

We are called to be what we receive

During the Vietnam War, some stray artillery rounds landed in an orphanage, wounding several children. One was a nine-year-old girl who lost a lot of blood. Word quickly reached nearby U.S. Marines and they sent a Navy doctor and a nurse to help the children.

They went to work on the young girl who was in shock and needed an immediate blood transfusion to save her life.

Unfortunately, neither the doctor, nor the nurse, nor the orphanage staff had the correct blood type. To find a suitable donor, they called together some of the older children who had escaped the bombardment unharmed.

In their stumbling Vietnamese and limited French they explained to the orphans that someone would have to give blood to help save the little girl's life.

At first, nothing but silence and stares came from the frightened youngsters. Then a small hand hesitantly went up a bit, then down again, then – finally – fully up. It was the hand of a little 10-year-old boy.

The nurse quickly asked his name. “Heng,” the wide-eyed child replied in a whisper barely loud enough to be heard.

He was placed on a cot and had a sample of his blood taken to see if it was compatible with the little girl's. Fortunately, it passed and the transfusion began to the smiles of the American doctor and nurse.

But, to their surprise, Heng began to cry. At first, just a few tears slid silently down his face but he soon began to cry aloud. "Is it hurting, Heng?" asked the nurse. "No," he answered, but he continued to cry with shuddering sobs. Soon, his whole body was shaking and he was awash with a flood of tears.

The medical team became worried and nervous. Something was **VERY** wrong.

At that moment, a Vietnamese nurse arrived on the scene. She spoke to Heng in his own language, engaging him in a rapid-fire dialog. Then the nurse crouched down and whispered softly to him. Soon, he calmed down and his crying faded away. Turning to the Americans, the Vietnamese nurse said in subdued tones:

"He thought he was going to die. He thought you needed **ALL** his blood, and that he would have to die to save the little girl's life."

Shocked, the doctor asked, "How could he possibly have the guts to do that?"

The Vietnamese nurse turned and translated the doctor's question to little Heng.

He answered simply, "Because she is my friend ... "

It's not a great leap for us to understand that life does not come to us without some sacrifice. Our mothers endured months of discomfort and then the intense pangs of childbirth just to bring us into this world.

The little girl in the story needed life-giving blood to survive her injuries. But first, **SOMEONE** had to **GIVE** that blood. It wasn't a **TOTAL** sacrifice – as many soldiers on the battlefield have done – but Heng was **READY**, even though he was only 10 years old ... and **SOOO** afraid.

Our Savior certainly knew that **HIS** sacrifice on the cross **WOULD** be total.

Jesus would be giving us **ALL** his Body and Blood. Just as the full name of today's feast implies: The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.

THAT sacrifice is deeply woven into the texture of the Mass.

There is pain in the Eucharist as well as joy.

Each Mass reminds us that our lives were bought at an **ENORMOUS** price.

It is **IMPORTANT** for us to dwell on the **SACRIFICE** involved in our redemption. It reminds us that a measure of sacrifice is needed in our **OWN** lives as well. At some point in our lives, we will **ALL** have to suffer and accept it in a Christian spirit.

It may mean sharing the plight of the unloved. It may mean grinding poverty, children who have left the Faith, the crushing pain of a divorce, the haunting memory of an abortion, an illness that draws us slowly away from our families, and the sudden realization of our own mortality.

But we have to remember that in Christian life, pain and joy often go hand in hand.

Pain is **NOT** the end!!! It leads to joy.

Our Savior's pain was just the **BEGINNING** of the **DIVINE** life He provided to us through the Sacraments.

Life given through a sacrament is **ALWAYS** divine life. It is given through a **HUMAN** action – a physical act of the Body of Christ here on Earth ... the **CHURCH**.

God can give grace without using any human instrument, by enlightening our minds with truth and moving our hearts with love.

BUT when God gives grace through sacraments, it is **ALWAYS** through the words and gestures of Christ's visible, **HUMAN** Body on Earth. In the Church, Jesus **CONTINUES** to speak with a **HUMAN** voice, to touch with **HUMAN** hands, to be present to us and interact with us in **FLESH** and **BLOOD**.

We are a **SACRAMENTAL** Church. We are the Body of Christ on Earth and we must **ACCEPT** what it means to **BE** and to **LIVE** as **HIS** Body.

The key to this and to all the sacraments is the **EUCCHARIST**, the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood.

All the other sacraments either **PREPARE** us to receive the Eucharist and its graces – as Baptism, Reconciliation, and Confirmation do – or they **STRENGTHEN** us to live as Eucharist ourselves ... that is, as the Body of Christ offered for the life of the world.

Matrimony and Holy Orders empower us to die to ourselves in love by a committed sharing of **ALL** that we are.

Anointing of the Sick empowers us to face the trials of sickness and death as Jesus Himself did. This sacrament either overcomes **SICKNESS** by **HEALING** it as Jesus did in his ministry or overcomes **DEATH** by **STRENGTHENING** us to surrender to it in triumph as Jesus did on the Cross.

St. Leo the Great said that the overall effect of the Eucharist is to change us into what ... that is **WHO** ... we receive.

What we **BECOME** is the Body of Christ **SPECIFICALLY** offered in **LOVE** and **SACRIFICE** for the life of the entire world.

Little Heng was **READY** to give up **HIS** life for a friend.

Jesus **DID** give up His life for **US** ... His friends.

We each are **CALLED** to give up our **SINFUL** lives and to **BE** what we receive in the Eucharist: The Body of Christ ... His hands, His voice here on Earth.

We are **CALLED** to use **OUR** hands and **OUR** voices to **WORK** toward a world **FREE** of evil.

In his homily on the feast we celebrate today, Pope Benedict encouraged us to nourish ourselves with love of Christ in the Eucharist and said that through this sacrament “we renew our faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.”

I can hardly close my own homily on the Feast of Corpus Christi with a better prayer than that offered by The Holy Father, who prayed:

“Stay with us, Jesus. Make us a gift of Yourself and give us the bread that nourishes us for eternal life. Free this world from the poison of evil, from the violence and hatred that pollute people’s consciences [and] purify it with the power of Your merciful love.”