

## Where the Blood Leads Us

When we reflect on how to live out our charism in the future, we must begin with the world in which we live and then see how our charism speaks to that world, rather than the other way around. Thus, we do not seek to fit the world into Precious Blood spirituality, but rather we ask what faithful and prophetic word a Precious Blood spirituality can speak to the world as we understand it. This, it seems to me, has to be an ongoing task of our discernment. It will mean that how our charism is enacted will differ from time to time and place to place. Rather than seeing this as a fracturing of our spirituality, it should be understood as a potential enrichment. Think, for example, what the prophetic witness of our sisters and brothers in Latin America and in Liberia has meant to how we have come to understand our vocation and spirituality here in North America! Or what the ministry of reparation the Carmel of the Precious Blood in Dachau has taught us about the mystery of Christ's blood. A genuine charism is one that continues to unfold, meeting the challenges of each new time and place. And I deeply believe that our charism is one that can address the challenges that the dawning of the third millennium can offer us. Our challenge, then, is not a once-for-all determination of the meaning of our charism, but an on-going seeking of its message for the times and places in which we find ourselves.

I would like to suggest that the world into which we are now moving calls us to focus the resources of our charism in three ways. These three are: intensify our focus on building communities, engaging in a ministry of reconciliation, and celebrating the Eucharist in a renewed way.

We are called to intensify our focus on building communities because of the challenges to community in the near and future world, and because voices long excluded need to be heard and welcomed. Some of the threats to community have already been outlined: divisions between generations, between cultures within the same city or nation, the dysfunctional nature of some of our families. And we need to hear voices too often excluded: the voices of women long silenced or ignored, the newcomers who speak in accents unfamiliar to us, and those we pretend do not exist--gay men and women, the disabled.

But our task is more than welcoming. Among ourselves, too, we need to create communities that have vibrant identities. Here, perhaps we have the most to do in overcoming a 1960's mentality when the deconstruction of restrictive and dysfunctional communities (we didn't use those words then) was meant to clear the way for new forms of community. Have those new forms of community emerged? To what extent have we simply been carried along by the powerful forces of individualism of the culture? In the case of my own congregation, it is interesting to hear our Companions raise frequently the question about vision and identity. One way to read that it isn't clear to them what they are associating themselves with. And that might mean that, even though the three U.S. provinces are welcoming of Companions, they can't articulate an identity. The same may hold for prospective candidates looking to join our ranks as brothers and sisters. The intensive search for community that is likely to be part of our larger future is also a call to us to deepen our own sense of identity.

Secondly, we are being called to focus the resources of our charism by engaging in a ministry of reconciliation. In places like Liberia, Chile or Guatemala, what is needed is clear enough. Within our immediate context, that will involve reaching out to victims of abuse, those alienated from the Church, the victims of racism, and families rent apart by divorce and dispute. Reconciliation is a ministry that cannot be entered lightly, and at best we are but agents of God's reconciling work, 'ambassador's on Christ's behalf', as Paul puts it. But given the many ways the world is pulled apart, surely this is a ministry to which our charism calls us. It is a complex ministry: it involves learning to tell the truth in the midst of a tangle of lies. It involves listening and then listening again to the

stories of broken lives until those lives and those stories can be healed. It involves helping see how God is restoring what is broken or lost in someone's life.

Third, we must learn to celebrate the Eucharist in a renewed way. David Power, in a book published last year, says that, at the end of the twentieth century, we celebrate the Eucharist in the ruins -- the ruins of our optimistic visions of progress, in the ruins of holocaust and genocide, in the ruins of a collapsed world order. The Eucharist has always been the flash point for larger issues as well. Today that flash point involves the use and abuse of power within the Church and the exclusion of women from important forms of ministry.

How do we celebrate the Eucharist in a world of ruins, amid the intense search for community, amid the yawning divides in our world crying out for reconciliation? It involves remembrance of the sufferings and pain of our world -- explicit remembrance, so that those stories can be taken up in the story of the suffering of Christ. But it involves also prophetic remembrance, a remembrance that not only speaks of the past, but lets the past speak to the future and judge the present. If the celebration of the Eucharist is to intensify our communities, it must be a celebration of the whole community and not just the ministers presiding. And it must offer freely God's grace of reconciliation, a gift greater than any of us and beyond anything we can do.

To put it in a single phrase the challenge of the dawning of the third millennium for us, dedicated in service through the blood of Christ, is to make connections. We must make connections in a polarized and atomized world. We must make new connections where the false connections of abuse, addiction, racism and oppression now prevail. And we must make connections by being agents of God's reconciliation. We make connections when we struggle to speak the truth. We make connections when we celebrate how the story of God's redeeming work in Christ continues to redeem our world today.

To do all of this faithfully and effectively, we need to engage the resources of our spirituality. In order to build community, we look again to the blood of the Covenant. What does covenant mean in our time of temporary connections, of short-term commitment, of voluntaristic association? What kind of covenant is worth dying for to bring about, as did Christ? What are the markers that define the circle of covenant? We have much to think about in understanding covenant, and how the blood of Christ draws the line around it, a line of suffering, commitment and passion.

How might we become agents of reconciliation? How might we learn to tell the truth in the midst of so many lies? How can we embrace the anguish of those overcoming the terror of those lies and the pain they have inflicted? How can we point to God's grace welling up in the midst of a broken life and calling it to a new wholeness? How do we learn to 'plead with Christ's blood before God,' as is pictured in the Letter to the Hebrews? How do we bring those once far off near through the Blood of Christ? Again, our challenge is to search that rich spirituality of reconciliation for answers.

All of this shows itself as we celebrate the Eucharist, as we enact that great offering once again. Especially as we offer that cup of suffering and salvation to one another, and as we accept the challenges it offers us, how deeply we are committed to covenant, how well we serve as agents of reconciliation, will become apparent. We must not drink it to our condemnation, as the Apostle reminds us, but to our salvation.

Making connections in a world of bad connections and no connections at all. The challenge to us is clear enough. The resources given us in a spirituality of the blood of Christ are powerful. The

work that lies ahead of us is daunting. But for the world to be reconciled in Christ, for it to become that New Jerusalem, we must do our part in the up building of God's holy Reign.

The millennium will soon be upon us. The challenges it brings are already in our midst. Christ hangs there crucified, in the ruins, 'outside the gates,' as the Letter to the Hebrews has it. We can only but echo Hebrew's response: 'therefore let us go out to meet him, and bear the insult he bore.'

*(Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S. from an Address at the Second Precious Blood Congress, St. Louis, Missouri, August 2-5, 1993)*