



JULY

**MONTH OF THE MOST
PRECIOUS BLOOD OF
OUR LORD**

**Volume 29
Issue 2**

**THE PRECIOUS
BLOOD FAMILY**

July 2022

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Pietà sculpture.
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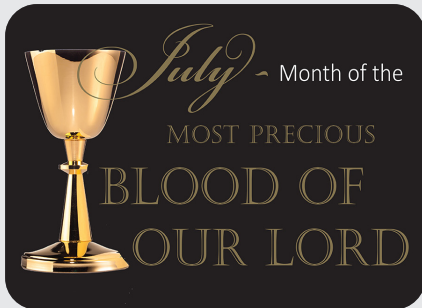
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THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY

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EDITORIAL

REFLECTIONS ON THE SEVEN BLOOD-SHEDDINGS

FR. JOHN COLACINO,
C.P.P.S.

With this issue, I have assumed responsibility for editing the Precious Blood Family. I am happy to have an opportunity to invite new contributors as well as call upon previous authors. This issue features several articles from members of the Rochester mission house of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. The accompanying illustrations are creations of Patricia Wheelhouse PhD from that community. I am also happy to welcome ecumenical and interfaith contributors to the publication. Fr. Jerome Hologa, C.P.P.S. will continue to provide his capable publishing skills which have given the magazine an updated professional look. We are still planning to publish three issues a year plus the annual calendar. The continued support of our subscribers is, of course, greatly appreciated.

The current issue in honor of the month dedicated to the Precious Blood offers a series of reflections on the traditional seven blood-sheddings of the Lord from a variety of perspectives. For those interested related liturgical and devotional practices such as a scriptural Chaplet of the Precious Blood and a Month of Readings on the Precious Blood will appear at my website (sanguischristi.com) to celebrate the month of July.

01

THE NEW ABRAHAM

THE FIRST BLOOD-SHEDDING: THE CIRCUMCISION

LINDA M. MACCAMMON

Covenant is a binding agreement between God and human beings that anchors the Bible's narrative, from the implied covenants with Adam and Eve to the covenants God initiates with Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David, and the "new covenant" proclaimed in Jeremiah 31. There the prophet calls for religious renewal in which God inscribes the Mosaic Law on the people's hearts: "[A]nd I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord" (Jer.31:33-34). It's a process in which the people internalize the law so that they freely obey it, not from fear or self-interest, but from the deep bonds of respect

and trust that develop between covenant partners.

In Genesis 15:7-21 God agrees to "cut a covenant" with Abram through animal sacrifice. Traditionally, parties to a covenant would walk between dismembered animals, announcing that a similar fate would await them if they violated the agreement. In this case, Yahweh passes between the animals alone, ratifying the promises of the covenant without asking for anything in return. The covenant is thus presented as a gift, a good faith offering that further demonstrates the trustworthiness of the Deity. Later, the outward sign of circumcision would distinguish the Abrahamic covenant: "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days

Simply put, to fear the Lord is to know the Lord in a deep and intimate way.



old must be circumcised” (Gen. 17:10-12a).

In entering the covenant relation, Abraham experiences a gradual shift in religious consciousness, from an initial state of fear and self-interest (Gen 12) to a profound sense of reverence that knows, understands, and trusts in God, emulates God’s example, and obeys God’s will without question (Gen 22). This shift confirms that “fear” of the Lord is a form of wisdom (Prov.1:7, 9:10; Job 28:28) that can only be acquired over time and with experience. Ultimately, what Abraham learns in this transformative process is that he and his family can have faith in God because God always provides. He may not always understand the nature and timing of the gifts, but the fact remains that God never fails him. This knowledge eliminates the doubts that plagued Abraham’s mind and heart throughout the narrative, finding confirmation in the story of God asking Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

In the eyes of God, the father’s readiness to sacrifice the son is the moment of truth that ultimately saves the child. But why would Abraham agree to sacrifice his son? The answer is found in the angel who intervenes at the decisive moment: “now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Clearly, fear of God is an essential attribute of God’s covenant, one that Abraham has not adequately displayed thus far; hence the test. If Abraham was motivated by fear of the Lord, then it’s crucial to understand what this means. We need look no further than God’s words in Jeremiah: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more” (Jer.31:33-34). Simply put, to fear the Lord is to know the Lord in a deep and intimate way.

