



ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST
APOSTOLIC LETTER and LITANY



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ON THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST

(Inde a Primis)

Apostolic Letter
of
His Holiness Pope John XXIII
and
Litany

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NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE
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APOSTOLIC LETTER
OF
HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN XXIII

TO OUR VENERABLE BRETHREN, PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES,
ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES
ENJOYING PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE
APOSTOLIC SEE

ON PROMOTING DEVOTION TO THE MOST PRECIOUS
BLOOD OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

VENERABLE BRETHREN

GREETINGS AND APOSTOLIC BENEDECTION

From the very first months of Our pontifical service it has often occurred to Us—and our frank and earnest words have often conveyed our feelings in this regard—to invite the faithful in matters of daily and living devotion to turn with ardent fervor toward the divine expression of mercy of the Lord for individual souls, for His holy Church and for the whole world, of which Jesus remains the Redeemer and Saviour. We mean the devotion to the Most Precious Blood.

This devotion was instilled in Us in the same homely surroundings in which Our childhood flourished, and We still remember with deep emotion the recitation of the Litany of the Most Precious Blood by Our elders in the month of July.

Remembering the salutary exhortation of the Apostle: "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as bishops, to rule the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood,"¹ We believe, O venerable brothers, that among the concerns of Our universal pastoral ministry after vigilance over sound doctrine, the question of the honest development and increase of religious piety in the manifestations of liturgical and private worship should have a privileged place. It therefore seems to Us to be particularly opportune to redirect the attention of Our beloved children to the indissoluble connection which must unite the two devotions of the most

¹ *Acts* 20, 28

Holy Name of Jesus and of His most Sacred Heart, which are already so widespread among Christian people, to that (devotion) which honors the Most Precious Blood of the Incarnate Word "shed for many unto the forgiveness of sins."²

If it is, in fact, of supreme importance that a sound harmony should reign between the Catholic Credo and the liturgical action of the Church, since the law of believing establishes the law of prayer,³ and that there never be allowed forms of worship not originating from the very pure sources of true faith, it is also right that a similar harmony should flourish among those devotions considered fundamental and more sanctifying. Likewise, it is right that those devotions which actuate better the economy of universal salvation brought about by the "one mediator between God and man, Himself man, Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all"⁴ may hold primacy in esteem and practice over personal and secondary devotions. Moving in this atmosphere of honest faith and sound piety, believers are certain of feeling, together with the Church, that is to say, of living in the communion of prayer and of the charity of Jesus Christ, founder and supreme priest of that sublime religion which draws from Him, together with its name, all its dignity and worth.

If We now glance back on the admirable progress that the Catholic Church has made in the field of liturgical piety, in sound accord with the development of its faith in the penetration of divine virtues, it is undoubtedly comforting to note that during the centuries closest to us there have not been wanting on the part of this Apostolic See clear and repeated proofs of consent and encouragement for the three aforementioned devotions, devotions which were practiced from medieval times by many pious souls and which were spread later in various dioceses and religious congregations and orders, but which waited to receive from the Chair of Peter the seal of orthodoxy and approval for the Universal Church.

It suffices for Us to recall that since the 16th century Our predecessors

² *Matt.* 26, 28

³ *cf. Encyclical Mediator Dei, Acta Apostolicae Sedis, XXXIX, 1949, p. 45*

⁴ *1, Timothy, 2, 5-6*

enriched with spiritual favors the devotion to the Sacred Name of Jesus, of which, in past centuries, St. Bernard of Siena had been the untiring apostle in Italy. It was particularly in honor of the Sacred Name that the office and the Mass were approved, and later the litanies.⁵ No less important were the privileges granted by the pontiffs to the worship of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the admirable propagation of which such a great part was played by the revelations of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (cf. Office of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, II noct., lect. V). And so great and unanimous was the esteem of the supreme pontiffs for this devotion that it pleased them to illustrate its nature, defend its lawfulness, instill the practice of it with many official acts, which were crowned by three important encyclicals regarding this question.⁶

Devotion to the Most Precious Blood, which the Roman priest, St. Caspar del Bufalo, promoted admirably during the last century, also received the deserved approval and favor of this Apostolic See. It is well to remember, in fact, that by order of Benedict XIV the Mass and the Office in honor of the adorable Blood of the Divine Saviour were composed, and that Pius IX, fulfilling a vow made at Gaeta, extended the liturgical feast of the Most Precious Blood to the universal Church.⁷ Finally, it was Pius XI, of happy memory, who, in commemoration of the 19th centenary of the Redemption, raised the aforementioned feast to the rank of double of the first class, so that by increasing the liturgical solemnity the devotion itself would be intensified, and so that the fruits of the redeeming blood would benefit men more copiously.

