatter: "Therefore I will give him his portion among the great and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty." (Isaiah 53:12)

The Dream of Calvary

There is a line in the play, Elephant Man, that could be applied to Golgotha's gruesome scene: "Sometimes I think my head is so big because it is so full of dreams." These words are spoken by David Merrick who lived in England near the end of the 19th century. His entire body, except for his left hand, was disfigured beyond description. Physically, he was an abomination, a freak, a top-drawing attraction in the circus sideshow.

His head, enormous and grotesque with a large trunk-like tumor protruding from the center of his face, rendered him the name, "the elephant man." His head was so large he had to sleep sitting up. If he tried to lay his head back, the weight of his head would break his neck and crush his windpipe.

Yet given his appearance, Merrick was a man deep in virtue, rich in vision, and expansive in his ability to dream. As the story unfolds, a doctor rescues Merrick from the circus and takes him to a hospital where he cares for him. The doctor gradually introduces Merrick to some of his friends. At first, these people are horrified by his appearance. There is a combination of aversion and curiosity. They want to turn away but at the same time are strangely attracted, like folks who slow down on the highway after there's been an accident. They are concerned for the victims but there's also a macabre kind of curiosity at work. Over time, though, these people become Merrick's friends as they discover what a truly gifted individual he is. They get beyond the gruesome, gargoyle-like physical appearance and see the person he really is behind the mask: a man whose heart is so big because it is so full of love.

The people who befriended David Merrick could have run away, repulsed by his marred appearance. Instead, they gathered around him not because of his affliction but because of his affection, his vision, his dream.

The people who followed Jesus to the cross were few in number. They grieved from a distance. And yet in his suffering and death, Jesus brought them near through the blood of his cross.

We see it. Do we believe it?

Transfiguring The Face Of Suffering

Isaiah's fourth song of the suffering servant is rich in imagery that shapes our identity as pilgrims of the blood. So far, we have touched only on the physical disfigurement of the servant that renders him an outcast. But even before his appearance was so profoundly marred, we hear that as a child "there was in him no stately bearing to make us look at him, nor appearance that would attract us to him." He would not be a candidate for the cover of Gentlemen's Quarterly. He was not one of the "beautiful people." His homeliness made him humble.

As the song unfolds, we learn of the tremendous suffering endured by the servant. We may think, as the wisdom of old taught us, that it was because of some unknown and secret sin that this servant was dealt with so cruelly. He looked like the "wrath of God." People avoided him not only because of his ugliness but because if they looked at him they were afraid they too might incur God's vengeance. As if God's vicious anger was contagious.

The verdict, once upheld, that a person who experiences suffering does so because of some wicked and evil deed, has been overturned by a higher court of knowledge. We don't believe anymore that those who suffer are "smitten by God and afflicted." We don't imagine God to be a vindictive deity who delights in causing people pain. And part of the evidence which support this new ruling is this servant. It is implied that the servant is innocent; that his suffering is not on his own account but for others.

What is remarkable about this decision is that because of his suffering, others are freed from their sins:

... it was our infirmities he bore,
our suffering that he endured ...
he was pierced for our offenses,
crushed for our sins;
upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole,
by his stripes we were healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

The servant is our freeway to the promised land. He pays the toll. The suffering servant is innocent but willingly bears the guilt of

others. He takes their pain as his own and because of his willingness to do so, others are free of suffering.

The prophet Isaiah elevates suffering here to a place where it has never been before. Because the servant is pure of heart, he alone can become the means of salvation for others. He shows an extraordinary sense of solidarity that is so seldom seen. Would I be willing to take on the suffering of another human being? Though my own sin is always before me, if it were possible, would I be willing to accept another's guilt, another's shame, in order to free them from misery?

These are questions that go beyond the ordinary ways in which we seek to share another's grief. They delve into the depths of the human spirit where few have gone before us to blaze a trail. They call to mind the limits we are willing to go, the risks we are willing to take, which allow others to experience the redeeming presence of God.

This is why the crucifixion of Christ is revolutionary. The suffering and death of Jesus; the innocent lamb led to the slaughter; the scapegoat for the sins of all the world, awakens in us our deepest desires not for sympathy but for solidarity and community with all peoples. Calvary reflects there are no limits to God's love.

The only way we can begin to understand the radical nature of Jesus' suffering and death, the revolutionary sacrifice of the suffering servant, is to learn more about love. Only then can we begin to see how love, absolute and unconditional, transfigures the face of suffering and death. We hear this in the fourth song of the suffering servant for even though the servant dies, the song ends not with lament but with a litany of life:

Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.
Therefore, I will give him his portion among the great,
and he shall divide spoils with the mighty. (Isaiah 53:11-12)

Justice, like love, is not blind. Only through the servant's vindication can justice be achieved. If he only suffers for the sake of suffering; if he suffers for others and the suffering ends in death, what

promise or future or meaning would his suffering convey? No, the servant suffers as a means to a greater goal — the salvation of the world:

Because he surrendered himself to death
and was counted among the wicked;
he shall take away the sins of many,
and win pardon for their offenses. (Isaiah 53:12)

As pilgrims who walk the way of the cross, who stand in the shadow of the cross, we must be willing to look closely and see what the face of love looks like. Then we might catch a glimpse of the freedom won for us in this act of eternal love. Though we may be tempted to avert our eyes from the gruesome scene, to discover the reality of love in our time we are to look squarely into the eyes of Jesus as he hangs on the cross. Then we will see what those people saw in David Merrick. We will see the face of God.

The Dream Is Born

This is our dream, a dream born on Calvary. But there is a tremendous tension in living out this dream in the real world.

In the summer of 1987, three weeks after my brother Ed's funeral, this tension between dreams and reality became apparent to me in two experiences in Europe. Though this was my first trip to Europe, my mood was clouded by loss. My heart was still with my family and with the people in the parish in Sedalia, MO to whom I had just said goodbye. I was mourning my brother's death, grieving with my family, and feeling sorry for myself that I was leaving my first love as a priest, parish ministry, and going into formation work. It was this latter point that brought me to Europe for a gathering of Precious Blood formation personnel from around the world. My emotions were twisted when I stepped off the plane in Rome on the Fourth of July, 1987, which may explain why these two experiences unravelled for me the meaning of finding love even in the losses of one's life.

The first occurred at San Felice near Giano, Italy, the birthplace of the Congregation of the Most Precious Blood; and the second at the memorial to the victims of Nazism in Dachau, Germany. Far apart in distance and history, the memories of these two places

merge as two seeds planted in the same patch of soil, the holy ground of Precious Blood spirituality. Here are planted the seeds of vision born at Giano and the seeds of suffering borne at Dachau. Here the dream comes alive: we must never forget the suffering or fail to live the vision of love.

San Felice is a beautiful setting high in the mountains with vineyards draping the landscape. In 1815, a young diocesan priest from Rome, Gaspar del Bufalo, came to this sacred spot and founded an institute of apostolic life. The Italian Province of the Congregation now uses this historic and holy shrine as a retreat house. Its most striking feature is the chapel. Stripped of its baroque paintings, it is eloquent in its stark simplicity. A corpus of Jesus hangs on the wall next to the window in the sanctuary; the soft colors of the day stream in to provide just enough light to awaken the soul.

I was there with Precious Blood members from all over the world for a day of recollection. The scripture passage we were given for the day was from Matthew's Gospel about Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to the disciples. The message to them and to us was clear: "I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Mt 28:20) This Emmanuel theme sounded like thunder in the silent surroundings where Gaspar founded the Congregation. I could imagine Gaspar sitting in this place and hearing those words of Jesus. With that promise imprinted upon his heart, Gaspar could risk anything knowing the Lord would always be with him. He would go forth from there to start a revolution — a revolution of love.