In this light, Jesus of Nazareth, as depicted in the gospels, might be seen as the new Abraham because he demonstrates what it means to fear and know the Lord from the very beginning of his life, indeed, from the eighth day when his father Joseph saw to the child’s circumcision (Lk. 2:21). In living out the Abrahamic ideal, Jesus would show his followers what it means to live a life of obedience, faith, worship, and unselfish service to others. And while Jesus is definitely the “new and improved” Abrahamic model, he is also fully human and experiences tensions in his relationship with God that test his faith. In the baptism scene, for example, the Father-Son relationship appears strong and secure. Jesus is anxious to please the Father, telling John that his baptism is necessary, “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt.3:15). The Deity is duly impressed, bestowing the gift of the Spirit, which empowers Jesus throughout his earthly ministry. In the garden of Gethsemane, however, we encounter a very different divine-

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My God, my God,
why have you
forsaken me?

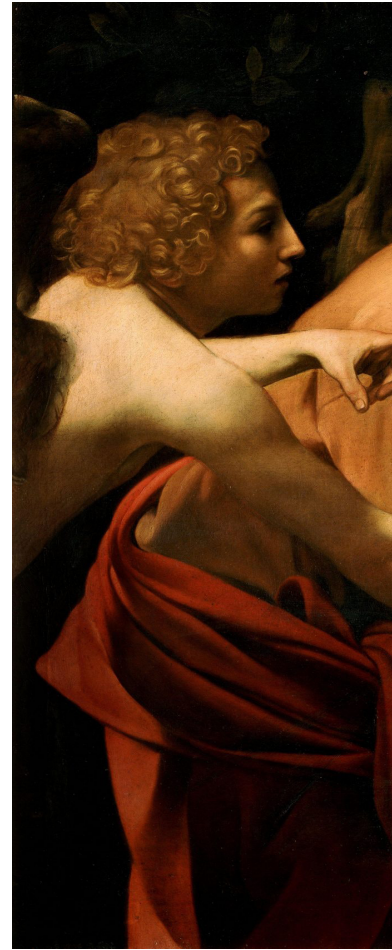
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human exchange.

Here is a Jesus who doubts, who cries out to his Father in heaven in fear and trembling, but the Father is silent. In this garden (a familiar setting for catastrophe), there are no words of praise from heaven, no dove signaling divine approval. Jesus' admonition to his disciples is heavy with irony, for he is suddenly aware of the weakness of the flesh. Faced with his own mortality he knows and fears the pain and prolonged torture of crucifixion. Yet, despite the

Deity's silence, Jesus doesn't run away from the test. Like Abraham at Mt. Moriah, Jesus trusts God and obeys the Father's will without a word of protest (Mk 14:61; Mt 26:63; Lk 23:9). The dutiful and obedient Son fulfills the Scriptures (Mk 14:49) just as he did at his baptism.

The depth of Jesus' faith commitment is clearly witnessed at the moment before his death. He cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46). Initially, these words seem to indicate a

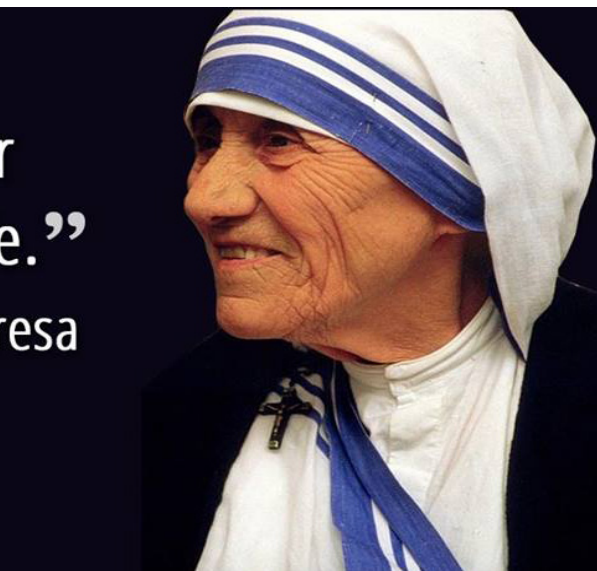


In living out the Abrahamic ideal, Jesus would show his followers what it means to live a life of obedience, faith, worship, and unselfish service to others.