Following therefore the example of Our predecessors, with the purpose of subsequently favoring the worship of the Most Precious Blood of the Immaculate Lamb of Jesus Christ, We approved the Litany of the Most Precious Blood according to the order compiled by the Congregation of Rites,⁸ encouraging also its recitation throughout the

⁵ cf. *AAS XVIII a.* 1886, p. 509

⁶ *Encyclical letter Annum Sacrum, Acta Leonis, a.* 1899, vol. XIX, p. 71 et seq.: *Encyclical Letter Miserentissimus Redemptor, AAS, a.* 1928, vol. XX, p. 165 et seq.: and *Encyclical Letter Haurietis aquas, AAS a.* 1956, Vol. XLVIII, p. 309 et seq.

⁷ *Deor. Redempti sumus, August 10th, 1849; cf. archives S.Cong. Rites, 1848-1849, fol 209*

⁸ cf. *AAS. 1960, vol. LII, pp. 412-413*

Catholic world, both in public and private, with the concession of special indulgences.⁹

May it then be that the "care of all the churches"¹⁰ proper to the supreme pontiff, in times of more serious and spiritual needs, will reawaken in the souls of believers the conviction of the perennial, universal and supremely practical value of the three devotions which We have praised in the foregoing.

With the approach, therefore, of the feast and the month dedicated to the worship of the Blood of Christ, the price of our redemption, the pledge of salvation and of eternal life, may the faithful make it the object of more devoted meditations and of more frequent sacramental Communion. May they reflect, enlightened by the salutary teachings that emanate from the sacred books and from the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, on the superabundant and infinite value of this truly most precious Blood, *cuius una stilla salvum facere totum mundum quit ab omni scelere* (whose one drop of blood is able to make the whole world safe from all impiety—Hymn *Adoro Te, devote*)—as the Church sings with the Angelic Doctor, and as was wisely confirmed by Our predecessor Clement VI.¹¹

For if the value of the blood of the Man-God is infinite, and if the charity is infinite that urged Him to shed it on the eighth day of His birth and with great abundance in the agony in the garden,¹² in the scourging and crowning of thorns, on the way to Calvary and in the crucifixion, and finally from the open wound in His side, as a symbol of that same Divine Blood that flows in all the sacraments of the Church, it is not only suitable but supremely proper that all those redeemed by its saving flow should pay a tribute of adoration and loving gratitude to it.

And it is all the more decorous and salutary that the worship of latria, due to the chalice of the Blood of the New Testament, particu-

⁹ *Decr. Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary, March 3, 1960, cf. AAS, 1960, Vol. LII, p. 420*

¹⁰ *cf. I Cor. 11:28*

¹¹ *Bull Unigenitus Dei Filius, Jan 25, 1343; Denziger, R., 550*

¹² *Luke 22:43*

larly at the time of its elevation in the sacrifice of the Mass, be followed by Communion with that same blood, indissolubly united to the Body of Our Saviour in the sacrament of the Eucharist. In union thus with the celebrant priest, the faithful will be able to repeat mentally and truly the words that he pronounces at the time of the Communion: "*Calicem salutaris accipiam et nomen Domini invocabo . . . Sanguinis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam meam in vitam aeternam. Amen.*" ("I shall take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord . . . May the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve my soul to life everlasting. Amen.")

In this way the faithful who present themselves worthily for Communion will receive the fruits of Redemption, Resurrection and eternal life more abundantly, which the blood shed by Christ "who through the Holy Spirit offered Himself"¹³ gained for the whole world.

