

The numbers are key. Gotta see those numbers. What's the cholesterol number, how much "good" cholesterol, and how much bad. It all comes down to blood work. I go for a physical and the doctor barely touches my body. "Go downstairs and let them take your blood," he says. If the numbers come in within range, they think everything is perfect. So my triglycerides were high. My cardiologist says, "lose 10 pounds." I'm thinking, I weigh less than you do! But then begins months without pasta and bread, near death for an Italian. "Take fish oil," someone says. Sure enough, 6 pounds and many fish-oil pills later, my triglycerides are great!

So today we think that blood tells the story. It reveals what is going on in various parts of the body, our blood-sugar numbers, our PSA scores, irregularities in other parts of our bodies. Is there another story blood can tell?

Unlike the focus of this Feast in other Cycles, our current Cycle B readings emphasize not the Body of the Eucharist, but the blood. Our reflection on the blood begins with a reading from the book of Exodus where the blood of an animal sacrifice is sprinkled. The most surprising thing is when we are told that Moses sprinkles it on the people. Where's the Clorox? we moderns think. But we don't need Clorox. We need to see that the ritual was saying that the blood of the animal, given as a sign of love and dedication, was now the blood of the people.

Covenant—blood of the covenant—blood that says: I pledge, I show my love, I show my dedication. Blood that says ultimately we are bound in death and in life. Blood that says God bonds with us, in death and in life.

This happens most graphically in Jesus, where his human blood becomes the effective sign of God's covenant with us. Hebrews tells us that the blood Jesus shed brings us into the heart of God, the temple not made with human hands, but the eternal temple which is divine life. Jesus brings our blood to God, in love and dedication. Jesus seals our covenant with God. Every time we gather for Eucharist, we see presented before us this giving our blood to God in Jesus, this dramatic love, this world-changing self-gift, of our Savior. Every time we gather for Eucharist, we renew the covenant God makes with us in Jesus.

So what does Jesus blood say? That the alienation of humankind from God is now bridged by God's gift of his Son. That the brokenness of our lives and deaths is now transformed into love by Christ. That no part of our lives need be distant from God, because God, in Jesus, has mingled blood with us.

Take this, all of you, and drink from it: This is the Chalice of my blood, of the new and eternal covenant. Poured out for you and for many to bring peace, life, and forgiveness. This blood is very good indeed, God's and ours, in Jesus. The Red Cross can do nothing like this!

Time is an asset and a liability. Call your attorney, physician, or clergy, and the first thing they do is block out a space on their calendar for you. Go to church or a meeting and you see people looking at their watches or waiting for the hourly chime. You take time off to be with the family or to golf and, before you know it, it's time to do the next thing. Time keeps rolling like the waters in a stream.

Time is an asset and a liability. We have the choice of taking it for granted letting it pass unfulfilled or doing something to make every minute quality time in our living.

A scenario clergy are likely to hear goes like this: "I don't have time to go to church. I don't have time to read the Bible and pray each morning. By the time I get up, shower, have breakfast, it's time to go to work. On Sunday, I like to sleep late. Now and then, I like to go

fishing, or spend a weekend away. When away, I don't know where the nearest church is. And so I say a private prayer on my way to the beach and leave it at that."

The Passover in the ancient Jewish community reflects a way of capturing and making quality time. They used Unleavened Bread because it was quickly prepared. Requiring no waiting for it to rise, Unleavened Bread became the symbol of a people making a dash for freedom, a people on the move to meet God.

The early Christians were on the move, too. They met in each other's homes and in hidden basements. They were always on the watch for their persecutors. And so the ritual of the Lord's Supper the Mass continued in the tradition of what they had known for over a millennium.

This tradition of a people on the move with God was good for the early Christians, since they perceived themselves as temporary residents in this world. They were on their way to heaven, God's eternity. The weekly Eucharist requirement became the focus for the dedication of their lives and resources to God and the visible place for nurturing their sisters and brothers in the faith.

We need to treat our limited earthly life span with greater respect. The advice of the Psalmist, "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," can help us be better stewards of life as we know it now.