“A life not lived for others is not a life
— Mother Teresa”



Abraham offered to God what was most precious to him, his own son, out of obedience to God and love for God. He thereby helps us to see clearly another element of the sacrifice of Christ: the way Jesus offers his sacrifice.



resurgence of doubt, but nothing could be further from the truth, for they are taken from Psalm 22. While the opening verses of the psalm describe the pain and suffering of one who feels utterly abandoned by God, the psalmist's hope for rescue is soon realized, transforming the lament into a song of gratitude and praise to a merciful God who keeps the covenant promises.

As it was with Abraham, Jesus' moments of doubt at Gethsemane and Golgotha serve as the catalyst for a deeper faith and trust in God, a trust so great that in the hour of his death he is confident that God will deliver him from evil. The blood of the cross – first shed at his circumcision -- symbolizes the end of this struggle; the resurrection confirms that Jesus' faith is not misplaced, for like Abraham before him Jesus knows that God is a trustworthy Deity who always provides.

The Agony in the Garden

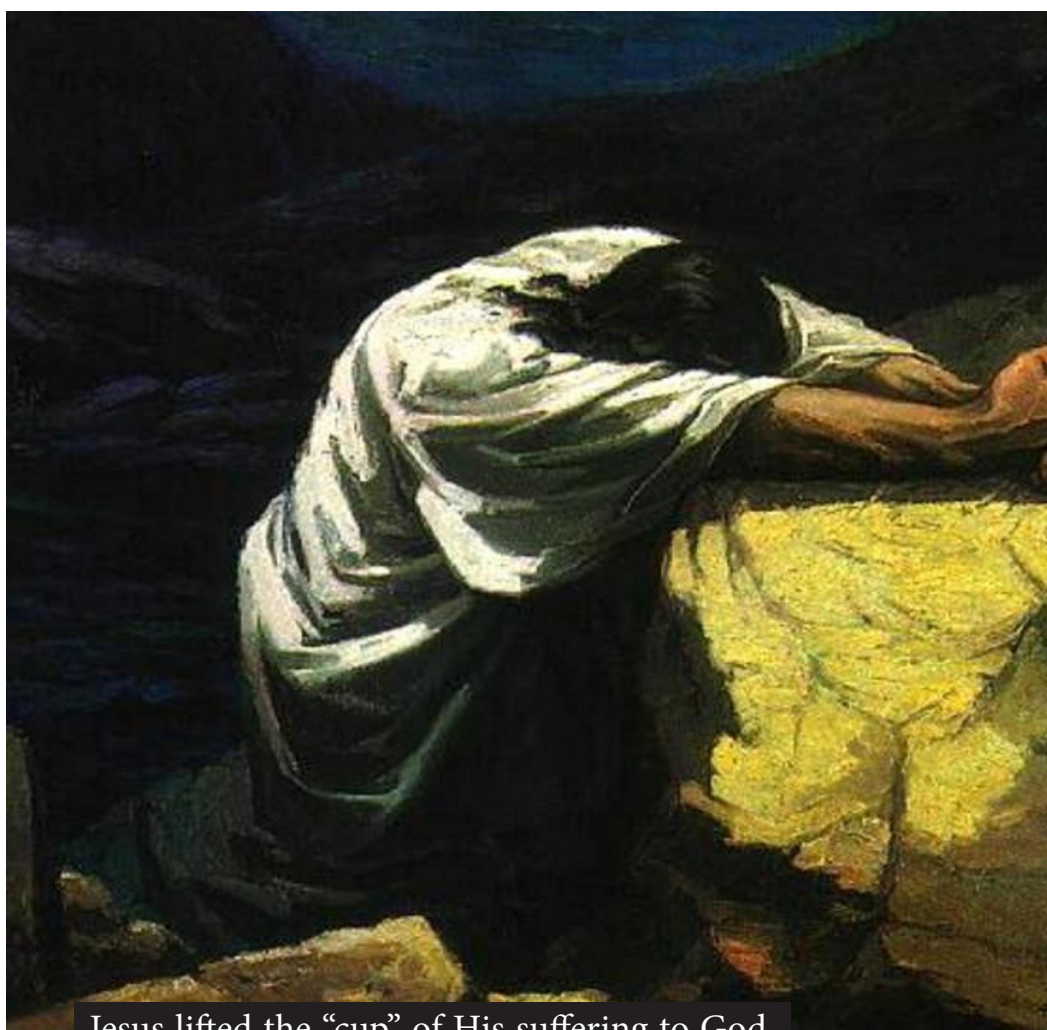
IN THE GARDEN FROM EDEN TO GETHSEMANE

THE SECOND BLOOD-
SHEDDING: THE
AGONY IN THE
GARDEN

Sharon Miller

Agony. Jesus collapsed in the garden of Gethsemane. The garden became a witness to Jesus' torment and a struggling state of mind after the Last Supper. Remembered was another garden where Adam and Eve succumbed to a beguiling evil force and acquiesced to the lure of temptation. Jesus rose as the divine potency to again open that garden door to God's presence. "I am the gate."

Peter, James, and John accompanied Jesus into the garden of Gethsemane, a setting Jesus had found comforting in the past. Before distancing from the three apostles, Jesus instructed them to remain close-by, to stay vigilant, and to pray. Boulders and ancient olive trees sheltered Jesus as he plunged into despair. He was conflicted between the earthly and the divine. Light and dark forces ignited when he faced the duality of human nature and the release of human-bound consciousness.



Jesus lifted the "cup" of His suffering to God,
the Father, and implored,

"Let this "cup" pass from me!"

Remembered was another garden where Adam and Eve succumbed to a beguiling evil force and acquiesced to the lure of temptation. Jesus rose as the divine potency to again open that garden door to God's presence. I am the gate!

