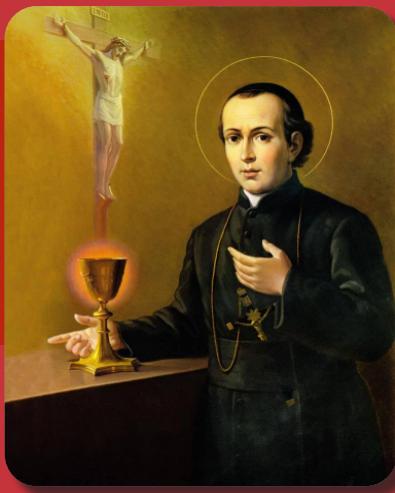


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THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY



**HE WAS TEMPTED IN EVERY WAY WE ARE,
YET WITHOUT SIN. (HEBREWS 4:15)**



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EDITORIAL

IT

seems that no sooner does the Christmas season end than Lent is upon us before you know it. This year, we had fewer than six weeks in that interval to prepare for the paschal season of Lent's Forty Days, followed by Easter's Fifty—with the Sacred Triduum in-between. Over these three months, from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, we will be occupied with the rhythms of fasting and feasting, mourning and joy, desert-dwelling where we face our sins and temptations to a dew-laden garden tomb where we will discover with the holy women Life's victory over death.



The offerings in this issue invite you to stop at key moments along this journey and reflect on their meaning, and on the ways in which we share in the Mystery of Christ through our own analogous experiences.

May the authors who have so generously contributed their wise reflections accompany you during this time of grace and renewal.

FR. JOHN COLACINO C.PP.S.

Lent: More Than Just Denying Self

Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman C.P.P.S



name Lent as their preferred liturgical season. Perhaps one reason is that Lent is often, in our understanding and our practice, restricted to being just a time of self-denial, of penance, of “giving up.” And certainly Lent is about more than better eating habits and losing weight! None of these things is very appealing in itself, is it? So is there more to Lent than this? Absolutely!

In one sense, what we do during Lent is not nearly so important as what is to happen to us during Lent. This season is given to us by the Church as a time of focused conversion. In this context, “conversion” does not mean to “convert” from one faith tradition to another (how we often think of it), but rather its meaning for Lent derives from its word origin meaning “a turning around” (Latin: *conversio*). During Lent we do whatever we need to do to turn our life around, to become more fully committed to Christ and living his Gospel message, to eliminating any behaviors that weaken our relationship with God and others. Lent is the Church’s season of inviting us to change ourselves for the good. It is a

If we were to survey Mass participants about their favorite time of year, few—if any—would

time to examine how well we have answered our baptismal call to hear God’s Word and to live the Gospel fully. Yes, Lent is so much more than merely self-denial. It is a season of discovery, of testing, of challenge, of encounter, of change. Actually, Lent is a full, stirring, bountiful liturgical season involving our whole being and our relationship with God, self, and others.

TAKING CONVERSION SERIOUSLY

Conversion is about growing in good ways, about change, about establishing new and helpful habits concerning our relationships with God, self, and each other. So, when Easter dawns, we don’t just drop our Lenten practices and get on with life as if these special days hadn’t even happened. Hopefully, our Lenten practices have stimulated good, lasting habits in us which help us not only to celebrate Easter with its promise of new Life with much more joy, but also to live the Easter mystery as we journey with Christ throughout the rest of the year. In fact, one of the measures of how well we keep Lent is how joyful our Easter celebration is. Why? Because as we grow in good habits, we grow in love of others. And love is life lived to the fullest.

What motivates us for keeping Lent as a time of conversion is to stay focused on the Paschal Mystery celebrated so sublimely at Easter. Our need for conversion reminds us that initiation into Christ’s Life at Baptism begins a lifelong journey. At Baptism we are plunged (the root meaning of “baptism”) into the waters in which the old self dies and we are raised

to new Life in Christ. We are grafted onto Christ and his life of love and service. But this doesn't happen simply in one fell swoop. We are a pilgrim people, a people on a journey, a people with a clear life goal. Alone, living the life, death, and Resurrection of Christ—that is, the Paschal Mystery—would be daunting. But because of the initiation sacraments, we are never alone. We are incorporated into the Body of Christ, a community of love, and we journey together with others who share the same eternal goal.

These initiation sacraments draw us into Christ and identify us with Christ and his life and saving mission. So our lifelong journey of living the Gospel more perfectly is a matter of growing ever more perfectly into the way of life that Jesus lived and modeled so beautifully for us. At the heart of Gospel living is love—not love as all too many identify it as self-satisfying and turned toward self, but a love so open as to invite not only from each of us, but from all those we meet in our everyday lives a love that is self-giving and renewing for ourselves and for others. This kind of love is self-giving made visible. When Jesus commanded us to love as he loved (see, for example, Jn 15:12), he was also commanding us to live as he lived and to give as he gave—selflessly and without counting the cost. For us human beings with free will, this kind of living doesn't come automatically. We need to work at it. Lent is our spiritual work time.