Gaspar remembered his dream and I saw it realized as we gathered around the altar in the chapel for Eucharist. There I saw the promise of "all nations" realized as members of the Congregation from Italy and Germany, Spain and Portugal, Austria and Switzerland, Guatemala and Chile, Peru and Poland, India and Tanzania, and Canada and the United States came together to share the cup of blessing. Though we represented so many different cultures and countries, languages and lifestyles, our circle in that sanctuary affirmed our unity in Gaspar's vision. I saw what had become of Gaspar's dream.

Dreams are communicated in various ways. When Gaspar was in exile, he was not allowed to preach in public, so he preached in private. And since he could not reach his desired audience by the

spoken word, he did so in writing. Dreams are like that. Dan Berri-gan once said, if they cannot be spoken, then write them down; if you can't shout it out, when whisper it to a friend.

When Dreams Die

But we have also seen in this century what happens when dreams die. When the world becomes a nightmare of evil. After the meeting of formation personnel concluded, a number of us took a train to Munich, West Germany. From there it was a short bus trip to the suburb of Dachau, a name which holds a horror shared with Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka, and others; a name synonymous with evil, execution, death. At the Dachau camp, the Nazis imprisoned thousands of Jews and those involved in the resistance against Hitler. Dachau was also the main prison camp where Catholic priests were sent to die.

The afternoon was overcast, matching the somber mood of the visitors. Words were inadequate to express the emotion one feels standing in the compound still guarded by barbed wire fences where men and women were stripped of their dignity. Only silence and memory have a right to speak at Dachau.

We saw a brief film and toured the museum where Hitler's rise to power and ruthless extermination of human beings were graphically documented. We stood in the barracks where the victims slept on the planks of wood as they awaited their execution. We walked through the garden to the crematorium where more than 30,000 people were hanged and their bodies burned. The memorials and graves to the unknown dead called us to prayer.

Toward the end of the tour, we discovered a chapel of the Sisters of Carmel who started a convent on the very fringe of the camp. The convent is dedicated to the Precious Blood. In the pamphlet describing this simple prayer space, Sr. Gemma Hinricher wrote: "This Carmel has the name 'Precious Blood' and in bearing this name, wants to be a sign of reconciliation."

This ministry of prayer became a sign that healing is possible. We can never forget the crimes of Dachau but the redeeming blood of Christ offers more than a measure of hope. Just as the faces of victims pictured in the museum, the agony etched in their eyes, called us to remember, the prayer of these sisters called us to believe in redemption. "All the sufferings of the world should be incor-

porated in Jesus Christ who conquered death by shedding his blood on the cross," Sr. Gemma wrote. "In Jesus alone can all concentrated sufferings of all times be reconciled and changed. The love of Jesus Christ shows the triumph over the infernal hatred of all times."

We stand in the shadows of the gallows of hate of our time, of all time. We huddle close, stand near, and see how evil is transformed by an unconditional act of love. We stand here, no longer passive spectators but active participants in the reign of reconciliation. We stand as pilgrims whose hearts are now so large because they are so full of dreams, of love.

For Reflection

Scripture: Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12

Like Simon of Cyrene, our work is sometimes interrupted when someone asks our help in carrying a cross in their life. Remember a time when God unexpectedly asked you to help carry the cross of another. Who are the Simons who have helped you carry your crosses?

What are the areas of life that are neutral to you? Is there any chance that your neutrality needs to be challenged? What are you condoning by your silence or indifference?

What are the dreams you carry inside your heart? Whisper that dream to a friend.

How have you experienced rejection or ridicule in seeking to act on your dreams?

Recall moments and memories in your life when your suffering has been transformed? How did it happen?

How do you see your suffering as redemptive?

Am I willing to take on the suffering of another? Would I be willing to accept another's guilt, another's shame, in order to free them from misery?

What does the face of love look like to you? Look closely at the face of Jesus as he hangs on the cross. Describe what you see.

Think of someone who you would describe as ugly. What is preventing you from seeing the face of God in that person?

Day Six: Late Afternoon

THE DAY GOD DIED

"God died the same day my daughter died," he said.

Ralph came to the parish mission at the invitation of his neighbor. At the reception after the last night of the mission, he came up to me and told me his story.

His daughter began to get sick her sophomore year of high school. The diagnosis was leukemia. He and his wife took their daughter, Jane, to specialists and hospitals all over the country. And they prayed. Prayed with all the energy and devotion they could generate. They made deals with God even going so far as to offer their lives in place of Jane's. "I remember telling God, if you spare Jane, I'll give you my life," Ralph said. "I mean literally. Take me instead. Let Jane live. I mean she's only a kid. I've had my time. Let the future be Jane's time."

But Jane died. She died on Good Friday seventeen years ago. And for Ralph, so did God.

Since Jane's funeral, he had been in church only once. That was for his wife's funeral. She died two years after Jane of what Ralph said was a "broken heart." He told me he didn't feel welcome in the home of a God who could be so cruel and heartless as to take a child in the prime of her youth. And to take the only woman he ever loved, his wife, so soon after their daughter's death. "I wasn't going to worship a God who had caused me so much pain and suffering," he said.

I didn't know what to say, so I said, "I'm sorry." He appreciated my sympathy and didn't flinch when I put my hand on his shoulder. I knew that nothing I could say could make his burden easier, his cross lighter, his loss less difficult to bear.

He wept at his memories of Jane. The time he gave her the tricycle or taught her how to ride the bike. The smile on her face when she came home after school, beaming, and proudly proclaim-

ing that she had made the freshman basketball team. He could still feel his arms hugging Jane as he told her how proud he was. He could still smell the fresh aroma of her shampoo as her hair brushed his cheek.

Ralph wept at the memory of the day the doctors told him that Jane had leukemia. In his tears were the memories of his daughter wasting away, losing her hair, lying there in the hospital bed. He could still feel her hand squeezing his as her breath became labored. "Don't let me go," she whispered. "Daddy, please don't let me go."

For seventeen years Ralph had kept his promise. Ralph had not let go.

"After the mission the other night," he said. "I went home and I looked at the crucifix that is hanging on the wall in what was Jane's room. I remember how I threw that crucifix to the floor the night Jane died. Just then the thought occurred to me: someone else's child died on Good Friday. And for the first time in years, I didn't feel alone."

The Wood Whispers

We discover our call and our commitment to follow the way of the cross in our own experiences. If we close our eyes and bend our ears we will hear God's voice whisper in the wood of the crosses we carry. The losses we bear. In the whisper of the wood we heart this: "You are not alone."

If we close our eyes and bend our ears we will hear the breaking of our own hearts. Once our hearts are broken open with the pain and suffering, the losses and loneliness, the despair and death we have experienced in our lives, we will know our God. We will know the memory of God. It is God's memory mingling with our own memories that will give us the map to help us find the promise in this land of pain.

We have only our own experience from which we speak. By going through those painful experiences of loss, reflecting on them, and then weaving them into the tapestry of our lives, we will find not only God's voice, but our own. The voice that will encourage us to speak up in situations where people seek to destroy the dignity of other human beings; where the circle of compassion breaks and

people are shoved out or left outside; where Gospel values are compromised.

But our voices will only ring with authority when we have gone through the door of the cross and listened to the whisper of the wood.

This process of going through the paschal mystery calls us to be transformed and ready to be changed by the Crucified and Risen Christ. To be free of attitudes that imprison us; to be free from the tombs of judgment and fear; and to live with a quality of love that includes all and leaves no one out in the cold.

I remember one recent Good Friday when it rained so much that even my heart could not stay dry. Certainly not after the Good Friday service. The tears there softened my soul. I was a privileged participant not only in the passion and death of Jesus, but in the passion and death of some very holy women. I helped three of the senior sisters, feeble, fragile, unable to stand on their own, to come up and kiss the cross. I held them in my arms as they bent slightly and pressed their lips upon the wood. When I helped each of them back to her chair and sat down, tears streamed down their faces.