And, nourished with the body and blood of Christ and made to share in His divine virtue that made legions of martyrs rise, they (the faithful) will go forward to face the daily struggle, sacrifices, and, if necessary, even martyrdom in defense of the virtue and the reign of God, feeling within themselves that ardor of charity that led St. John Chrysostom to exclaim:

"We arise from that table like lions spitting fire, having become formidable to the devil, thinking on Him Who is our Head and of all the love that He had for us . . . This blood, if worthily received, removes the devils from us, calls the angels to us, and even the very Lord of the angels . . . This blood which, shed, purifies the whole world. . . . This is the price of the universe and with this Christ redeems the Church . . . This thought must check our passions. How long will we, in fact, remain attached to this present world? How long will we remain inert: How long will we neglect to think of our salvation? Let us reflect upon the gifts which the Lord has deigned to grant us; let us be grateful for them; let us glorify Him not only with faith, but also with good works."¹⁴

Oh, if Christians only reflected more often on the paternal warning of the first pope: "Conduct yourselves with fear in the time of your sojourning. You know that you were redeemed from the vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, not with perishable things,

¹³ Hebrews 9:14

¹⁴ In Joan, Homil. XLVI; Migne P. G. LIX, 260-261

with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”¹⁵

If only they heeded with more concern the exhortation of the Apostle of the Gentiles: “For you have been bought at a great price. Glorify God and bear Him in your body.”¹⁶ How much more worthy, more edifying would their morals be, how much more salutary for the whole of humanity would be the presence of Christ’s Church in the world! Were all men to heed the invitations of the grace of God—God, who desires them all to be saved because He wanted them all to be redeemed by the blood of His only begotten Son, and calls all to be members of a single Mystical Body of which Christ is the head—how much more brotherly would the relations between individuals, peoples and nations become; how much more peaceful, more worthy of God and of human nature, created in the image and likeness of the Almighty, would social coexistence come to be!

It was in contemplation of this sublime calling that St. Paul invited the faithful of the chosen people who were tempted to think with nostalgia of a past that had been only a pale image and prelude of the new alliance: “But you have come to Mount Sion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to the company of many thousands of angels, and to the Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in the heavens, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus, mediator of a new covenant, and to a sprinkling of blood which speaks better than Abel.”¹⁷

Fully confident, O venerable brothers, that these Our paternal exhortations, communicated by you in the way you deem most opportune to the clergy and faithful entrusted to you, will be practiced not only willingly, but also with fervent zeal, we impart with full heart as a token of heavenly grace and as pledge of Our special benevolence the apostolic benediction to each of you and to all your flocks, and in a special way to those who respond generously and piously to Our invitation.

Dated Rome, at St. Peter’s, June 30, 1960, on the eve of the Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the second year of Our pontificate.

¹⁵ *1 Peter* 1:17-19

¹⁶ *1 Cor.* 6, 20

¹⁷ *Hebrews* 12:22-24

The Litany Of The Most Precious Blood Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Approved for Inserting in the Roman Ritual

Lord, have mercy on us.	
Christ, have mercy on us.	
Lord, have mercy on us.	
Christ, hear us.	
Christ, graciously hear us	
God, the Father of Heaven,	Have mercy on us.
God, the Son, Redeemer of the world,	Have mercy on us.
God, the Holy Spirit,	Have mercy on us.
Holy Trinity, One God,	Have mercy on us.
Blood of Christ, only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, Incarnate Word of God,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, of the new and Eternal Testament,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, falling upon the earth in the Agony,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, shed profusely in the Scourging,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, flowing forth in the Crowning with thorns,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, poured out on the Cross,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, price of our salvation,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, without which there is no forgiveness,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, Eucharistic drink and refreshment of souls	Save us.
Blood of Christ, stream of mercy,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, victor over demons,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, courage of martyrs,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, strength of confessors,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, bringing forth virgins,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, help of those in peril,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, relief of the burdened,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, solace in sorrow,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, hope of the penitent,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, consolation of the dying,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, peace and tenderness of hearts,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, pledge of eternal life,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, freeing souls from purgatory,	Save us.
Blood of Christ, most worthy of all glory and honor,	Save us.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Spare us, O Lord
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Graciously hear us, O Lord
Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy on us.

v. You have redeemed us, O Lord, in Your Blood

r. And made us, for our God, a kingdom.

Let us pray

Almighty and Eternal God, You have appointed Your only-begotten Son the Redeemer of the world, and willed to be appeased by His Blood. Grant, we beg of You, that we may worthily adore this price of our salvation, and through its power be safeguarded from the evils of this present life, so that we may rejoice in its fruits forever in heaven. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Nibil obstat:

Harry A. Echle
Censor

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† Patrick A. O'Boyle
Archbishop of Washington
August 20, 1960

(Partial indulgence of seven years for each recitation, plenary indulgence once a month, under the usual conditions, for reciting the Litany daily for a month)