LENT'S THREE AREAS OF CONVERSION

The Gospel for Ash Wednesday calls us to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (see Mt 6:1-6, 16-18). These three Lenten practices address the three relationships of our lives: prayer, our relationship with God, drawing us to focus on God as the very center of our life; fasting, our relationship with ourselves, cultivating the self-discipline that enables us to change and grow; and almsgiving, our relationship with

others, strengthening our bonds as members of the Body of Christ. When these three relationships are in balance, we find our lives are filled with joy and peace.

The nature of relationships is that they are dynamic, not static. Either they are deepening, or they are weakening. If we want our relationships to deepen, we must work at them. We must encounter the other, listen to the other, reach out to the other, care for the other, love the other in deep and life-giving ways. We deepen our relationship with God by deepening our prayer life. Prayer is nothing less than an encounter with God. Whether it's liturgical prayer or devotional prayer, the point to prayer is encounter. We open ourselves to God and let God speak to us in the depths of our heart and nourish us. We deepen our relationship to ourselves by fasting. Fasting is an act of self-denial. It teaches us to control our impulses and free ourselves to love as Jesus did. Rather than focusing on ourselves and our own wants and needs, fasting reminds us to forget self and reach out to others. We deepen our relationship to others by almsgiving. While contributing money to various charities is important, almsgiving asks of us much more than that. It invites us to a personal encounter with others which can take many forms. Almsgiving can include, for example, visiting the sick and imprisoned, listening to someone deeply with the heart, responding to an apparent need of another without being asked.

Lent is a favorable time to choose one practice in each of these three areas of relationships with God, with ourselves, and with others—that can help us form new habits of encounter. The practices we adopt do not need to be big, obvious, or time-consuming. They need to change us into being more Christ-like, even in the smallest of ways.

HOW MIGHT WE KEEP LENT?

We can live a more Christ-like life if we take on just one Lenten practice in each of these three relational areas that helps us live the Gospel more fully. And this doesn't necessarily mean "giving up" something.

Perhaps this Lent we might choose to take a few verses each day from Mark's gospel (the shortest one!) and read and pray them (a practice called *lectio divina*, or divine reading), so that by Easter we've read/prayed the whole gospel through. Perhaps we might spend a few more minutes each day in other kinds of prayer. If we find ourselves over-committed, we might take a few minutes each day to be by ourselves in silence to put our priorities in order. We might make a phone call once a week to encourage someone who is ill or homebound, or just to listen to them and help them experience the inherent dignity that is theirs simply because they are created in the image of God. These are all positive acts leading us to reach out to God, self, and others, guiding us to choose conversion. And when Lent is over, we choose not just to drop our three practices. Hopefully, we have formed three new and good habits of daily living that continue on our journey with Christ and each other.

Lent is such a positive, grace-filled time! Let's make the most of it! Let's not observe Lent counting days until the end. Let's make Lent an encounter season in our lives, during which we grow deeper in our relationships and love of all those we encounter in our daily living.

Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, C.P.P.S., a Sister of the Precious Blood founded by Mother Maria Anna Brunner, serves as Director of the Institute for Liturgical Ministry in Dayton, Ohio.

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PARADE ROOT

Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian

Some may remember an old American song, *I Love A Parade...* the tramping of feet, a line of cadets, or any brigade. Large or small, secular or liturgical, ritual processions can be wonderfully exciting or deeply moving. They may honor public service and sacrifice, guide us in remembrance, direct our focus, or celebrate shared values or national pride.

Processions can move us. They hold power...

...but are sometimes staged to display power—to brandish military force, install new leaders, or rally a people into unity (that is, to intimidate them into silence or compliance). For example, in the magnificent story of Palm Sunday, we witness such a display of power in first-century Jerusalem. Every year at the time of Passover, the Roman governor would ride his tall, strong horse into the city, leading armed soldiers in a military parade through the huge crowds present from their annual pilgrimage to the temple.

But the timing was about more than the guaranteed large audience. Remember what Passover commemorates—the triumph of the Israelites over their oppressor (Pharaoh). Clearly, those in power did not ever want a repeat of that Passover. Imagine if the people were

actually inspired by their own history, daring to believe that they, too, might rise up and break free. And so, the army would be marched in full view, to “inspire” the people into submission.

But on that first-century day, the governor, Pontius Pilate, was in for a surprise: His would not be the only parade in town, as another one was taking shape...

...with Jesus himself the event planner and master of ceremonies.

Knowing full well that tidy ranks of imperial soldiers will enter the city as usual from the west, he will lead an untidy mix of folk from the east—pilgrims from all places and those from all walks of life, including the poor, the oppressed, and the voiceless. As the Governor enters Jerusalem on his powerful horse, Jesus is inspired by the scripture he learned growing up—he will enter the city on the back of a donkey—a beast of burden.

Just as Jesus imagined and choreographed it, these two campaigns will process directly toward one another and collide head-to-head in the very heart of the holy city.

A cosmic political drama, generations in the making, is about to unfold between the Empire of Man and the Kingdom of God.



As the soldiers brandish their weapons and shout, "Hail, Caesar," the people raise palms and cry "Hosanna"—save us, deliver us—to Jesus.

And deliver them he will.

