

Most Precious Blood of Jesus, save us.

As we know, the month of July is dedicated to the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord. The Gospel for the feast of the Precious Blood, on 1st July, tells us that after His death on the Cross a Roman soldier opened the side of Our Lord by piercing it with a lance, and that there flowed out blood and water (Jn 19:34). In his sermon on this part of John's Gospel, St Augustine draws our attention to the fact that the original Greek doesn't say the soldier 'struck' Our Lord's side, or 'wounded' His side, or even 'pierced' His side, but that he 'opened' His side. This gives us a very distinct image, doesn't it? Our Lord's heart is opened, as if a window or a door was opened, and there flowed out the waters of Baptism and the Precious Blood of forgiveness.

This tiny detail becomes even more significant if we remember that earlier in John's Gospel, Our Lord had twice, in the space of just a couple of verses, said 'I am the door' (Jn 10:7,9). In this context, Our Lord was talking about the door to the sheepfold. He said, 'I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved' (Jn 10:9). In that discourse, Our Lord warns against thieves and robbers who are false doors as it were: those who would lead the sheep astray, who would steal, and kill, and destroy (Jn 10:10). Going through the wrong door leads to death and destruction.

By contrast, if we regard Our Lord as the door – if we go through the right door – we shall find fresh and green pastures which give health and life (Jn 10:9 and Ps 22:2). In other words, Our Lord is the door which leads to salvation. Through Him – and through Him alone – can we be saved and enter into heaven.

Yet before we can step through that door, there first floods out through that door the very means by which we may be saved: the fresh waters of life in which we are bathed when we are baptized, and the precious blood of salvation by which our souls are washed clean of sin in the Sacrament of Confession. The wounded and Sacred Heart of Our Lord is the source of redemption,

the seat of His love for us that saw Him die on our behalf so that might live with Him for ever in heaven once this life is over.

There is a beautiful symmetry, is there not?

Christ died that we might live.

He gave His life-blood that we might have life.

A sinner opened Our Lord's heart so that we might become saints.

Blood and water flowed out so that we might enter in.

In that same sermon St Augustine draws other parallels by pointing out that just as Noah opened the door of the Ark to let in the animals that they might be saved from the destructive waters of the flood, so Our Lord opens the door to His heart so that we might enter into the Ark of Salvation – namely, the Church – and so be saved from the destructive tide of sin.

Yet there are still more parallels from the Old Testament.

When Adam slept, God brought forth Eve, the mother of new life, from the rib – from the heart – of the First Adam. In exactly the same way, when Christ was asleep in death on the Cross, Almighty God brought forth our new Mother, the Church, from the heart of the Second Adam, and through the Church we are brought to birth supernaturally, and are given supernatural life in the Sacraments. This is why we refer to the Church as the Mystical Bride of Christ: She came into being from the heart of Her Bridegroom; and why we call Her 'our Holy Mother the Church': it is She who gives us life.

Again and again Our Lord makes it clear that it is only through Him that we can have access to the blessings and graces of the heavenly places (Eph 1:3); that it is only through Him that we can come to the Father (Jn 14:6); that it is only through Him that we shall find the fresh pastures which we call heaven (Jn 10:9). And it is the open door of His heart that grants us this access; it is the Blood and water that pours out from this open door that makes passing through this open door even possible.

If you have never prayed the Litany of the Precious Blood, then I urge you to do so. There you will find a whole list of prayerful images that help us appreciate the power of Christ's Precious Blood. There you will see the Precious Blood of Our Lord described as the price of our salvation, as that which quenches the thirst of souls, as the torrent of mercy, as the conqueror of dæmons, as the hope of penitents, the comfort of the dying, as the peace and sweetness of hearts, and the pledge of eternal life.

Perhaps a chalice of the Precious Blood should always be reserved in the tabernacle in all Catholic churches around the world for our adoration and consolation, except that we are reminded that the Sacred Host is the presence of Christ, Body *and* Blood, Soul, and Divinity, the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ whole and entire. In other words, there is already in all tabernacles the presence of the Precious Blood of Our Lord.

If you have not already made time for private devotion to the Precious Blood of Our Lord, then try to do so at some point in the remaining couple of weeks of this month dedicated to such a great gift, and pray that the Most Precious Blood of Jesus might save us.