02



Gnarly and twisted tree trunks supported a dense canopy of foliage and the multiplicity of drupe fruit. Gethsemane meant "oil press." Olives were traditionally pressed until they released a valued oil, that at first appeared as blood-red droplets, before turning golden-green. Olive oil was frequently used for holy anointing. Likened to the crushing of the olives, Jesus' heart was under extreme pressure from afflicting suffering, separation, and wrestling with the True heart. His sweat oozed blood from his pores as though portending the ultimate shedding of blood, drop by drop, for the redemption of humanity-during the unavoidable crucifixion.

Jesus was reduced to powerlessness and aloneness in the material world. His human nature was tormented with thoughts of betrayal and the fear of an impending arrest and brutal death. The apostles did not respond to Jesus' urgent call and were discovered asleep. Despite the deepening gravitas, the threesome had drifted away from their support. Jesus was once again abandoned.

Under duress, Jesus projected His personal struggle when He commanded the apostles, "*Watch and pray you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" Jesus lifted the "cup" of His suffering to God, the Father, and implored, "Let this "cup" pass from me!" Jesus pleaded with

humble supplication for a release of the shame and torture of an imminent and horrific death. During that pivotal moment of naked vulnerability and suffering, Jesus fully understood and experienced human weakness and temptation.

God, the Father, did not remove the "cup" and had to bear witness to the barbaric death of His only Begotten Son. Jesus was sent to the mortal domain for the purpose of re-uniting God with humankind. A God-ordained angel was sent to Jesus to provide courage and strength. Perhaps, the angel reinforced that Jesus was not separated from God's presence. And, confirmed that His sacrifice sanctioned hope for all who believed in the Kingdom of God. The angel reassured, we were never alone.

Jesus readied to surrender all vestiges of attachment and transcend to purity of will and full illumination. His sacrifice was aligned in absolute communion with God. The Sanskrit word, dharma, meant fulfilling one's inherent purpose and adhering to divine order. Jesus knew and accepted His God appointed mission and destiny. He transcended and merged as one with the Holy Scepter- a symbol of the sovereignty and the reign of the Sacred Heart.