Without a word of violence in his mouth or a weapon in his hand, Jesus will reframe the military command "Stay in line!" into the divine commandment "Walk in love."

Every year on Palm Sunday, we commemorate the dramatic, brilliantly conceived, final entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. We will raise our palms to honor his procession of hope and peace, and to remember those human cries for justice and the longing for salvation.

But we must take care not merely to "play church" when we re-enact this iconic scene, rather than engage the timeless reality of this story and what it conveys—that the two processions from that first-century day are the same two processions in our world today—the Empire of Man versus the Kingdom of God...

...as the Gospel is not merely a quaint document, frozen in history, irrelevant in our own time. Just pick any place on the world map—close to home or far away—and consider today's news—the suffering of innocents, the horrors of genocide, the whimpers of frightened, hungry, sick, injured children, and the refusal of those in power to put the will of the people over party and position, even within a democracy. It is ever thus.

The parade of political corruption, personal greed, and indifference to human suffering marches in every place and time. That is not a question. The only question is this:

To which will we pledge our allegiance—the Empire of Man or the Kingdom of God?

As Christians, we know how we are called to answer. We made vows to follow Jesus in the Way of Justice, Mercy, and Peace. We have promised to endorse the Way of Love.

That is our parade route.

As for those who insist that the Christian walk is compatible with any other creed, with any personal behavior or political position that achieves its gains or pads its pockets at the cost of human suffering—well, let us dare to say it:

They are walking in that other parade. And no, we cannot have a foot in both.

In the events of Palm Sunday, Jesus himself has arranged for us to see this clearly and unmistakably, to see that we must repeatedly make choices in this life. By our every thought, word, and deed—personally, socially, and politically—we must decide each time with whom and for what we stand.

So, which will it be—the Empire of Man or the Kingdom of God? One says *Take*, the other, *Share*. One is greed; the other, service. One is fear; the other, love. One is fleeting; the other, eternal.

To which will we raise our palm branch? To whom will we shout, "Hosanna—save us"?

Which parade will we follow? Amen.

Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian serves as rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, NY. Her homily draws inspiration from "The Last Week" by Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan (2006).

Staying at the Table

Sr. Toni Longo ASC

Holy Thursday holds many things to reflect upon, many things to hold in our hearts. There are symbols everywhere: washing feet, bread and wine, sacred chants and ancient prayers of thanksgiving. Another we can reflect on is the Table. Everything that night revolved around the Table, so there must be some significance for our lives in this special place of gathering and familial sharing.

The table that night was festively decorated, heavy with all the prescribed food and drink. That night, Jesus and his disciples gathered for the sacred ritual that would take on its deepest meaning for the whole world. Jesus knew the significance and really wanted to celebrate this night with them: "Long have I desired to eat this meal with you." He longed to be with them, love them, and speak words that would change everything and call them to be more than they ever thought they could be.

They, on the other hand, gathered with all sorts of fears, questions, and desires in their heads. Who will be first in Jesus' Kingdom? Who will betray him? Who will be strong and stay with him no matter what? "Lord, you will never wash my feet!" "I will never deny you!" So, there were quarrels, whispers, insinuations, and true lack of understanding of the immensity of the night. They were in denial, they were afraid. They had heard and seen the religious leaders' disdain, anger, and downright hatred of Jesus. They were afraid for him and for themselves as his followers.

The Table heard it all and the Table held it all. Tables are used to that. Families gather around tables not only to eat together, but to discuss important matters, to share opinions that aren't always accepted. They gather to celebrate important occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, and weddings together. Tables are places where all are welcome and each voice is heard, where hopes are spoken and vulnerability is present and accepted, because each one comes as they are. We know what these tables feel like.

Sometimes, though, because each one comes as they are, things are said or left unsaid and others are hurt. Sometimes the food, though lovingly prepared, is left uneaten because of sorrow or grief. Sometimes the energy is explosive, angry, tense, and not conducive to good digestion. We have all been at tables such as these, also. It is difficult to stay at these tables.

That Passover night, there was truly a mixture of it all. And Jesus stayed at the Table. His great love for them, his desire to share his very self with them, kept him there. He washed the feet of ones who would deny, betray him, run away, and hide. He broke bread and shared the wine that was his very self, to show them how intimate he wanted their relationship with him to be. He wanted them to know that his desire was to live in them and that they live in him. They were to love as he loved: completely, fully, and forever.

They were being taught by example to stay at the table when things got rough. To remain, to talk things over, to try to understand, to allow differences, to welcome all to the table of their lives.

He was teaching us all of this, too. So, as we approach the Holy Thursday celebrations and, for that matter, every time we gather around a table in 2026, how will his teachings come alive in us? Will I welcome the other and invite them to share the table of their lives, just as they are, with me? Are there people I would rather not welcome at the table of our lives? What decision will we make as they knock at our door? How do we welcome and sit with the poor, the disadvantaged, the immigrant, the hungry, and the prisoner? What about persons with differing opinions, different theological or ideologies, sexual preferences or political persuasions? The list could go on and on... On the other hand, what keeps me at the table no matter who joins me there? Why do I stay? Is it to convince the other that my way is the right way? Or is it, as it was for Jesus, to share the love of his Father, not only in word, but in deed? What choice will I make as I come to the Table? How will the bread and wine shared around the Eucharistic Table and all the “normal, ordinary” tables, not only remind



us of what Jesus did that night, but be for us the strength we need to welcome all who come, to stay at the table, and love them to the end?