One especially was so moved she could not stop crying. My only thought: don't try to stop. This is a good day to cry.

I assumed her tears were genuine reminders of how Christ died for her. And how she shares in Christ's passion today. Betrayed by her body, her bones so brittle and her muscles so weak even the slightest effort was excruciating and exhausting. But she wanted to kiss the cross. She desired nothing more than to unite her body with the wounded body of Christ.

Her tears told me she heard, she saw, she believed. Her tears told me she was not alone.

When we have the courage to enter the garden of anguish by tasting our own tears, we drink from the same cup as Jesus. When we have the courage to feel intensely the pain of our lives, we drink from the same cup. When we have the courage to release the scream buried deep within — the scream Jesus put into words as he knelt in the garden and hung on the cross — we drink from the same cup.

This cup captures our covenant with God. God's presence in those moments of devastation when our sweat, blood, and tears mingle with the sweat, blood, and tears of Jesus bonds us as one.

This is the cup that contains the vintage wine of our liberation. Not liberation from the litany of losses and crosses and crutches, but a liberation to solidarity with others: to feel the pain and be purified; to sense the sorrow and be sanctified; to taste the tears and be glorified.

The Music Of The Night

Suffering and death sneak like night into our lives, leaving us to believe that dawn is a distant mirage. During the 1980s, Ronald Reagan used to say it was "morning in America." Perhaps for some it was. But for those who still sat in the darkness of poverty, it was still night. For those who stood in soup kitchen lines day after day, it was still night. For those who lived in closets of guilt and shame, it was still night.

Morning in America came and went and for most it was a cloudy morning at best.

At the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, Maya Angelou reflected the same imagery of darkness and light, night and morning, to capture the mood of this moment of our history:

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness,
Have lain too long
Face down in ignorance.

For those who believe the world is at peace, it is still night.

For those who turn away from the faces of those who starve in Somalia or freeze to death in Bosnia, it is still night.

For those who turn out the light on Lady Liberty and turn away those who come to our shores in search of a new day, it is still night.

For those who judge others by where they live or how they love, it is still night.

For those who lock the doors of their hearts because of fear, it is still night.

As much as we might want to believe the poet's word and the promise they convey, we will not see the dawn until we acknowledge it is still night.

We will not see the dawn until we have the courage to wrestle with those demons of darkness that linger and lurk in the shadows of our souls.

We will not see the dawn until we are ready to talk, openly and honestly, with raw truth, the words that unwrap our wounds.

We will not see the dawn until we are willing to play and bathe in the ashes of our lives. To trust another enough to tell our truth. To be open enough to allow another's truth to tap and tear away our defenses. To be humble enough to admit we know not answers but questions and are willing to live those inquiries into some distant resolution.

We will not see the dawn until we fall down in reverence and respect of the dignity of the other because we respect ourselves.

We will not see the dawn until we listen to the music of our night and allow this music, in the words of The Phantom of the Opera, "to stir and wake imagination."

We will not see the dawn until we feel the passion of our lives. A passion that has both pain and promise. A passion that is our purpose for living and perhaps even dying for what we believe.

The poet's promise proclaimed the dawn. And yet darkness still descends in each of us at times. In moments of lethargy and loneliness and loss; in periods of trial and separation and fear and frustration. On a personal level, the darkness may take many forms: the death of someone we love; an unexpected rejection by a close friend; a tangled web of misunderstanding with a family member; the betrayal of our bodies as we grow older or a sudden illness that reminds us of our mortality. Whatever our particular pain might be, we become lost in the darkness of night, unable to find our way.

In those moments when anguish grips us and tries to squeeze the life and love right out of us, we need to embrace the night but remember the light. Rest in the light. Be bathed in the light.

We cannot embark on this mission of morning, of bringing a new dawn to the world, alone. We need each other. The question is: do we have the courage to climb toward the light?

If you are like me, you're still afraid of the dark.

We talk to one another, if we talk at all, about the things we can see in the light and not about those things we bump into during the night. It is safer that way.

We whisper secrets to one another, seduced by news, true or not, of deeds done in darkness. Tabloid newspapers and television shows feed our curiosity but never satisfy our appetite.

Growing up Catholic we learn that confession is good for the soul. But until recent years at least, a shroud of anonymity covered the soul-wrenching experience. Raised with shame, we were taught that by simply telling the deep, dark secrets of our souls, light would come.

The old way of confession certainly became a metaphor for the experience. Hands wringing, wet with nervous tension, we waited in long lines going over the laundry list in our minds. When our time came, we slipped into the closet behind the dark, red, velvet veil. In a voice no higher than a hushed whisper, we recounted for the faceless voice behind the screen the sins of our lives. Or at least of the last week. Depending on the mood of the one who listened with one ear pressed against the screen, we learned how great our sin was before a God we were taught was forgiving but also angry for our falling into the same sins again and again. Our penance etched upon our mind if not our heart, we went forth feeling if not forgiven at least free from the closet of our guilt if not our shame.

And so, the deeds we did in darkness were confessed in darkness and nothing seemed to change. Least of all, our shame.

As we know, the lines to the confessional are much shorter now. Perhaps because the music of the night doesn't play as loud. Pardon is possible without a confession. Or a federal investigation. With or without an indictment.

Morning will only find its meaning, its rhyme, and its reason in our lives only when we have the courage to embrace the darkness that still exists in our day and transform that night into light. When we take the risk to go through the pain of our lives and our world rather than around it or over it, together we will see the dawn of a new day. We will live the dream.

A Memory of Myrrh

There is a person near the cross, sometimes standing, sometimes slumping, always crying, who understands the music of the night. Here is where the Mary, the Madonna of the Precious Blood, stands in our spirituality. She is a woman of sorrows who knows the night and the meaning of morning.

Mary, unwed mother, says yes to a plan only God could conceive. A frightened young woman who discovers one day she is pregnant. Faced with choices, she knows some will try to shame

her and blame her. But most of all, she thinks about her beloved and how to tell him. She wonders if he will leave or stay by her side. Confused and fearful, she races off to her cousin, Elizabeth, to share a moment that lasts for months.

Mary, humble mother, is star-struck by all the attention this child of hers is receiving. The poor and rich come to visit. Lavish gifts but one that unsettles her a bit: myrrh. An odd gift to give a child. Isn't myrrh used to prepare a body for burial?

Mary, political refugee, flees with her husband and baby to another country to escape persecution. This child of hers has created a stir and brought down the wrath of the ruler. In her escape, nursing the child at her breast, she grieves for those mothers and holy innocents left behind, not fortunate enough to discover a future in their dreams.

Mary, proud parent, brings her child to the temple and hears the wise old man tell how this child will be the rise and fall of many. She thought she might have to wait until her son's graduation to hear these accolades. But even in the midst of the old man's avalanche of expectation, there is a dire prediction of a pierced heart. And she remembers the myrrh.

Mary, distraught mother, finds out halfway home from vacation that their twelve-year old son isn't with them. She and her husband look everywhere and finally find him in the temple. He is teaching the elders. He deserves discipline but how does one punish a prodigy?

Mary, concerned mother, tells her son to help out at a wedding feast of a friend. She doesn't want the couple to be embarrassed because the wine has run out.

Mary, confused mother, stands outside the house while her son, an aspiring rabbi, is sitting inside surrounded by prostitutes, tax collectors, and other riff-raff. This must have been one of those arrows the old man was talking about years before. She does not understand her son's bizarre behavior. He's been working too hard. She wants him to come home and get some rest.

Mary, grieving mother, slumps at the foot of the cross, her hands and hair splashed with the blood of her dying son. Now the old man's words and the memory of myrrh make sense.