Jesus' atoned blood flowed in holy circulation with the Sacred Heart at its pulsing center.

Union occurred as human will united with divine will in the “purified element of blood.”

The “cup” - transformed to chalice- served as an offering of Jesus’ blood, a testament to the sacrament of Communion previously bestowed to the apostles at the Last Supper. During the inevitable crucifixion, blood from Jesus’ five wounds was absorbed by the earth and became the new covenant.

Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot who, in the darkness of night, came forward as an instrument of evil. Judas targeted and revealed Jesus’ identity with a “kiss” of betrayal and hailed Him as “Rabbi.” Members and soldiers of the Sanhedrin entrapped and arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. The Passion of Jesus was enacted with the consequential arrest, scourge, trial, and crucifixion.

Holy teachings. Jesus humbly exposed His vulnerability and

doubt plus fears of suffering and betrayal.. Ultimately, He surrendered to the will of God and the spiritual gained prominence over the material and temporal world. The mystery of paradox - faith was exalted from constricted agony and betrayal - with ultimate surrender and union with God.

Jesus awakened the Truth of three vows. Poverty meant prayerful and emptying o the separate self and becoming a clear vessel for God. Obedience declared absolute listening to God who was closer than breath itself. Chastity was purified intent and abiding faith in God.

Jesus emanated authentic humility and surrendered to the supernal. And, from His Sacred Heart flowed the blood of unconditional compassion and forgiveness. Divine mercy was directed to receptive souls with Jesus’ eternal agape love. “ I am the way, the Truth, and the life.”

Sharon Shantima Miller is a member of the Rochester Mission House and the Assisi Institute.



THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY

We appreciate any donation to help defray the postage and printing costs of this publication. The suggested annual offering is \$25. Please make cheques payable to Unio Sanguis Christi. Tax receipts are issued in January of each year.



C.PP.S. MISSION PROJECTS

Since 1976 C.PP.S. Mission Projects has worked to uplift human dignity and improve living conditions for the people of Tanzania. Our African missions support 2.5 million people a year through water projects that guarantee access to clean water and by providing an education to children and adolescents in different schools. If you would like to assist in these efforts you may find us at cppsmissionprojects.ngo for further information.

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MASS ASSOCIATION

Since 1883 with the approval of Pope Leo XIII the Missionaries of the Precious Blood throughout the world have offered 4000 Masses annually for those enrolled in their Mass Association. Enrollments may be made on behalf of the living and the dead. These may be made in person or by mail at the Shrine of St. Gaspar, 540 St. Clair Ave. W., Toronto ON M6C 1A4. Requests are also accepted by telephone at 416-653-4486 or through the Atlantic Province website. The suggested offering is \$25.00 plus \$4.00 postage if the certificate is mailed.

SHRINE OF ST. GASPAR DEL BUFALO

The chapel was dedicated in 1981 and serves to promote devotion to the Most Precious Blood and to the founder of the Missionaries, St. Gaspar del Bufalo. It is located at 540 St. Clair Ave. W., Toronto ON. The chapel is open for prayer Monday-Friday from 9:00am-5:00pm.



UNION OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

Founded in 1851 by the Ven. Giovanni Merlini, third Moderator General of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and approved by Pope Pius IX, the Union serves to promote the spirituality of the Blood of Christ through a variety of activities. For information on local groups, contact Fr. Gerardo V. Laguartilla C.P.P.S. at uscatlanticprovince@gmail.com

SANGUIS CHRISTI WEBSITE

A variety of liturgical and devotional resources is available at the website maintained by Fr. John Colacino C.P.P.S. The address is sanguischristi.com

The Scourging

A photograph of a cemetery with numerous wooden crosses of various shapes and sizes. In the foreground, a crow is perched on the top of a cross. The background shows a green field and trees under a blue sky with light clouds.