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The Forgotten Aspect of the Paschal Mystery

Fr. John Colacino C.P.P.S.

Despite its confession by the Creed since the Ninth Century in the West, Christ's "descent into hell" has received scant attention: the interim between the Lord's death and resurrection being largely ignored by theology, spirituality, liturgy, and certainly preaching. During the Paschal Triduum when the commemoration of the Lord's Passion is over, nothing is left but to await the vigil of the Lord's resurrection. Customs forbid the celebration of the sacraments, though the Divine Office continues to be the prayer of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours in the Roman rite sums up the Church's approach to Holy Saturday in the haunting text of an anonymous homily that reminds us "Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear."

Now I am not suggesting anything should break this silence of Holy Saturday. The silent sermon of the Word "spoken" to the "spirits in prison," as First Peter puts it (3:22), needs no interruption from us. Still, I am concerned that this article of faith not be left in the void, so to speak, for it is filled with theological and spiritual treasure all too easy to miss. And few others have attended to the middle-term of the Paschal Mystery more piercingly than Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In calling our attention to Jesus' going to the dead in the "mystery of Holy Saturday," he reminds us in his *Credo: Meditations on the Apostles' Creed* that "It was as a humanly dead man that the Son descended to the dead, and not as a victorious living one with an Easter banner, such as is depicted in Easter icons through an anticipatory projection of the Resurrection onto Holy Saturday" and that his true death and burial mean "the loss of any and every sort of contact with God and his fellow human beings." Christ's full participation in death, von Balthasar says elsewhere, is "in the first place the abandonment of all spontaneous activity and so a passivity, a state in which, perhaps, the vital activity now brought to its end is mysteriously summed up"; for his death means "in that same way that, upon earth, he was in solidarity with the living, so, in the tomb, he is in solidarity with the dead." (*Paschale Mysterium*). Indeed, one could say that only Christ has died in the fullest theological sense.

And because his death redeems death, it is more than solidarity. His death gathers to itself the full weight of death as the consequence of sin. As Paul says, "For our sake [God] made him to be sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). This results in Christ's knowing, as von Balthasar describes it, "the pure substantiality of 'Hell' which is 'sin in itself.'" (*PM*). Assuming the condition of the God-forsaken—the sinner abandoned by God through the unimaginable choice of damnation—the dead Christ bears the full brunt of Hell.



The cry from the Cross—“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—plunges the Redeemer into the depths of alienation from God, without guarantee of anything awaiting him beyond death. This cry of dereliction ensues in what Francis of Assisi called the “obedience of a corpse”—the

purpose of which von Balthasar notes “is that of purifying the relationship between God and the guilty world.” (*You Crown the Year with Your Goodness*).

And one should never forget that the heart of von Balthasar’s reflection is the realization that Hell is a Christological sphere—indeed, a “product of the

Redemption” (*PM*)—already included in the mystery of Triune love, in that “distance” the Creed describes with the words “God from God, light from light, true God from true God.” Hell, like the Cross, is already there in the space opened up by the Father’s kenosis, or self-emptying into the Son, before its surmounting by the Holy Spirit: a self-emptying which continues in God’s sending the Son, the very Son who being “in the form of God” enters the world marred by sin, and therefore assumes a particular form—“the form of a slave”—and more than that, “became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” And thus, the procession and mission of the “Other” in God includes that empty space from which the Son was raised, to be given “the name that is above every other name” (*Phil. 1:1, 7-9*).

All of which is part of the “admirable exchange” that so fascinated our ancestors in the faith and permits us to say it is God who undergoes the kenotic descent into hell in the Person of the Word made flesh; indeed, that God has suffered, died, been buried and descended into hell.

Hell is a Christological sphere— indeed, a "product of the Redemption." (Paschale Mysterium)

It seems to me, moreover, that the alienation of Holy Saturday embraces not only the sinner's condition in relation to God, but God's in relation to us as well: a God who also desires to make atonement ("at-one-ment") with suffering humanity, especially the innocent who suffer. Yes, the Crucified Redeemer achieves atonement in two directions: Godward and humanward. God is reconciled to the world, and the world to God. For Christ in his descent bears not only God's reproach of the sinner, but also utters humanity's reproach of God for all those who suffer and die: the reproach that God too must endure as the author of Creation marred by suffering. Yes, the mystery of Holy Saturday reaches into Hell as the abode of those accursed by God, reached by the One who became a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

The "admirable exchange" of Holy Saturday, in other words, satisfies the outrage of those who bear suffering out of all proportion to human guilt, whether personal or collective. As songwriter Sydney Carter expresses it in the lyrics to his song "Friday Morning," in words he places on the lips of one of the thieves crucified with Jesus: "It's God they ought to crucify instead of you and me."

