

# *Corpus Christi*

The language of the first two readings is exceedingly dramatic. There are few things more vital to our functioning or more obviously involved in every act or experience than blood. It is everywhere in our body. Yet the word itself is far from ordinary. The very word *blood* evokes violence, deep emotion, death. If we catch sight of blood we are instantly shocked and disturbed. It is something which should stay in its place, neither seen nor heard, but simply performing its functions.

When the Old Testament wishes to express our relationship to God, there is always a shedding of blood involved. By the death of the animal sacrificed, Israel symbolized the utter seriousness of vows and promises of fidelity: it is as if they said if we break this promise, may this be done to us. The stream of life is the seal of a life-commitment to God.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Paschal Lamb, a sacrificial animal whose blood stands for the firstborn Jews who do not die in the slaughter of the firstborn Egyptians. The obedience with which the Jews killed the lamb marked them out as undeserving of the death meted out on the rebellious.

So it is that Jesus arranges his own crisis for the time of Passover. He sees the lambs being driven into Jerusalem as he walks the Way of the Cross; as the first of them die in the courts of the Temple, the nails are driven into his own body. As the last of them is killed, he pours out his life and the very last of his blood, a firstborn who did not refuse to die with sinners at Passover.

This is the mystery we simply touch in the Eucharist, which we have the privilege to celebrate every day. It is as if we go with Jesus out of the city where no-one wishes to hear about sacrifice, or life and death, or a love that endures beyond death, or the dire frontier between human nature and God, or the war between good and evil. It was at an unusually quietened table that Jesus suddenly began to speak of these things, and drew himself the parallel between the wine in the cup, and his own blood which would soon be shed.

As we receive these gifts into our hands, let our lives be revealed to us, caught up into his dramatic Exodus into the Paschal life of eternity. Let us be fed by his precious gift, the most vital ever given. And let us not fail to take the chalice, in which the blood of his sacrifice is cast toward the people, with his own words: *This is the blood of the eternal Covenant the Lord has made with you.*