THE LIFE BLOOD OF GOD: ANTIDOTE TO EVIL

THE THIRD BLOOD-SHEDDING: THE SCOURGING



CRAIG BULLOCK

03

As I write this reflection, Russia is in the eleventh week of its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. This atrocity has reminded us of the reality that darkness or evil is a very real force in the world. The reality of a dark force needs to be underscored because many in our postmodern era deny the supernatural, including the phenomenon of evil, preferring instead to reduce all that happens in the world to

a psychological or sociological explanation. If we take our cues from the opening chapters of Genesis, humankind did not invent evil, but was seduced by it. With astute insight, Carl Jung tells us, “One must be positively blind not to see the colossal role that evil plays in the world. Indeed, it took the intervention of God himself to deliver humanity from the curse of evil, for without his intervention man would have been lost.”



“Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia and Ukraine.”

While I am not suggesting we look for the devil under every rock, an overly optimistic understanding of the forces that impact human history is dangerously naive. Though we need not fear the powers of darkness, neither should we deny them. The prologue of John’s Gospel tells us, “In him (Christ Jesus) was life, and this life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not conquer it.” No, evil’s dark minions did not overtake Jesus, however hard they tried. We too will be confronted by the forces of darkness to the extent we align ourselves with Jesus’ mission. For this reason, the drama of Good Friday, particularly the scourging of Jesus, remains the timeless template for our own confrontations with evil.

Jesus came to bring humanity the greatest gift imaginable: fellowship with God. In scourging Jesus, the Romans attempted to both humiliate him and to break his will



“Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world.”
Pope Francis

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not conquer it. No, evil’s dark minions did not overtake Jesus, however hard they tried.



“Everything that God creates is beautiful and good, steeped in wisdom and love; God’s creative action brings order, instils harmony and bestows beauty ... in opposing their Creator people go against themselves, deny their origin and consequently their truth; and evil, with its painful chain of sorrow and death, enters the world. Moreover, all that God had created was good, indeed, very good, but after man had opted freely for falsehood rather than truth, evil entered the world.”

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

to be the instrument of God's blessings for humankind. Yet through this horrific ordeal, Jesus stood upright, never wavering in his mission. Both his love for God and for us empowered him to endure this humiliation with faith in God's providence. Truly, love is the most powerful force in all of creation, because God is love.

What does the scourging of Jesus mean for us? The same forces that tried to humiliate and break Jesus'

determination will try to humiliate and break our will. We will be empowered to remain unwavering in the midst of such an onslaught not by egoic willpower, but by the very same power that sustained Jesus: our love for God and God's love for us. As Saint Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things; love never fails." Thus, if we are going to participate in the mission of Christ Jesus, which is the vocation of every

Christian, we must nurture and deepen our love of God through daily prayer and meditation.

Additionally, we must understand a certain mystery to Jesus' scourging. Drops of blood undoubtedly fell from Jesus' body to the earth. On a human level, we know that blood bestows life. Still deeper, the blood of Jesus is the very lifeblood of God! When Jesus' blood flowed to the ground, the earth became a metaphorical chalice. In those moments, a new spiritual and moral force was embedded within the collective consciousness of the human family, acting as a counterforce to the dark powers.

Clearly, evil ultimately becomes drunk with power and inevitably defeats its own purposes: the scourging of Jesus resulted in the outpouring of his precious blood upon humanity. The scourging was the beginning of the end of evil's sway over human history. Every time you and I partake of the Lord's Supper we receive a transfusion of the very lifeblood of God that heals, strengthens, and transforms us. We become living chalices who work with God to create a new heaven and a new earth.



Craig Bullock is the Spiritual Director of the Assisi Institute in Rochester, NY and a practicing psychotherapist.



RENÉE TEMBECKJIAN

IT WAS TIME FOR A NEW KING.

- ONCE AND FUTURE KING - THE FOURTH BLOOD-SHEDDING: THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

It was time for a new king...and the great prophet, Samuel, had one in mind. He had his eye on Saul, because, as it was said, there was not a man among the sons of Israel more handsome than he, being taller than any of the people from his shoulder and upward. (1 Samuel 9:2) But looking like a king and being a king are two very different things. King Saul did accomplish some good, but history shows that over time, his ego swelled and he claimed more authority than was rightly his to take. It is said that he gradually became driven by jealousy and

But David was not the last shepherded-king born in Bethlehem. From the root of his ancestral tree would come another boy who didn't look the slightest bit royal - a baby born in a filthy stable to refugee parents under threat of scandal.