Or, as Kenneth Leech put it more formally, "...in order to speak of the crucified God we need a theology of abandonment, of dereliction, of an alienation so profound that it can only be expressed in language marked by paradox and by great daring and risk." (*We Preach Christ Crucified*). I am merely highlighting how the Mystery of Holy Saturday runs in two directions. In perhaps less tendentious terms, Pope Leo XIV gave two catecheses on Holy Saturday during his weekly audiences in the recent Jubilee Year, to which we now turn.

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Jesus Christ Our Hope: The Passover of Jesus

Pope Leo XIV



In the garden was a new tomb, in which no one had yet been buried.

The Son of God lies in the tomb. But this “absence”

of his is not emptiness: it is expectation, a restrained fullness, a promise kept in the dark. It is the day of the great silence, in which the sky seems mute and the earth immobile, but it is precisely there that the deepest mystery of the Christian faith is fulfilled. It is a silence laden with meaning, like the womb of a mother who carries her unborn but already living child.

The body of Jesus, taken down from the cross, is carefully wrapped, as one does with something precious. John the Evangelist tells us that he was buried in a garden, inside “a new tomb where no one had ever been laid” (Jn 19:41). Nothing is left to chance. That garden recalls the lost Eden, the place where God and man were united. And that tomb, never used, speaks of something that has still to happen: it is a threshold, not an end. At the beginning of creation, God planted a garden; now the new creation also begins in a garden: with a closed tomb that will soon be opened.

Holy Saturday is also a day of rest. According to the Jewish Law, no work is to be done on the seventh day: indeed, after the six days of creation, God rests (cf. Gen 2:2). Now, the Son too, after completing his work of salvation, rests. Not because he is tired, but because he loved up to the very end. There is nothing left to add. This rest is the seal on the completed task; it is the confirmation that what should have been done has truly been accomplished. It is a repose filled with the hidden presence of the Lord.

We struggle to stop and rest. We live as if life were never enough. We rush to produce, to prove ourselves, to keep up. But the Gospel teaches us that knowing how to stop is an act of trust that we must learn to perform. Holy Saturday invites us to discover that life does not always depend on what we do, but also on how we know how to take leave of what we have been able to do.

In the tomb, Jesus, the living Word of the Father, is silent. But it is precisely in that silence that the new life begins to ferment. Like a seed in the ground, like the darkness before dawn. God is not afraid of the passing time, because he is also the God of waiting. Thus, even our “useless” time, that of pauses, emptiness, barren moments, can become the womb of resurrection. Every silence that is welcomed can be the premise of a new Word. Every suspended time can become a time of grace, if we offer it to God.

Jesus, buried in the ground, is the meek face of a God who does not occupy all space. He is the God who lets things be done, who waits, who withdraws to leave us freedom. He is the God who trusts, even when everything seems to be over. And we, on that suspended Sabbath, learn that we do not have to be in a hurry to rise again; first we must stay and welcome the silence, let ourselves be embraced by limitation. At times we seek quick answers, immediate solutions. But God works in depth, in the slow time of trust. The Sabbath of the burial thus becomes the womb from which the strength of an invincible light, that of Easter, can spring forth.

When it seems to us that everything is at a standstill, that life is a blocked road, let us remember Holy Saturday. Even in the tomb, God was preparing the greatest surprise of all. And if we know how to welcome with gratitude what has been, we will discover that, precisely in smallness and silence, God loves to transfigure reality, making all things new with the fidelity of his love. True joy is born of indwelt expectation, of patient faith, of the hope that what has been lived in love will surely rise to eternal life (September 17, 2025).

In the Spirit he also went to preach to the spirits in prison (1 Pt 3:19).

Today, again, we will look at the mystery of Holy Saturday. It is the day of the Paschal Mystery in which everything seems immobile and silent, while in reality an invisible action of salvation is being fulfilled: Christ descends into the realm of the dead to bring the news of the Resurrection to all those who were in the darkness and in the shadow of death.

This event, which the liturgy and tradition have handed down to us, represents the most profound and radical gesture of God's love for humanity. Indeed, it is not enough to say or to believe that Jesus died for us: it is necessary to recognize that the fidelity of his love sought us out where we ourselves were lost, where only the power of a light capable of penetrating the realm of darkness can reach.

The underworld, in the biblical conception, is not so much a place as an existential condition: that condition in which life is depleted, and pain, solitude, guilt and separation from God and others reign. Christ reaches us even in this abyss, passing through the gates of this realm of darkness. He enters, so to speak, in the very house of death, to empty it, to free its inhabitants, taking them by the hand one by one. It is the humility of a God who does not stop in front of our sin, who is not afraid when faced with the human being's extreme rejection.

The apostle Peter, in the brief passage from his first Letter that we have just heard, tells us that Jesus, made alive in the Holy Spirit, went to take the news of salvation even “to the spirits in prison” (1Pt 3:19). It is one of the most moving images, which is expressed not in the canonical Gospels, but in an apocryphal text entitled the Gospel of Nicodemus. According to this tradition, the Son of God entered the deepest darkness to reach even the last of his brothers and sisters, to bring his light down there too. In this gesture there is all the strength and tenderness of the Paschal message: death is never the last word.