Someone has taken the time to give us some statistics. If you figure you are going to live seventy years, someone calculates that, on the average, you will spend your time like this:

- three years in education
- eight years in amusements
- six years at the dinner table
- five years traveling
- four years conversing with people on the telephone, at the bar, and in a club
- fourteen years working
- three years reading
- twenty-four years sleeping
- five months attending Eucharist weekly and praying five minutes every morning and evening.

As you adore the Blessed Sacrament, let me remind you that the Liturgy guides us in making a helpful distinction between two types of time. Linear time: the ticking of the clock, the passing of the days, weeks and years. Then, "kairotic" time, or fulfilled time. For example, a weekend at Ocean City, three days at Myrtle Beach, a family campout each one is a short period of calendar time, but their restorative benefits cannot be measured on a time scale.

In the Blessed Sacrament, we make and celebrate time on several dimensions. The Holy Eucharist makes

- sharing time
- remembering time
- giving time
- promising time

First, sharing time. It is good to watch people entering the nave, finding their way to the pew. One can feel the linking together of spirits to meet the Lord at the Altar. As we sing and begin the prayers, the feeling deepens because we want all to feel a welcome at the Altar of the Lord.

Second, remembering time. "Do this in memory of me," Jesus said.

Remembering, in this context, means more than memory or recall. Eucharistic remembering intends to be a re-enacting so as to make the reality happen again. For example, making Martin Luther King, Jr. day into a national holiday is meant to be more than a memory of King; it is meant to be a re-enactment of his "I have a dream ..." to move us to dream bigger dreams and make them come true.

A deeply moving story in our national history comes from the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The funeral line of mourners and viewers seemed endless. A black woman entered the line seeking to have a last look at the countenance Edwin Markham called "that tender, tragic, everchanging face." She inched forward with the line of steadily extending mourners. Finally, hours afterward, her patience was rewarded. She lifted up into her arms a curly-headed little five-year-old boy, held him high in her arms, turned his head so that the focus of the little fellow's eyes would be on the face of Lincoln. And then, with tears flowing from her cheeks, she said, "Take a long, long look, honey. He died for you."

Jesus did both a recall and a re-enactment at the Last Supper. Using the format and the elements of the Passover Meal, he re-enacted the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. Not surprisingly, he used the familiar symbols but reinvested them with new meaning. He changed the bread into his body and the wine into his blood. Then he linked the meal to the banquet in heaven, making it a foretaste of the rich, eternal fellowship with God for which all humankind is created.

Thirdly, giving time. Being incorporated into Christ's saving action, feeling rescued, feeling assured that this experience makes an effective difference, convinces one, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it is real but also beyond description.

Once we have centered in on God's action, recalled Christ's life, death and Resurrection, then we are beginning to be ready for what God wants to give us forgiveness of sins, strengthened faith, and hope of eternal life.

Fourth and finally, promising time. Throughout the Bible "covenant" is the word for God's promise of faithfulness to his people. Covenant signifies a promise more binding than a contract. In a contract, if one party fails to fulfill his/her promise, the other party is free of obligation, whereas in a covenant the promise stands. So, for all practical purposes, God marries us: "I, the Lord, take you to be my bride. I promise to be true to you in good times and bad times." I know no better model for understanding God's promise than the wedding vow.

But I have to say, I was not there when Moses sealed the covenant with blood. I was not there when Jesus declared, "This is my Body ... This is my Blood of the new covenant ..."

But I don't have to be there. I am here, twenty centuries away from the promise. The secret is believing and making the faith work here and now. For example, If you promise a pay raise, you're likely to hear, "When I see the pay check, I'll believe it." A woman, after her engagement to her lover, said, "I really didn't think he meant it until he put his diamond ring on my finger. Then I knew it was real."

My point is this: for twenty centuries the church has been offering up the Eucharistic Sacrifice. I believe what the church is doing is as valid and real in this global century as it was in simpler days gone

Blessed Jesus, we celebrate your eucharistic presence because, in this wonderful Sacrament, we feel a bonding that lasts forever. We believe, Lord! Help our unbelief!