When we encounter not the still waters, but the swirling tides of fear, anger, or anxiety, our shepherd's

outstretched arm reaches for us.

paranoia, and began hiding the truth, even from those closest to him. Any humility Saul once possessed became corroded by a destructive pride – he neglected the welfare of his people and became so unstable that he is described in scripture as with, “evil spirits sometimes taking hold of him.”

It was time for a new king.

So the prophet Samuel looked to Jesse, a prominent farmer from Bethlehem, with eight sons. Where Samuel once focused on appearances, he finally realizes that God seeks a king with a true heart. After meeting seven of Jesse's sons, none of whom seem suited to the call, he asked if Jesse has any other sons anywhere. As it happens, Jesse did have one more son, his youngest...but he is clearly not king material. He is just a shepherd boy, who plays the harp and sings to his sheep. His name was David. Samuel wanted to meet this shepherd boy, anyway, and, when he does, he anointed David as king, right there on the spot. And what does the newly anointed King David do with his newly conferred power? He goes right back into the field to tend his flock. Looking like a king and being a king are two very different things.

And so, when we wander into pastures of distress,

loneliness, or grief, our shepherd's unfailing love will

comfort us.



We know that over time, David became a great king with a powerful reign. But David was a conflicted soul, too. He had very human flaws and made grave human errors. Now looking every bit the king, he seems to have forgotten what it means to be a shepherd. Perhaps it was those very human experiences – triumph and sorrow, love and lust, loyalty and betrayal, grand courage and petty smallness – that evoked from David's soul many of those heartfelt songs that we have come to know as the psalms. And one of those psalms in particular, struck such a deep chord within our human

soul that it became perhaps the most repeated song throughout all of history: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

But David was not the last shepherd-king born in Bethlehem. From the root of his ancestral tree would come another boy who didn't look the slightest bit royal – a baby born in a filthy stable to refugee parents under threat of scandal. For looking like a king and being a king are two very different things... And unlike David, this king will never forget his call to be a shepherd. He will love his flock, and from that love, he will challenge them – to follow him out from their enclosures of

familiarity and comfort, to push against the fences of prejudice, and the gates of fear. He will break bread with outcasts, touch and befriend those considered unclean and unworthy, and upend the established religion by daring to heal on the Sabbath, even as the priests and authorities argue over whether he should. And even when the shepherd himself is brought like a lamb to the slaughter, when violence is so unjustly and cruelly exacted upon his own dear head – he will not retaliate or harm so much as a hair on the head of another... because there is absolutely no one beyond the reach of his staff or the wide embrace of his open arms. He will not abandon his call as shepherd.

And so, when we wander into pastures of distress, loneliness, or grief, our shepherd's unfailing love will comfort us. When we encounter not the still waters, but the swirling tides of fear, anger, or anxiety, our shepherd's outstretched arm reaches for us. When we walk through the valley of the shadow – personal darkness or despair – our shepherd's voice calls to us. And when we are tempted to go astray and compromise our own integrity, our shepherd's rod and staff – his unfailing wisdom and love – guide us back into wholeness, ever and over again.

For looking like a king and being a king are two very different things. Ours may not look like a king of this world, but he is the shepherd of our souls. We are his flock. We are held in his arms. We are safe in his care.

The Very Rev. Renée Tembeckjian, PhD is rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, NY.

**THE FIFTH BLOOD-SHEDDING:
THE WAY OF THE CROSS**

LINDA SEITZ

BEHIND ME AND JUST TO MY RIGHT



As I follow along, I see his back stained with blood through his garment, and I see drops of his blood lying yet unsoaked into the dry earth. “It’s me”, I whisper.

“I’m with you. You can’t see me, but I’m here....right behind you and a little to the right.”

At the present moment, it is devastating to be in the world. At times, life feels like an intolerable fire that you can't get too close to without being deeply burned.