This descent of Christ does not relate only to the past, but touches the life of every one of us. The underworld is not only the condition of the dead, but also of those who live death as a result of evil and sin. It is also the daily hell of loneliness, shame, abandonment, and the struggle of life. Christ enters into all these dark realities to bear witness to the love of the Father. Not to judge, but to set free. Not to blame, but to save. He does so quietly, on tiptoes, like one who enters a hospital room to offer comfort and help.

The Fathers of the Church, in pages of extraordinary beauty, described this moment as a meeting: that between Christ and Adam. An encounter that is the symbol of all the possible encounters between God and man. The Lord descends where man has hidden

out of fear, and calls him by name, takes him by the hand, raises him up, and brings him back to the light. He does so with full authority, but also with infinite gentleness, like a father with the son who fears that he is no longer loved.

In the eastern icons of the Resurrection, Christ is depicted breaking down the doors of the underworld, stretching out his arms and grasping Adam and Eve by the wrists. He does not save only himself; he does not return to life alone but carries all of humanity with him. This is the true glory of the Risen One: it is the power of love, it is solidarity with a God who does not want to save himself without us, but only with us. A God who does not rise again unless he embraces our miseries and lifts us up to a new life.

Holy Saturday, then, is the day on which heaven visits earth most deeply. It is the time in which every corner of human history is touched by the light of Easter. And if Christ was able to descend all the way down there, then nothing can be excluded from his redemption. Not even our nights, not even our oldest faults, not even our broken bonds. There is no past so ruined, no history so compromised, that it cannot be touched by mercy.

To descend, for God, is not a defeat, but the fulfilment of his love. It is not a failure, but the way by which he shows that no place is too far away, no heart is

too closed, no tomb too tightly sealed for his love. This consoles us, this sustains us. And if at times we seem to have hit rock bottom, let us remember that this is the place from which God is able to begin a new creation. A creation made of people lifted up, hearts forgiven, tears dried. Holy Saturday is the silent embrace with which Christ presents all creation to the Father to restore it to his plan of salvation.

(September 24, 2025)



VOICE FROM TRADITION

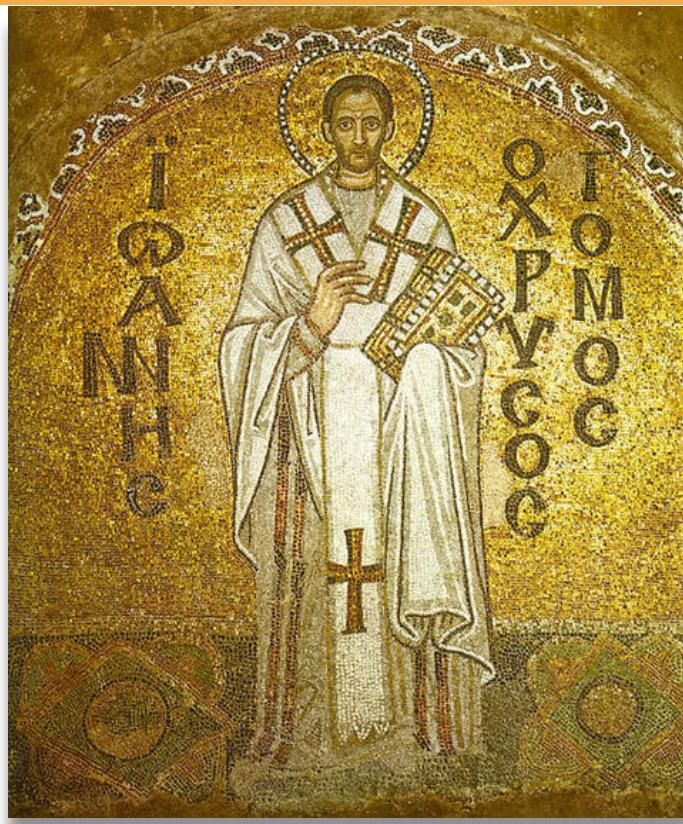
St. John Chrysostom—Paschal Homily

Is there anyone here who is a devout lover of God? Let them enjoy this beautiful bright festival. Is there anyone who is a grateful servant? Let them rejoice and enter into the joy of their Lord! Are there any now weary with fasting? Let them now receive their wages! If they

have toiled from the first hour, let them receive their due reward. If any have come after the third hour, let them, with gratitude, join in the Feast!

And he that arrived after the sixth hour, let him not doubt; for he shall have sustained no loss. And if any have delayed until the ninth hour, let him not hesitate; but let him come too. And he who arrived only at the eleventh hour, let him not be afraid by reason of his delay.

For the Lord is gracious and receives the last even as the first. He gives rest to him who comes at the eleventh hour, as well as to him who toiled from the first.



To this one He gives, and upon another He bestows. He accepts the work as he greets the endeavor. The deed He honors and the intention He commends.

Let us all enter into the joy of the Lord! First and last alike

receive your reward; rich and poor, rejoice together! Sober and slothful, celebrate the day! You that have kept the fast, and you that have not, rejoice today for the Table is richly laden! Feast royally on it, the calf is a fatted one. Let no one go away hungry; partake, all, of the cup of faith. Enjoy all the riches of His goodness!

