



The Holy See

AUDIENCE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE "SANGUIS CHRISTI" UNION AND JUBILEE PILGRIMS

Saturday, 1 July 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. I am pleased to meet you all, members of the male and female religious families and Catholic associations devoted to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus on this first day of July, which Christian piety has dedicated to meditation on "the Blood of Christ, the price of our redemption, the pledge of salvation and eternal life" (John XXIII, Apostolic Letter *Inde a primis*, in AAS, 52 [1960], 545-550). As I greet you affectionately and thank you for coming, I extend my gratitude to the Provincial Director of the Society of the Precious Blood for his kind words, which he also addressed to me in your name.

Until the liturgical reform introduced by the Second Vatican Council, on this day the mystery of the Blood of Christ was also liturgically celebrated throughout the Catholic Church. Paul VI, my Predecessor of venerable memory, joined the commemoration of the Blood of Christ with that of his Body in what is now called the Solemnity of the "Body and Blood of Christ". For in every Eucharistic celebration, not only does the Body of Christ become present, but also his Precious Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant, which is shed for all so that sins may be forgiven (cf. *Mt 26: 27*).

2. Dear brothers and sisters, what a great mystery is the Blood of Christ! From the dawn of Christianity it has captivated the minds and hearts of so many Christians and, particularly, of your holy founders and foundresses, who made it the standard of your congregations and associations. The Jubilee Year gives new impetus to this important devotion. For, as we celebrate Christ 2,000 years after his birth, we are also invited to contemplate and adore him in his sacred humanity, assumed in Mary's womb and hypostatically united to the divine Person of the Word. Christ's Blood is the precious source of salvation for the world precisely because it belongs to the Word who became flesh for our salvation.

The sign of "blood poured out", as an expression of life given in bloodshed as a witness to supreme love, is an act of divine condescension to our human condition. God chose the sign of blood because no other sign suggests a person's total involvement so eloquently.

This mystery of self-giving has its source in the heavenly Father's salvific will and its fulfilment in the filial obedience of

Jesus, true God and true Man, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the history of our salvation bears the mark and indelible seal of Trinitarian love.

3. In the presence of this wondrous divine work, all the faithful join you, dear brothers and sisters, in offering hymns of praise to the Triune God in the sign of Christ's Precious Blood. However, the witness of life must be joined with the confession of the lips, as we are urged by the Letter to the Hebrews: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus ... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (10: 19, 24).

And there are many "good works" which meditation on Christ's sacrifice inspires in us. It spurs us, in fact, to give our life for God and our brethren without reserve, "usque ad effusionem sanguinis", as so many martyrs have done. How could we ever fail to recognize the value of every human being, when Christ shed his blood for each one without distinction? Meditation on this mystery prompts us to turn to all those whose moral and physical suffering could be alleviated but who, instead, are left to languish on the fringes of an affluent and indifferent society. It is in this perspective that your service, members of AVIS, stands out in all its nobility. I cordially greet you, as well as your President, whom I thank for his address. You do not limit yourselves to giving something that belongs to you; you give something of yourselves. What is more personal than one's own blood? In the light of Christ, the gift of this vital element to a brother or sister acquires a value that transcends mere human horizons. Therefore, members of AVIS, I offer you my esteem and encouragement.

4. I would now like to extend a cordial greeting to the pilgrims from the Diocese of Bergamo, led by their Pastor, Bishop Roberto Amadei, whom I thank for the sentiments he expressed in his friendly address. Dear friends, by today's visit you wish to show your affection and closeness to the Successor of Peter. I cordially thank you! Down the centuries your Church has maintained very close ties of communion with the Apostolic See. How can we forget, in this regard, your countryman and my Predecessor, Pope John XXIII, soon to be enrolled among the blessed? May the path of prayer and meditation which leads you to the Jubilee sites be an opportunity for you, dear friends, to reaffirm your convinced fidelity to Christ, "the Holy Door" to the Father's kingdom. On returning home, take the Pope's greetings and encouragement to the priests, consecrated men and women and all your brothers and sisters in faith. May the Holy Year encourage them all to rekindle their faith and to persevere in their commitment to the new evangelization, which is confirmed and strengthened in charity.

5. Lastly, my thoughts turn to the faithful from St Mary of Victory in Montebelluna, from St Bernardine in Tordandrea di Assisi, from St John the Baptist in Acconia di Curinga, as well as to the Blessed Mary De Mattias Institute of Frosinone and the Community of the Little House in Aversa.

Dear friends, may the celebration of the 2,000th anniversary of the Incarnation of the Son of God find you watchful in faith, firm in hope and fervent in charity. Today Christ still approaches each person to offer him the gift of God's infinite mercy. May you also be rich in this mercy, as is our Father in heaven.

With these sentiments and in the love of the One who has sprinkled us with his blood (cf. 1 Pt 1: 2), I wholeheartedly bless you all.

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