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May 2010

Dear Friend of the Franciscan Missions,

**BEGINNING THE SEVENTH YEAR!** This is meditation **73**. If you would like to receive them by email rather than snail mail, just let me know. These keep me a little focused. The Easter Season continues to May 23, the Solemnity of Pentecost. The Solemnity of the Ascension is on May 13 in the Northeast and on May 16 in most other places in the United States and Canada. May the blessings of Easter continue to touch your life.

This month is filled with special celebrations. Mothers Day is May 9. We will remember all our living and deceased mothers, grandmothers, godmothers and all who serve in motherly capacities, each in a special way. May 10 is the feast of St. Damien of Moloka'i. May 13 is the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. May 15 is the feast of St. Isidore the farmer and his wife, Maria de la Cabeza. They are two wonderful and generous people who achieved sainthood as husband and wife raising a large family. May 20 is the feast of St. Bernardine of Siena, a Franciscan writer who encouraged devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus. Memorial Day is observed this year on May 31 (the feast of the Visitation of Mary). Please pray for all who have died in war. In this month, we especially remember Mary. Thank you for your constant support for the missions. Be assured of our prayers!

### **Washed in the Blood of the Lamb**

Russell Becker, O.F.M.

During the Paschal Triduum and the Easter Season, there are numerous references to the blood of the Lamb. Reading the Book of Revelation, the following passage appears, and is also a part of the Liturgy of the Word for the Solemnity of All Saints:

**Then one of the elders asked me, "Who are these people dressed in white? And where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you should know better than I." He then told me, "These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." [Revelation 7,13-14]**

The phrase *washed in the blood of the Lamb* appears in the Bible and in the writings of the early Church in addition to appearing in sermons and homilies of many preachers. More often than not it is presented as an example how we are cleansed of our sins in the shedding of the blood of Christ. The text from the Book of Revelation makes that very clear: the robes of those who have gone through the time of trial are made white being washed with the blood of the Lamb. We can appreciate the sacrifice of Christ and the result of that sacrifice. It is very consoling and sobering. We can rejoice because we can recover from our sins but, there is a real challenge to faithfulness and a similar sacrificial attitude that goes along with it.

There is a problem with this image because everyone knows that blood does not make anything clean, but really stains, with a stain that is very hard to remove. Blood stains can stay for years. This is one of the things that makes it possible for crimes to be solved years after they have been committed because blood cannot be washed away easily or completely. So in some ways, the image of washing something in blood can make you wonder. How can something be cleaned by one of the strongest and most trenchant stain makers?.

The benefit of symbols is that they are capable of bearing multiple meanings. In this case, *washed in the blood of the Lamb* offers another image which is also important to the paschal proclamation.

There are a lot of pastoral images in the paschal season: the blood of the Lamb, the Good Shepherd images, the flock. All of these images are very serious, they evoke critical life and death issues. People who only know about sheep from wool sweaters and suits and roast lamb can miss that. But to a society that is based on sheep herding, every image of flocks reminded them of life and death issues: food, shelter, clothing, survival depended on the good of the flock and its success. Lambing time was one of these critical times.

In the Spring (Paschal Time), the new lambs were born. If everything went well, it meant

that the flock was renewed and increased. It was rare, though, that everything went well. There were always some problems. Some ewes give birth and their lambs die in the process or are stillborn. Some lambs are born and their mothers die giving birth. These things put the flock in crisis. Interestingly, the childless mothers and the motherless children are not drawn to each other. The fear for the flock is that the survivors will also die and the flock will suffer and so will the shepherds and their families.

In the flock, the childless mothers and the motherless children are both in mortal danger. The sheep whose lambs died run the risk of mourning unto death. All their energy was focused to care for their lambs and they are gone. All the lambs who lost mothers can easily die from lack of care and nurturing from their dead mothers. Shepherds discovered a way to save their mourning mothers and abandoned lambs. They found out that if they took the blood of one of the lambs that had died and poured it (washed) over one of the surviving lambs and presented that lamb to mother of the dead lamb, she would recognize it as hers and take care of it as if it was hers. The childless mother adopts the orphaned lamb. So **washed in the blood of the Lamb** in this case means adoption.

The story of the sacrificed Paschal Lamb with its blood put on the door frames of the Israelites enabled the angel to recognize them and pass over the houses of the Israelite with the last of the plagues. When a lamb was sacrificed some of the blood was sprinkled over the people, normally this is interpreted as a purification rite, but it could also be an indication of being signed with the blood as an adoption rite. Having the blood of the Paschal Lamb on the people, would enable God to recognize the people as God's own people. The process of a childless mother adopting an orphan is a n image of our redemption won for us in the blood of the Lamb by which we become God's adopted children. (Actually a very maternal image and a wonderful baptismal image).

These blood images and the fact that blood is almost impossible to remove should be a great way for us to appreciate the power of the paschal mystery and what God has accomplished for us and in us in the blood of Christ, the Paschal Lamb. When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, let us listen more carefully to the words the Lord left us so that we would recognize the meaning of his passion death and resurrection: ***this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.***

Continue to find new ways to proclaim the resurrection for we are all washed in the blood of the Lamb: our sins are forgiven and we are God's children by adoption.

### Reflection Questions

1. Can you appreciate the critical issues that are symbolized in the Blood of the Lamb?
2. Does Christ sacrifice challenge us to be willing to make sacrifices for others?
3. How does our partaking in the Eucharist transform us?

**Please pray for our missionary friars on their birthdays:**

**Fr. Juvenal Leahy, O.F.M. (Brazil): May 17**  
**Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan): May 30**

**Grant them strength and length of days!**

**Please also pray for our missionary and former missionary friars who are ill:**

**Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)**  
**Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)**  
**Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)**  
**Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)**

**May God bless them with health and energy.**