Let no one grieve at his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one mourn that he has fallen again and again; for forgiveness has risen from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the death of our Savior has set us free.

He has destroyed it by enduring it. He destroyed Hades when he descended into it. He put it into an uproar even as it tasted of His flesh. Isaiah foretold this when he said, You, O Hell, have been troubled by encountering Him below. Hell was in an uproar because it was done away with. It was in an uproar, because it was mocked. It was in an uproar, for it was destroyed. It is in an uproar, for it is annihilated.

It is in an uproar because it is now made captive. Hell took a body, and it discovered God.

It took earth and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw and was overcome by what it did not see. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?

Christ is risen, and you, O death, are annihilated! Christ is risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is risen, and life is liberated! Christ is risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; for Christ, having risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen!

St. John Chrysostom (+407), renowned as the "golden-mouthed" preacher, served as Patriarch of Constantinople—a See from which he was ultimately exiled for his outspoken denunciations of imperial corruption and decadence.

I (Still) Believe in the Holy Spirit

Fr. Peter Santandreu

There is a joke I heard once that if the Holy Spirit one day stopped moving in the Church, it would probably take a few months to a year to notice his absence. This is a critique of a Church that is seen to be overly bureaucratic and almost unrecognizable compared to the Church of the Acts of the Apostles. While the critique does point to something real, namely how easy it is to be distracted from the prompting of the Spirit amidst the Church's various structures, this sentiment fails to grasp what the Church is for and how it works. This Church is not just some organization like any other; it is a community of the baptized that strives to live after the example of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is integral to this mission and helps guide us, members of the Church all, toward accomplishing that goal.

The Holy Spirit, which has always been active and moving in the world (cf. Gen 1:2), is given to us today in splendor and glory. It is this encounter, the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, that will help the Church recognize the Holy Spirit as a fully revealed member of the Trinity. This, of course, is not totally new. There has always been the sense that God was active in the world through his breath, his holy Wisdom, or another form of divine presence. Looking back after the Pentecost event permits us to see the Spirit of God throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. This is something of the theme with the Christian Scriptures, the fullness of revelation. Just as all of what Jesus does and teaches in this earthly life is somehow already present and latent in the scriptures, so too the presence of the Spirit has always been alluded to, but only now comes to full recognition.

The coming of Christ is wholly focused on revealing to humanity the fullness of God's inner life and love for creation. Jesus comes to give the definitive word on who God is and the kind of relationship he desires with his creation. Because the Lord is the center of all this, what he taught, said, and did are essential means by which God is revealed. We see the confusion surrounding this revelation when Jesus was living on the earth. It seemed like there was some barrier between what Jesus wanted to share with the world and the disciples' ability to comprehend it. Even the Resurrection did not break through this wall. All of this was healed for them by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Seeing the Holy Spirit as God himself, as fully a member of the Trinity as much as the Son and the Father, is essential to appreciating how the Lord is fulfilling his promise to be with us "until the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). By sending the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Lord gives his people the power to understand all that has taken place in salvation history up to this point. It opens the eyes of those who receive him to the fullness of revelation. Beyond this understanding, the presence of the Spirit also gives men and women the power—the fortitude—to carry out the mandates of the Lord. This is the voice that speaks through the Apostles when they are put before the Sanhedrin; this is the inspiration that accompanies the Evangelists when they compose their Gospel accounts. The Holy Spirit is the one to shed ultimate light on the meaning of creation, the words of the prophets, the people of Israel, the coming of Christ, his death and resurrection, and the history of the early church.



A question remains. Was not all of this Holy Spirit stuff much more powerfully felt at the beginning? Have we come to such a point in the history

of the Church that we no longer rely on the guidance of the Spirit for our actions? Times have changed, but this does not mean that the core of what the Church is about has shifted in the slightest. The work of the Holy Spirit is, in some way, the same work of the Savior; to reveal what is hidden about God and guide us to walk in his ways. Just as Jesus has revealed to us the fullness of the merciful and loving Father, so the Holy Spirit continues to reveal to everyone who seeks the truth the hidden reality of God in the world.

While this all sounds well and good, there is the issue of how we actually apply this to our own lives. How are we to know we are on the right track? How can we be sure we are following Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit and not just doing whatever we want and justifying it by appealing to the “will of the Holy Spirit”? What signs can we expect for this? This last question is the most important because it has an answer. The signs which accompany the presence of the Spirit come to us through St. Paul when he explores the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). These twelve attributes serve as indicators that we are on the right track in our walk with the Lord. Even if the road is tough and uncertain, if we are experiencing an

increase in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, modesty, chastity, and generosity, we can be sure that what we are doing is in line with what God desires and where the Holy Spirit is leading. It is when our lives are headed in the opposite direction and we experience a decrease in these elements that we should be worried and seek a course correction.

