

**Homily at the Mass of Elevation
of the Vietnam Mission
January 21, 2007**

Introduction

With great joy we gather today to celebrate the presence of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in Vietnam. Here with us in spirit and prayer is the entire Congregation now exercising our ministry in twenty countries around the globe. As Moderator General responsible for the international community, I convey to you the love and support of all our Missionaries. Present in a special way are the members of the Kansas City Province through the presence of its Provincial, Fr. James Urbanic.

I would like to reflect briefly on the meaning of this occasion in light of this Sunday's readings, for they offer important insights for understanding our presence here.

One Body – Many Charisms

The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians sets the tone for understanding the occasion we are celebrating today. St. Paul speaks of the Church as a Body with many parts, with different members all of which are necessary and each serving a purpose. For the body to function properly all the members are needed.

The reading goes on to speak of the different charisms in the Church. Again each one is distinct, but contributing to the good of the whole body.

This reading helps us to understand the function of religious life in the Church. Each religious congregation has received a charism, a gift of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Body and for the furthering of the Reign of God. A charism is a gift to be shared for the enrichment of the whole community of the Church. This is so because the mystery of Christ is so great that it can be approached from many angles and because the Holy Spirit calls forth within the Church religious communities as a response to the needs of the times and circumstances. Some communities were founded long ago, some are more recent. Some are large and famous, some are small and relatively unknown. But as St. Paul reminds us, each member is important for the good of the whole body.

The Missionaries of the Precious Blood

Our Congregation, founded in Italy, by a Roman priest, St. Gaspar del Bufalo, in 1815 is a community which God called into existence at a time of great confusion and moral decay in the Pontifical States. It was a time in history when God was viewed as a very stern and distant God and when the message preached was one which stressed punishment for sin and the need to appease God.

The message of the Cross on which Jesus Christ shed his Most Precious Blood in order to save us from sin, spoke to the people of God's unboundless love for all peoples, even sinners. The Precious Blood spoke to people of "the greatest joy of all: knowing that we are loved by God." Indeed it reminds all of us of our "preciousness" in the eyes of our God who sent His only Son to give his life to save us from death and sin, and to give us "fullness of life."

As Missionaries of the Precious Blood, we are present in the Church to keep the mystery of the Blood of Christ, the price of our Redemption, ever present and before the eyes of God's People, lest we forget our preciousness and inherent human dignity as peoples, not only made in God's image and likeness, but also redeemed "not with silver and gold, but with the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ."

How do we share this charism with the Church?

Our Congregation contributes to the renewal of the Church through the Ministry of the Word. In the beginnings, our Founder and his small band of Missionaries, preached the Word of God through popular missions and retreats for the renewal of the Church and to bring God's merciful love to all peoples, reaching out to those who were on the margins of society in a special way.

Gaspar dreamt of having a thousand tongues to go throughout the whole world preaching the Good News of God's redeeming love. Today our Missionaries preach in many tongues, in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Croatian, German, Tamil, Swahili, and today we add Vietnamese!

The message of the Blood of Christ is needed more than ever in our broken and bleeding world. It is a message of hope to the poor and marginalized; a message of freedom for those oppressed; a message of reconciliation and healing in our brokenness and in the brokennesses of our world and society; a message of life where there is death and of affirmation of human dignity to those who are considered nothing, or garbage in the eyes of society. The Precious Blood speaks of inclusiveness, of stretching the circle of love and community, so that all peoples can find a place in the circle of our love, in the circle of Church and of society.

As Missionaries of the Precious Blood we have been given a charism by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the community and of God's Reign, as Jesus received the Holy Spirit in the Synagogue that Saturday morning when he announced the fulfillment of the Words of the Prophet Isaiah.

We are marked by the Blood of Christ, marked by His love and sent as bearers of a Good News for all peoples. It is a message we preach not only by word of mouth, but one which we aspire to have written in our flesh and on our hearts, being persons of reconciliation, of welcoming, of affirmation, of hope, pilgrims of solidarity and of compassion.

Our very lives, our way of living together in community, and in our apostolates, we wish to witness to the Message of the Blood of Christ. Just as Jesus not only preached the Good News he worked miracles of love and compassion, of healing and reconciliation. As we grow in Vietnam our young missionary community will also be discerning how to carry out this Ministry of the Word in concrete ways and commitments. We will discern the cry of the blood and how best to respond to this cry in our apostolic commitments. We ask your prayerful support in this discernment.

We celebrate in Eucharist

A very special moment for us as Church and as Missionaries is the celebration of the Eucharist. It is here, as we gather around the Altar, and as we raise the Cup of Salvation that we recall the “price of our Redemption.” It is here where we lift up to God the joys and sorrows, the hopes and aspirations, and the cry of the suffering. It is here, where the blood of suffering is mixed with the Blood of Redemption, and the Cup of Suffering becomes the Cup of Hope and of Salvation.

As we drink from that Cup we are energized by God’s loving presence and we fill ourselves up, as “living chalices” so as to continue our mission of bringing God’s redemptive love to all who we accompany in each day. As we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we enter into communion with God and we commit ourselves to continue Christ’s mission, becoming a life broken and blood shed in order to bring the love of God and fullness of life to others

A word of thanks

Thank all of you, priests, brothers, religious sisters, and friends who have supported us and encouraged us on our journey and who join us today as we celebrate the Eucharist and raise the Cup of Blessing in thanksgiving for our charism and for our presence in Vietnam.

Thanks to the Pastor of this parish for being such a welcoming and generous host. A special word of thanks to Fr. James Urbanic and to the members of the Kansas City Province for their generous and continuing support of the Vietnam Project throughout the years. Thank you, Fathers Lac and Dien, for your courage and untiring efforts that have made this day possible. Thank you, our candidates, who have put your trust in us. Together we will discover God’s Will; together, living in the “bond of charity” we will fulfill our mission of being heralds and messengers of Good News, of renewal, and of reconciliation!

Amen!

Barry Fischer, C.P.P.S.