Mary, faithful mother, listens as her son in his dying breath takes care of her future. She won't have to live alone. His closest friend, John, will provide for her. And she for him.

Mary, mourning mother, cradles her dead son in her arms. Is there a wound more grievous or lasting than this — a mother holding the lifeless body of her first born? Her tears mingle with the blood seeping from her son's forehead. She remembers holding him for the first time that night long ago when the stars were bright and the future was forever. Now she holds him for the last time. There are no stars, no sun, no future now. Only gloom, darkness, and memories.

The memory of myrrh.

A Lady of Sorrows

These are my images of Mary as she clings to the foot of the cross. They remind me of images I have of another woman I know and love: my mother. A woman who has also known some of the joys and sorrows Mary knew. A woman who has also buried her first-born son.

My mother's birthday comes during the autumn equinox: the end of summer and the advent of autumn. But her life has taught me that when the cold winds of winter's discontent sweep my soul, one can still sing of spring. From mom I have learned what it means to love in the losing, hope in the darkness, nurture faith even when the doubts crowd in. Though she would not claim this, I believe she has modeled her life after the holy women of Scripture who continued to say yes to God's will even when the odds were stacked against them. Mom has survived tragedy and sorrow of every sort. Her heart has been pierced more than my memory can retrieve. Yet she stands at the foot of the cross and her life echoes faith.

My mother is a lady of sorrows who in her pain has learned compassion; in her suffering, patience. She has been forged by the force of faith that frees her to go on no matter what the consequences. When I looked out at her that day we buried my brother, Ed, her eyes were filled with tears and with faith. Though she could not understand the long years of suffering Ed endured; though she could barely comprehend what all this meant, there was faith in her eyes that day. And absolute love.

I was convinced then and am even more certain of it now that it was mom's faith that helped all of us find our way through the terrain of tragedy caused by Ed's lingering mental illness and sudden death. I learned that day that "God is love and we who abide in love, abide in God, and God in us." I have rarely felt God's presence as strongly as I did that morning of my brother's funeral. I knew then that God has a human face. A face that at times is stained with tears and etched in sorrow. But a face that never loses its countenance to care; its demeanor to dream; its beauty to believe.

Mom, like Mary, protects the flame of faith with tender hands and tenacious hope. She knows that somebody's else son died on Good Friday and with that knowledge she understands she is never alone. Like Mary, she will never forget the memory of myrrh.

Making The Paschal Mystery Practical

These memories of our experiences of suffering make the paschal mystery very practical. I am reminded that in our constitutions it states that "before his incorporation into the Society the candidate undergoes a special program of religious formation which includes a more intense experience of the paschal mystery . . . (C35)." I didn't know quite what they meant when I was in formation. But when I became formation director shortly after my brother's suicide, it finally made sense. No, it doesn't mean we are supposed to make our candidates suffer or that we design new vocation posters that read, "Come, suffer with us."

But it does invite our candidates and ourselves to a deeper awareness of the suffering of our world by acknowledging the suffering present within our own souls. It does mean that we are somehow moved by this suffering. Moved not to sympathy but to compassion and action.

When we embrace the cross of Christ and see how Christ hangs in the balance between heaven and earth on our own personal crosses too, we begin to catch a glimpse of the glory that the paschal mystery seeks to teach us. It is a hope born of pain. A hope that breathes in the open wounds of Christ. A hope that sustains us in our waiting for resurrection.

If we are to live this intense experience of the paschal mystery, we will discover that suffering is sometimes unjustly imposed and always unfair. We don't deserve it. We don't want it. We can't

handle it. But we can find a measure of healing through memory. The memory of myrrh. The memory of blood. The memory of our own suffering. And the memory that someone else's child died on Good Friday.

For Reflection

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Listen to the whisper of the wood of the crosses you carry with you now.

How is it night in your life?

What are the situations of life from which you turn away your face?

Pilgrims protect the flame of faith with tenderness and hope. Where is your hope for yourself, your family, your community, your church, your world. What do you imagine we can become as people of faith?

Remember those who have stood at the foot of your crosses with you. Remember those whose faith has given you the courage to continue to sing even amid the suffering.

How have you experienced intensely the paschal mystery?

Day Seven: Morning

HOPE IN THE TOMB

The womb of the earth has received the body of Jesus. We stand in vigil. Waiting. Mourning. We watch for signs of hope. For as Dostoevski said, "To live without hope is to cease to live."

Their hope was so often masked by fear and their fear threaten to kill the spirit of life that was erupting within the tomb of their souls.

All is quiet now. All is silent. After the anguish of yesterday — the mourning, the grief, the terrifying cries and tender surrender — their friend was taken down from the cross and his body placed in the tomb of a man from Arimathea. His name is Joseph.

You remember him. During the trial he was the one standing in the back near the door. The one who felt deeply disturbed when Jesus announced to the court his identity. The one who remembered the words of Jesus were the same words God spoke to Moses when Moses asked God's name: "I AM."

It took courage for Joseph to step forward and offer his grave. After all, he was a distinguished scholar, respected by his colleagues. But then maybe the terrible storm that shook the earth and ruptured the heavens shook loose the kernel of faith that the young man's words had planted in his heart. Since Joseph was known as a person who was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, he felt he had just witnessed the labor pains.

Hiding out in a second floor room of an abandoned apartment building, the young man's friends mourn in silence. Their leader is dead and now their lives are in shambles. Maybe they should have gone with him, stayed with him to the bitter end. But in those moments of reflecting "what might have been," their courage is interrupted by the sounds outside the house. And fear returns. Always wondering if the soldiers were coming to get them.

What do we do now? Where do we go? These were the questions whirling around in their minds looking for a safe place to land.

"I suppose I could pick up my fishing business again," one said. "There will always be fish to catch."

"I could go back to collecting taxes," Matthew said. "After all, taxes are one of the two realities in life. Funny, isn't it, how the other reality is leading me back to my former life."

One by one, in soft whispers edged with sorrow, they gauge their future and remember the past. For there is no present. Without hope, there is no today.

One of the women who was there when he died sits in the corner, her hair still caked with the blood from the young man's feet — the feet she had anointed a few days before with the perfume that made the room as fragrant as a garden in spring. Now her hair bears the stains of brutality, of lost love, of pain and death. Now her hair smells of dried blood.

She is silent. Her eyes closed. Her voice muted by the memory. Finally, she speaks. "Should we go and anoint the body Or at least place some flowers near the grave?"

"Too dangerous," one of the men responds quickly. "Pilate has posted guards. I guess he's afraid someone will try to steal the body and claim that the dream of resurrection came true. Besides, they know our faces if not our names and if they catch us, we are as good as dead. Best to stay here until all the commotion outside settles down."

With this warning firmly in place, a few of the women sneak out of the house anyway. But the men stay where they are. In their grief, in their fear, in their loneliness, they think only of themselves. And yet, each knew deep down what their friend had meant to them. How he had changed them. Now that he's gone, everything remains the same. Today is no different from yesterday. They were afraid of death and death still scares the hell out of them today.

Better to watch, to wait, to listen, and to remember. "When the situation cools off and the guards have left to pursue petty thieves, we'll go and see the body and pay our respects. Then we can return home and take up where we left off." But when the one who said this turned to see if the women agreed, the women were already gone.

The youngest stands by the window, his arms wrapped around his shoulders. His brother comes up to him and asks him if he's all right. When he nods, the brother asks gently, "You were there. You stood there and watched the whole thing. What was it like?"

He is silent, remembering. The pain on his face, the sorrow in his eyes, the bruises on his legs, the blood that streamed down his side. These form a collage of chaos in the young man's mind, choking his words. Yes, he had gone back. After running for his life after the arrest in the garden, he hid out at a distance. He stayed far back in the crowd when they marched the would-be king to his death. But after the king had been nailed to the cross and the joking and jeers were finished and the crowd started to leave, he came closer. He stood at his feet, holding the king's mother in his arms. Promising his friend that he would take his mother home.