In the final analysis, the Church does look very different than it did 2,000 years ago. It has become more professional, more bureaucratic, and more reliant on structures. These things, however, are merely accidental additions that have come with the years. The Spirit is still very active in the Church and in the world. Our spiritual lives are a journey with the Lord toward becoming like the person of Jesus. We cannot live exactly as he did, an itinerant preacher in the land of Israel, but we can live out of his example in the myriad lifestyles and circumstances we find ourselves in. What Jesus came to show us is that surrendering our wills to the will of God (“thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”) is the way to a truly human life of happiness. Even with all the ways we can live this out, one thing is common to all true paths to the Lord: they are accompanied by a growth in the fruits of the Spirit. We, the members of Christ’s body, the Church, are wholly dependent on the guidance of the Spirit to live our lives well. No matter where we fit in the structures or hierarchy of the Church, we cannot escape the fact that we are all simple Christians doing our best to find the Lord and walk in his ways. Without this basic understanding, we would be lost. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, however, all things are possible for God is with us.

Fr. Peter Santandreu serves as Vice Chancellor and Adjutant Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Buffalo, NY.

OUR APOSTOLATE



C.P.P.S. MISSION PROJECTS has been deeply rooted in specific localities, above all by a significant presence in Tanzania for the past 50 years. Our projects have provided essential services such as clean water, education, healthcare, and sustainable development, focusing on marginalized communities.

The call to missionary discipleship, however, goes beyond geographical boundaries. We are being called to new horizons in response to the urgent needs of the Church. Rooted in the spirituality of the Precious Blood, C.P.P.S. Mission Projects is now prioritizing evangelization, formation, and social development in underserved communities worldwide.

As we entrust the Tanzanian initiatives to local leadership, we remain committed to fostering new missionary endeavors that bring Christ's reconciling love to the margins of society.

Find us at
cppsmissionprojects.ngo.

A LENTEN RECIPE FROM ST. GASPAR DEL BUFALO

*Take the root of faith,
the leaves of hope,
the rose of charity,
the violet of humility,
the lily of purity,
the absinthe of contrition,
the myrrh of mortification,
the wood of the Cross.*

*Tie them together in a small packet
with the thread of resignation.
Set them to boil over the fire of divine love,
held in the urn of prayer,
with the mystic wine of holy joy
and the mineral water of temperance,
securely covered with the lid of silence.*

*Let it stand thus for the morning
in the serenity of meditation.
Take a cup of it in the morning
and in the evening,
and you will enjoy spiritual health.*

LETTERS
JUNE 19, 1825



Unio Sanguis Christi

The Union of the Blood of Christ (Unio Sanguis Christi, USC) is the spiritual family fostered by the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, founded by St. Gaspar del Bufalo. Established by Fr. Francesco Albertini, its aim is to promote devotion to the Blood of Christ. Members commit themselves to live and promote the spirituality of the Blood of Christ.

RULE OF LIFE Members follow a program of spirituality solidly based on the traditions of the Catholic Church. Motivated by the love of Christ, who died for us, rather than by any moral obligation, members practice a rule of life inspired by Christ's unselfish love. Conversion and reconciliation are ongoing processes fostered by an appreciation for the Word of God, nurtured by the Eucharist, and wrapped in a life of prayer.



HOW TO ENROLL Any practicing Catholic may become a member of the Union upon completion of a period of formation. For information on joining or starting the USC in your parish, please contact Fr. Gerardo Laguartilla, C.P.P.S., at uscatlanticprovince@gmail.com.

Mass Association

Since 1883, with the approval of Pope Leo XIII, the Missionaries of the Precious Blood throughout the world have offered 4,000 Masses annually for those enrolled in their Mass Association. Enrollments can be made on behalf of both the living and the deceased.

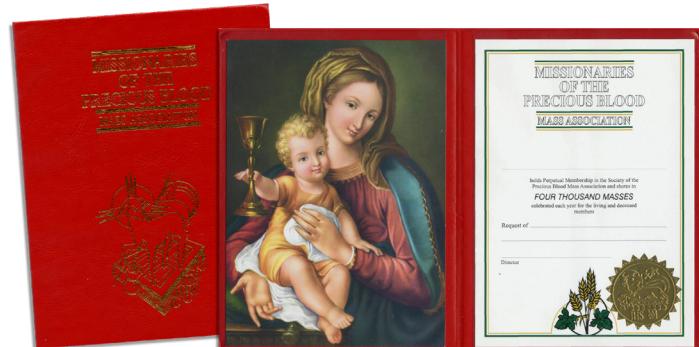
HOW TO ENROLL

In Person or by Mail: Shrine of St. Gaspar
540 St. Clair Avenue West, Toronto, ON M6C 1A4

By Telephone: 416.653.4486

Online: Visit preciousbloodatlantic.org and click on 'Donations'.

Suggested Offering: \$25.00, plus \$4.00 postage if the Certificate is mailed.



Additionally, you can request a single Mass or make a donation to support the spirituality of the Precious Blood and the work of the Missionaries by completing the required fields on the website.



Vocations

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood continue St. Gaspar's Ministry of the Word by preaching renewal and conversion through missions and retreats. We bring the love of God to parishes, schools, hospitals, and prisons.

As missionaries, we work where the Church needs us most and where the Good News has not been heard. We walk with Jesus by sharing the joys and sufferings of the people with whom we work.

For more information, please contact Precious Blood Vocations at 705.507.4288 or email preciousvocations@gmail.com.



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