The self-appointed leader of the group sits at the table with his arms folded. He plays the scene over and over in his mind. The prediction had come true. He denied even knowing the one person who meant more to him than anyone in the world. Yes, he was going to be the brave one. He was going to follow at a distance and find out where they were taking him. But when confronted with the accusations of "guilt by association," he broke. All he sees now is that fire in the courtyard and the look on his friend's face as the rooster crowed. His fear got the best of him: "I don't know the man." Easier to put an ear back in place than to heal a broken heart. And once again he realizes his words had surpassed his will. He ran into the night, unable to escape the emptiness inside. Now his tear-stained cheeks and quivering lips unmask his fear. His emptiness. His cowardice. His shame.

His brother, the one who had introduced him to the slain young man, comes over and puts his hands on his brother's shoulders. For a moment the fear is gone and he sees the lake and the nets filled with fish. He remembers the laughter of those years before that afternoon when the young man came strolling along the beach and the two of them, so caught up in the young man's stories, his vision, his genuine warmth and wonder, dropped their nets and followed him on the way.

The way to nowhere or so it now seems.

"Why did it have to end this way?"

The two brothers hold each other tightly. There is no answer. Only a brother's love offering an avenue of escape.

The Wounded Heart

A friend once gave me a candle in the shape of a heart. It has its own little stand made of wood. A small gift from a large heart. I thought about just setting it on top of my bookcase as an ornament, a "knick-knack" just like all the rest. But one night I decided to burn the candle heart.

I watched as its wick glowed in the darkness. It did not take long for the wax to melt, over the stand, spilling out on to the bookcase. A stream of wax from a wounded heart.

When the wick was finally consumed by the flame, this is what was left: a heart with a hole in the center.

Love is like that. Until it is enkindled with the fire of passion, it just sits as a decoration. We can love like this — looking nice, heart in the right place, but never on fire.

For love to make a difference, there has to be a fire. A spark. A passion. Then watch what happens to love: it glows in the dark, warms in the cold, melts itself down and spills all around.

True love burns, it bleeds, diminishing the one who is willing to love like this. It gives itself and leaves behind a hole in the center.

Our deepest pain is inflicted by those we love the most. Otherwise, our hurt would not be so great.

Our highest hopes yield our greatest suffering.

This is the movement on the day after death: to arrive at that moment when we are grateful for our suffering. When we find grace at the center because we know our pain comes from our ability to love like Jesus. A love that is passionate. A love that is consuming. A love that is deliberate and dangerous and untimely delightful.

The call of the blood is the call to be wounded in love.

The Gift of Suffering

She told me that ten years ago she had cancer. As she was lying in her hospital bed, angry and feeling alone, she thought her life was over. She sensed a stirring deep within of what she had to do. But she was afraid. For two days she debated with the voice that screamed within. She knew she could not silence the voice, so finally, on the third day, she allowed it to speak.

The disciples grieving the death of Jesus were overwhelmed with emotion for the one who had enkindled the flame of desire, the fire of passion, in their lives. They felt intensely his loss.

The next word defined after "passion" in the dictionary is "passive." At times in our lives we get these words confused.

There is nothing passive about the day after the death of the one we love. Our friend is dead. Passion is our only response.

When I worked with our candidates in formation in Kansas City, I used this as a guiding principle. I told them that there is no room in the church today for passivity. We do not need leaders in the church who are passive. What we need is passion. Whatever they do, I told them, I want to see them do it with intensity and desire. "Don't be afraid to make mistakes!"

If we are afraid of making mistakes, we will never take any risks.

To be a pilgrim is not for the lukewarm. We do not walk in the middle of the road. Discipleship is not for the timid. When someone we know is hurting, do we stop and consider, "Now what should I say?" Or do we just go to her, and on the spur of the moment, without planning, without preconceived notions of what would be appropriate to say, and just be there with her?

When we hear of an injustice, do we stop and discern, "Now, what should be my response?" Or do we just speak out with a fervor that eclipses our fear?

Discernment is an important element in our tradition. We value the opportunity to reflect, to discuss, to pray over a matter that requires our attention. But when we come face-to-face with death, with experiences of loss, the moment of decision has arrived. To be passionate about life or not; to be passionate about those we love or indifferent to their pain. That is our choice.

Remember, the worst thing in life is not hate. The worst thing in life is indifference.

Taking Leave

Which brings us to the tomb where the women have gone to pay their respects. The stone is rolled in place. Death is trapped inside and they are left to mourn the loss of the one they loved.

Yet, even as they stand on this holy ground, there is a groaning, a moaning, a rumbling beneath the earth. The ground is moving

ever so slightly beneath their feet. The first waves of the explosion of love are beginning to be felt. The earthquake of eternal proportions which will shake loose forever the grip that death had on the world is beginning. Even as these women grieve.

They did not know what we now know: the stone would not be in place for long.

This is the hope that is found in the tomb. This is the promise that guides our journey through the pain. This is the passion that will heal earth's sorrow.

The birth pangs begin. The labor of love is on the way. The womb of the earth is about to give birth to eternal life for all.

This belief colors our lives and sometimes even our language. Once, flying back from California, I overheard a conversation between two people who were discussing a mutual friend. "John has been dead for seven years," one of them said. It struck me, what a wonderful way to talk about death. Like someone calls for a person you live with and you tell her, "No, she's not here right now. She's been gone for a couple hours but I expect her back anytime." That was the tone in this man's voice. "John has been dead for seven years." If he would have said, "John died seven years ago," or "John's dead," there a finality in those sentences. But by saying, "John's been dead," one can almost hear the next phrase, "But I expect him back anytime."

"He's been dead" implies a temporary condition and so conveys a belief in the resurrection. Even though John's been gone, he's coming back!

The would-be king has been dead for almost a day. But we hear the groaning; we sense the earth moving below us. It's only a matter of time. So we watch filled with wonder; we wait filled with expectation; we mourn filled with memories; we weep filled with the faith that soon all our tears will be wiped away.

That is why there is promise in the pain.

That is why there is passion in the hearts of those who believe.

That is why there is life in the womb of the earth.

That is why there is hope in the tomb of the dead.

For Reflection**Scripture: Mark 15:42-47**

Remember a time when you had lost all hope. Get in touch with the feeling. Who or what helped to revive hope in you?

When have you offered hope to a friend recently?

Denial often steals hope from us. What are you denying in your life? Has someone else's denial of a dream ever robbed you of hope?

When has love for another burned a hole in your heart? Who do you love passionately?

What issues are met with indifference by you?

How has your belief in Jesus called you to take risks?

*Day Seven: Early Evening***TASTE THE TEARS**

The waiting seems endless. The minutes struggle to become hours and the hours hold us hostage. We wonder if our watches have stopped. Has time stood still? It has to be later than it is.

When we grieve, time doesn't fly, it stalls. Time becomes stuck in the mud caused by our tears.

When my brother died, the wake began at noon and went until 8:00 p.m. An eight hour day. The longest eight hours I have ever worked in my life. And grieving is hard work. I suppose the reason behind such a long period of visitation was to give everyone a chance to stop by and pay his or her respects. Though many friends and relatives of my family and brother stopped to offer us comfort, the minutes still mocked our mourning.

To help us pass the time, we tell stories about the one who died. That is what the young man's friends must have done the morning after his death. Remember Cana. Remember Bartimaeus. Remember the centurion and the sick servant. Remember Tabitha and Lazarus. Remember the stories.

The memories quench our thirst for awhile but soon we discover how parched we really are. As parched as he was as he hung from the cross. He whispers, barely able to get the words out. He's thirsty. Please, someone, give this condemned man something to drink. The soldiers smile slyly at each other and pour some vinegar on a rag, place it on a spear, and shove it in his mouth.

They laugh as Jesus turns his head and tries to spit out the bitter taste. But there's no saliva, only the sarcastic smell of vinegar and the aftertaste of anguish.

We have all had experiences that left a bitter taste in our mouths. We have all had dreams that have turned sour. We have all tasted tears.

The salty taste of tears.

We thirst for someone to taste them with us. To drink from the same cup of suffering. To share the sorrow.

But who is willing? When we know the milk of comfort has turned sour, who will be there to drink it with us.

On the cross, Jesus says, "I will." I will be there to drink from the cup that is so bitter you want to spit it out and wretch. Sorrow cannot stay down. It comes back up.

Jesus says, "When you can't swallow the bitterness of your lives, pass the cup to me."

Salty tears. Salt of the earth. Salt from the body. When we taste the tears, we recycle the salt and become for another the sweet wine of compassion.

We thirst for God when our mouths are dry and our throats are parched. When we have no vintage wine but only vinegar to drink, we can swallow and it stays down because Jesus stayed on the cross and drank from the same cup.

To be pilgrims of the blood of Christ means we are willing to taste the tears of another.

The Kiss Of Life

Each of us has encountered this paschal mystery in our lives. We may have learned it in the fidelity of our parents or grandparents; in our family or from our friends. We may have experienced it in the forgiveness of an injury. It might have come to us in the silence of prayer or in the joyful noise of a crowd. We may have seen it in the faces of the poor or in the eyes of a starving child. We may have heard it in the words of an orator or the melody of a favorite song that brings back powerful memories. We may have welcomed it in the kindness of a stranger or the warm embrace of a forgotten friend.

But however it comes, when it comes, we know we will never be the same again. This is the moment of our conversion.

For me, one of those moments came in the love of a wife saying goodbye to her husband.

Since his retirement as a coal miner and farmer, Joe kept a small garden and tended to the flowers that guarded the small house where he and his wife Julia had moved when they left the farm. Joe's calloused and coal-stained hands could not camouflage

the green thumb he possessed in helping mother earth give birth to beauty and bounty.

Shortly after Christmas of the first year I was in the parish, Joe was told he had liver cancer. It would not be long, the doctors told Julia. "There is nothing we can do except try to make him comfortable."

Joe stayed at home rather than spending his final few weeks in the hospital. Julia, a nurse's aide for many years, took care of him and nurses would come to the house to give him shots to ease the pain.

The first few times I brought him communion, he was dressed and sitting on the sofa. The talk was always casual, colored by memories of the many years that he and Julia lived on the farm. Though the thought of death lingered in the back of our minds, it only forced its way into our conversation every now and then. And always in the context of Joe's gratitude for the gift of another day to remember.

In early February, Joe and Julia celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Since Joe was too weak to get out of the house, we celebrated Eucharist in their home. The family crowded into their small home and surrounded by their children and grandchildren, Joe and Julia renewed the promise of love they made fifty years before.

This would be the last time Joe would get dressed and sit on the sofa. It was as if he held out long enough to celebrate one more time in the company of his family. But the cancer was progressing rapidly.

Less than three weeks later, I was walking across the parking lot at the church when the parish secretary came running out of the rectory and shouted, "Julia just called. It's time."

When I arrived at their home, I was trembling with a sense of dread that accompanies one about to meet death face-to-face. But that fear quickly disappeared as I entered the room where Joe lay dying. Julia was at his side, clutching his hand. After the customary prayers for the dying, we joined hands and prayed the Our Father. I remembered how often Joe would cry in those weeks before when we prayed that prayer together. And how often people who are sick or dying cry when they recite those familiar words we so often say

without notice. But this time Joe's eyes were closed and his lips still. I am convinced, though, his ears heard every word.

I traced the sign of the cross on Joe's forehead and invited Julia and the children gathered around their father's bed to do the same. Joe entered the world marked with the sign of our faith, the sign of the cross; and now he would leave with that sign etched upon his mind, his memory, his body.

After signing Joe with the cross, Julia leaned over and whispered in his ear, "I'll be with you soon, Joe." Then she kissed him.

With that promise planted in his heart and sealed upon his lips, Joe died.

Letting go of someone we love is the hardest thing we have to do in life. Our willingness to participate in this sacrament of taking leave depends to a large degree on the depth of our belief in the life and words of the one who says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though that one should die, will come to life."

When Jesus whispered, "It is finished," on that cloudy, gloomy, Friday afternoon, he underscored our belief that we are not meant for death but for life. Those three words echo the conviction that my work here is done, my ministry complete, my commitments kept. But now, it is time. Time to move on to the realm beyond our mortal reach where life is endless and joy is boundless and all tears are wiped away.

Julia believed this with every fiber of her faith. She was willing to let her husband go. There were tears to be sure but the tears seemed to wash away the pain of Joe's last few months of suffering and filled Julia and her children with a profound sense of joy and hope.

This is our faith. It is not a fragile faith but one that allowed Julia to kiss Joe goodbye knowing that someday they would meet again. Not a fragile faith, but one that frees us to love under the heaviest burdens; frees us to hope even in the depths of despair; frees us to live even in the face of death.

Joe died ten years ago. I moved from that parish nine years ago. But whenever I went back to visit, I would stop and see Julia. Especially in the Spring, I would see the flowers still blooming in the garden that guarded Julia's home. They continued to remind her of Joe's tender touch. As the winter faded and the sun warmed

the womb of mother earth, the flowers rose from their sleep and burst into colors that sung, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Less than a year ago, I received word that Julia had died. Fortunately, I was able to return for her funeral and celebrate the promise she made to Joe nine years before: "I'll see you soon, Joe." It took nine years, but Julia kept her promise. And what a reunion it must have been.

Witness To The Resurrection

One afternoon when I was serving as a deacon at St. Francis Xavier parish in St. Joseph, Missouri, George Knapp, a friend, parishioner, and Companion, said, "I hope you're not busy because there's someone I want you to meet." George said this in such a persuasive tone that I went with him immediately.

He took me to see an old friend of his, Don Guinn. George and Don had played basketball together on the Central High School championship team in the 1930s. After high school, they lost track of one another. Only a few years before had they caught up with each other again.

At the time I met Don the most remarkable thing about him was that he was alive. Three years before, Don was a handsome, silver-haired contractor. But then the doctors diagnosed the cancer. Since then, he had been engaged in a violent struggle with death. His wife, Winnie, told me she had stopped counting the number of operations or complications he had gone through; or the number of times the doctors told her that Don would not last through the night. But that afternoon in the fall of 1981 when I met him for the first time, Don Guinn was very much alive.

He communicated by means of a pencil and erasable slate. He had a tube in his throat and one in his stomach. Bandages hid the scars on his neck but the marks from the surgery on his skull were visible signs of his struggle. Winnie told me that one time the doctors had operated and wondered if Don would allow some medical students to come in to see him and observe the results of the delicate procedure. By that time, Don had survived so many surgeries that the doctors used him as an exhibit of what modern medicine can do. When the doctors asked Don's permission, he smiled and wrote on his slate, "Sure, just make sure my hair is combed."

The impact of the hour or so I spent with Don that afternoon, from the firm handshake at the door until the note he wrote about praying for me as I left, was that I had spent time with someone who believed deeply in the resurrection. This man, medically speaking, should have been dead long ago. But in his dying, he became a powerful witness to the resurrection. He lived to shake hands with the unbeliever in me; to remember with a friend a basketball game played forty years ago; to patiently allow wide-eyed medical students to peer into his eyes and ask, "How can you still be alive?". This simple, wounded man startled me into wondering, "Do I believe in the resurrection?"

Don Guinn had surrendered his spirit into the hands of God. He embodied the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He had tasted death — his once strong body cut open again and again as his organs were ravaged by disease. He was frail. He could not speak. But his silence spoke with the force of an empty tomb.

The last words of Jesus on the cross were these: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." The last words of Jesus become our first words. As servants of the blood, we commend our lives, our spirit, into the hands of a loving God. As servants of the blood, we experience safety and security in those hands, knowing that nothing, not even death, can separate us from God. As servants of the blood, we listen to those in our midst whose silence shout with the force of an empty tomb.

Less than a year after that first encounter with Don Guinn, I was passing through St. Joe again, going from Kansas City to Chicago where I was studying at the time. I stopped by to see him in the hospital and he wrote on his slate that he was going home the next day. Both he and Winnie knew he was going home to die.

When I returned to Chicago, I received a letter from George. He told me that Don had died the day after he returned home. He had spent one last afternoon sitting out on the patio in the back of the house, soaking in the warm, spring sun. He went inside to take a nap and breathed his last.

In The Garden Again

Standing in the cemetery, grieving in the garden, we remember the stories and they remind us how much he taught us, how much he loved us. But one story keeps coming back. The memory of

Bethany. We were there that day when Jesus went to comfort Mary and Martha at the death of their brother Lazarus. We saw his tears and knew that Lazarus was a very dear friend. As we do now, we know what he was going through as he tried to imagine what life would be like without Lazarus. What will our life be like without Jesus?

That was some day! We smile at the memory of what finally happened. Of how old Lazarus, bound like a mummy, came shuffling out of that tomb! What we forget, though, and what we remember now, is the thoughts we had when Jesus suggested to the mourners to "take the stone away." In the chaos and confusion that death inflicts, we thought Jesus was simply lost in grief. But he was serious. Not dead serious but serious about life. What occurred to us then was that it not only took physical strength to move the stone, it took courage. It would have been much safer to leave the stone in place. To leave the stench and decay of death imprisoned in the tomb. But then we remember what he said then, "Did I not assure you that if you believed in me, you would see the glory of God?"

So now we want to shout, "We believe! Take this stone away! Show us your glory again! You did it for Lazarus! Now do it for yourself! Do it for us! Roll this stone away!"

Somewhere deep in our souls, we hear, "I will. Just be patient. Just believe a little longer. It will happen, you know. You'll see. Just believe. I will roll this stone away. I will!"

"We will," we whisper softly as we taste the new tears. "We will believe. We will."

The Gardener

Mary and the women have reached the cemetery. They have the myrrh to anoint the body of their friend. As they wander aimlessly through the graveyard they say nothing but remember everything.

When they reach the tomb, they think, "There's been a mistake." The tomb is empty. But this is where they told us he was buried! Where's the body? Their first thought is that someone has stolen the body. The groundskeeper is nearby and Mark goes to him and asks if this is where Jesus of Nazareth is buried. He says it is.

"The body is gone!" Mary screams. "Do something!"

But the man acts as if he doesn't hear her and continues to weed the flower garden.

"Are you just going to stoop there with those stupid flowers? This man's body is gone! Aren't you going to find out what happened to it?"

The gardener smiles. "Why are you so upset at finding an empty tomb?"

"Why shouldn't I be upset?" Mary cries. "This man was just buried and now his body is gone and no one seems to care!"

"By coming here you must have loved him very much," the gardener says. There is tenderness in his voice and sympathy in his eyes.

"Of course I loved him! He was, well, he was the Messiah! Didn't you see what happened after he died? I was there. I saw the storm. I felt the earth shake under my feet. This man was not just a prophet; he was God!"

The gardener looks at Mary and says, "Then I must ask again, why are you so upset at finding an empty tomb?"

But Mary doesn't understand. She thinks this gardener is some kind of lunatic. She even wonders if he had something to do with the disappearance of the body. She is furious but she doesn't know where to turn. She thinks about going back to the apartment where the others are hiding. She has never felt so lost, so frightened, so alone.

And then the gardener says, "Mary."

Her eyes are opened by the sound of his voice and the call of her name. Now she knows what the gardener had been trying to tell her. Stop looking for the Messiah inside stone walls and empty tombs, for if you do you will miss him.

Look instead into the eyes of the gardener.

For Reflection

Scripture: John 20: 1-18

When has grief held you hostage? Who helped to free you from the prison of pain?

In the silent space of your prayer this night, hold the tears of those who have no one to cry with them tonight. Taste their tears as best you can.

Who have been "witnesses to the resurrection" for you? Those people whose lives shouted with the force of an empty tomb. Reflect on their stories and tell them to a friend.

Visit the grave of a loved one.

By way of meditation, look into the eyes of the gardener and hear him call your name.

DANCING ON THE GRAVE

It is morning. The long night of waiting and watching, mourning and remembering is over. The dawn has finally broken the gloom and shattered the darkness of our despair. This is the moment we have been waiting for the longest time. Now our pilgrimage of pain makes sense for we finally see it in the light of the promise.

There is a scene from the television series, *Northern Exposure*, that reflects what we feel this morning. Ed, the town's film buff, is concerned that Ruth Anne, the aging shopkeeper, is falling apart before his eyes. Her approaching birthday marks this physical depreciation and Ed wants to give her a gift to cheer her up. So, he asks the town's DJ, Chris, what he should give Ruth Anne for her birthday. Chris suggested a gift that "keeps on giving."

At the surprise birthday party Ed plans in her honor, he gives Ruth Anne a jar full of dirt. The next day, he takes her to the top of a mountain. When she asks why he brought her here, Ed tells her that this is her gift. Ruth Anne likes the scenery but doesn't understand. So Ed explains that he bought her a small patch of land where she could be buried. A gift that keeps on giving.

And Ruth Anne, touched not troubled by Ed's generous if ghoulish gift, says, "You know what I'd like to do now? I'd like to dance." So, as the camera pans the panoramic vista, we see Ruth Anne and Ed dancing on her grave.

This is the day Jesus dances on the graves of all who have fallen asleep and invites us to come and join in the dance. He dances on the graves where we have buried all of our pain, our prejudice, our pride, and invites us to experience the joy, peace, and the humility that frees us to kick up our heels before our God. He dances on the graves where we have buried our fears, frustrations, and resentments, and breathes new courage, patience, and hope into our tired and aching bodies.

This is the end — and the beginning — of our pilgrimage.

A few years ago I spent Holy Week in retreat with a group of Adorers of the Blood of Christ from Columbia, PA, and Ruma, IL. At the end of the retreat, after the Easter Vigil, an 83-year-old sister who taught polka for sixty years, grabbed me by the hand and said, "Come on, Father, let's dance!" She led me to the center of the room and we danced to the "Beer Barrel Polka." I could not have imagined a better way to celebrate the resurrection.

Our experience this morning leads us out of ourselves and into the heart of God. Easter exposes us to the timeless truth that the tomb is empty and we are free. Like the disciples who race to the tomb not knowing what to think or what to believe, we too might have our doubts and allow fear to imprison us. But seeing "the linen wrappings on the ground and the piece of cloth which had covered his head not lying with the wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself," we also believe what the youngest one believed — the one who arrived at the tomb first: that the dance of life has begun.

Like A Rolling Stone

Reaching this moment of dangerous delight is not without its practical considerations, however. For example, I wonder if Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James — and the other women who were with them that day at dawn — had figured out how they were going to move the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb? This was no small stone but a massive rock that shouted, "I shall not be moved!"

I'm glad they did not bring the men along to help them. Men tend to believe more in muscle than imagination to move inanimate objects, people, even nations.

But God had already taken care of this not-so-small matter of the unmovable stone. The earthquake just before dawn had taken care of that. The explosion of life from within the womb of earth had blasted and smashed that stone to smithereens. The stone had crumbled under the force of God's new principle: life is more powerful than death.

As pilgrims who have arrived at this promised land of life, our euphoria does not distract us from the fact that there will be more stones along the way. Stones of regret that all of our dreams have not come true; all of our hopes have not been realized; all of our

friendships have not flowered. Stones of resentment that some hurts still weight heavily on our hearts; critical words still stay stuck in our memory; and words of affirmation left unspoken at time of accomplishment. And there are still, of course, the stones of fear that block our path at times: fear that as age imprisons our bones, we are not as productive as we once were; fear that our spirits will sag as we try to keep up with the changes caused by this Easter explosion; fear that our hearts will grow cold with compromise, chilled by the lack of conviction.

Sarah's Stone

Her daughter came to me worried that her mom, Sarah, was becoming a recluse. "After dad ran off with another woman, mom has no energy to do anything," she said. The daughter had tried to take her mom out to lunch, shopping, visiting some of her old friends. She often brought the grandchildren over to spend a couple of hours with their grandmother. She even planned a surprise birthday party for her mother but Sarah spent most of the day sitting on the couch, smiling slightly, but watching the clock that would signal the end of the party and allow her to retreat again to the safety of her silent tomb.

The daughter had tried with all her might to lift Sarah's stone, but the stone was too heavy and she asked me to give her a hand. "Just go visit her," she said. "Mom always liked you."

Sarah was gracious and warm. She welcomed me as if she had been expecting me. She looked pale and worn, not as I had remembered her when I knew her a few years before. Then she was married to Larry and both were very active in the church. Now Larry was married to another woman and Sarah was alone.

I could not lift the stone either. But as we talked about her hurt; as she shared with me her pain, I could sense just the slightest stream of light coming through the cracks of her tomb. And I thought when I left, that as long as there is a crack between the stone and the tomb, light can seep in. That as long as there are stories to tell, the seeds of love can grow. That as long as there are people like her daughter willing to take the risk to enter Sarah's chamber of sorrow, there is hope. And that one day that stone which blocks Sarah's view will crumble under the weight of such love.

Resurrection Dawns

Our pilgrimage continues when we overcome our fear and instead of keeping our hands to ourselves, take the risk to reach out to another with care. Our pilgrimage continues when instead of keeping our distance we dance to the drumbeat of the Great Spirit's breath. Our pilgrimage continues when we feel the passion not to be imprisoned in impossibility but believe instead in God's power to turn the darkness into dawn.

There are many stories of how this happens along our pilgrim's way. Take Dave, for instance. He started drinking in high school because there was nothing else to do on Friday and Saturday nights in the small town where he grew up. In the beginning, his drinking was reserved for weekends, but as the years went by he drank to pass the hours he was alone; he drank when he was together with friends; he drank when he was nervous and needed to relax; he drank when he was sad and needed to be cheered up; he drank when he was afraid.

But the most frightening moment came when Dave stood up in the crowd of strangers and with trembling voice said the words he was too afraid to ever admit: "My name is Dave and I am an alcoholic."

The stone was rolled away and resurrection dawned.

Keith and Karen had become accustomed to the idle chatter at the dinner table. Both were aware that it distracted them from the hurt and death inside. The silence was now unsettling, not like it was in the early days of their marriage when the quiet defined their intimacy. What happened since then was not clear. Too busy, too mired in debt, too focused on the children, too tired to allow their love to grow. Both knew it was only a matter of time before the divorce decree became the death certificate for their marriage.

Then one night, Karen reached across the table and touched Keith's hand. He looked up from the meatloaf and mashed potatoes and saw the sadness in her eyes. The children were still as Karen's eyes began to brighten and she said softly, "Keith, I love you."

With those words, the stone started rolling and resurrection dawning.

"It could be any time now," the doctor told Barbara as she caressed the forehead of Bob, her dying husband. As she looked at him there, she thought back to the once strong body and handsome

face that first attracted her to him only a few years before. But now, though only 31, his body was a shell of brittle bones. With painful effort, Bob opened his eyes and with his gaze he directed Barbara to open the drawer on the table nearby. There was an envelope and in it was a small sheet of hospital stationary.

As Barbara read the words scrawled on the paper, the stone was being rolled away. She bent low to touch his head. His eyes blazed like a furnace, and on his lips their love, for this moment and all time, was sealed. Resurrection dawned.

Threatened By Resurrection

Passionate pilgrims of the Precious Blood believe so deeply in this resurrection energy that it grows and groans and must be released in our relationships with others so that we truly are people of life who absolutely and unconditionally refuse to give in to the powers of death.

The question the angels ask the women at the tomb becomes the question that guides our nights and guards our days: "Why do you search for the Living One among the dead." When we always seek out the life in the most deadly experiences we encounter in community, in self, in society, in the world, we will see how the nights seem so short that the dawn always seems late. We will nurture friendships so rare that love seems ever new and joy so contagious that everyone we touch will be infected.

Living as passionate pilgrims of the Precious Blood means we are no longer threatened by the forces of death. No, now we are threatened by life. At the concluding prayer service of our Precious Blood retreat in Guatemala, one of the sisters read a reflection on the theme, "threatened by the resurrection." That phrase certainly summed up well the ten days in October we spent on retreat in Guatemala. At every turn, we were threatened by the sounds and sights and smells and tastes of Guatemala and her people. Threatened to believe in life. Threatened to embrace the reality of the blood. Threatened to profess our faith in a God and a people for whom hope is eternal.

"Threatened by the resurrection" describes our on-going pilgrimage as Precious Blood women and men. We are threatened to believe in news too good to be true; a story so remarkable that the

men could not believe the women's story about the empty tomb and "refused to believe them because it seemed like nonsense."

No, this is not nonsense but Godsense. This is the sense to believe in life, not death. That is what we are threatened with as pilgrims of the Precious Blood. Threatened to believe in miracles no matter how small and people no matter how difficult they are. Resurrection threatens us to enjoy each new beginning, new idea, new dream and refuse to cling to past mistakes, old routines, and dusty dreams. Resurrection threatens us to keep loving in the losses that pile up in us and around us because one day we know will be found again.

The resurrection of Jesus threatens us to listen for small explosions of love and large tremors of tenderness in our relationships with one another.

Most of all, the resurrection threatens us to experience joy. God's joy. An explosion of joy that caused the earth to quake, the ground to rumble, and the large stone to crumble. For this day, God laughed so hard that the earth shook. God smiled so broadly the sky could not contain it. God clapped so loudly that the trees took a bow, the flowers stood up, and the rocks rolled in the aisle.

We share this joy of God because the joke is on the forces of evil which think that death can be victorious. Admittedly, for a long time on our journey, it appeared they might be right. But not anymore. Not for another day. Because God had the last laugh and we are threatened to believe that the laughter will last forever.

So, step out of the worn shoes we've been wearing these last eight days and put on some dancing shoes. For Jesus, his wounds still fresh, reaches out a hand and says, "May I have this dance?" And dance we will, wounds and all, until we finally arrive at our final destination: at home the heart of God.

For Reflection

Scripture: Mark 16: 1-8

Where do you need resurrection in your life? What stones are in place that keep you imprisoned in a tomb?

Name some people in your life for whom the tomb is very dark and the stone too heavy to move. Find the courage today to visit one of these people. Spend time listening to them.

Remember a time when another has come to you and brought a little light into the darkness of your tomb.

Remember those who have journeyed with you on this pilgrimage of pain and promise. Those who have accompanied you into the very heart of God. Let the fire of your faith touch them in prayer.

How are you threatened by the resurrection?

Where do you go from here? Where do we go — as a family, a religious community, a parish, a church?

Close this book and join the dance of life. Dance into the very heart of God.