05



For as long as I can remember, I have taken for granted the natural intersection of the spiritual and earthly worlds. As a child, growing up Protestant, I was sensitive, impressionable and prone to overthink anything pertaining to God or Jesus. My six-year-old self was taught to repeat the bedtime prayer that was our nightly deal with God: "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." Consequently, I became obsessively aware of the fact of death - my death, my grandmother's death, my cat's death. And since the spiritual world always presented itself at night, there was one other eventuality I feared even more than death: I knew Jesus was planning to appear to me. Each time I faced the dark alone I would carry on a running monologue with Jesus, warning him to stay where he was. What is more, from staring at the framed portrait that loomed over the landing of my grandfather's stairway, I greatly feared Jesus intended to reward me by showing me his insides, particularly his heart, which he was holding in one hand. This was unthinkable! My default plan was to live my life as I learned in Sunday school -- that Jesus just wanted me for a sunbeam. I vowed to be a sunbeam for him.

Inevitably, my sunbeamed little heart paired with a mind that tended toward over analysis. The more I poured over Jesus' cryptic sayings and parables, the more befuddled I became. So it should come as no surprise that at a certain point in my

adult life, I got the wild notion to enroll in some theology courses "just for fun." As it turned out, this proved a dangerous side trip in my quest to understand my connection to Jesus. Studying theology disclosed a tension-filled arena within me, where Reason and my vivid imagination clashed against each other like two burly sumo wrestlers. One of my theology professors summarily diagnosed my problem as my having an unusually "high Christology." After thoroughly researching my condition, I had to agree that I probably did.

I thought of Jesus as the Logos, a semi-transparent and luminous being, present with God before time. My favorite Jesus story was the Transfiguration -- the loving gesture he undertook in climbing that mountain and how he showed himself to his earth-bound friends in his full glory. His presence was mystical and incomprehensible. He came to you in your unworthiness as grace because the possibility of your deserving his attention was nil. So I thought it best to chalk up my status with Jesus as equal to that of a Pharisee -- a person who is clueless and just troublesome, and never seems to get any of the things Jesus said. Still, I had my heart set on tasting Jesus, and a taste of him would be like luscious mounds of sweet whipped cream. My problem was I had contented myself with past-expiration-date Cool Whip. So I asked Jesus for help.

Then, on Sept. 16, 2016, I had the dream. It was the signal event in my spiritual life. In the dream I was in a tavern or bar with a group of people I was acquainted with though no one was identifiable. I was with them but sitting alone at a long wooden picnic table facing the group. I remember feeling too serious for the occasion, which seemed to be one of hilarity. I made some kind of comment which set the group against me with either mocking or accusatory remarks directed over at me. In turn, I defended myself earnestly. As I directed my comments to the group, trying to make them understand my point, I heard a calm voice behind me and just to my right. He was clarifying my thoughts, taking my side with the group. He was even finishing my sentences! The group fell silent when he began speaking. I swung around, eager to see who this person was who knew me so well. He was an average-looking youngish guy, but I knew, I KNEW, as you do only in your dream life - KNEW. There sat Jesus. It was Jesus as me!

The dream's effect has stayed with me over the years. I still want to be a sunbeam for Jesus - joyful, loving and being my bewildering-to-others self. The dream now enables me, most of the time, to be me in confidence without a second thought. I face the world, undismayed, because I know there is one being who truly gets me, and that is Jesus. I still prefer a "high" outlook, and, drawing from a powerful image in a classic spiritual text, I maintain a daily ritual when greeting the new day. I sound a high note on my mind's silver bugle producing the highest note I possibly can, then holding that note for the rest of the day.

At the present moment, it is devastating to be in the world. At times, life feels like an intolerable fire that you can't get too close to without being deeply burned. The things that sweep across the daily news attest to the drama of clashing opposites. The last two years, beginning with the fallout from the Trump era and ending with the Russian invasion of Ukraine have pelted my heart with stones. Most poignant are the ways people hurt each other, and in the fray, Truth seems to be among the missing. Add to that the strange isolation of the pandemic. I have been so world-weary, I spill anger everywhere. I warn my friends to stay away, that I have become a Brillo pad, scratchy and abrasive. I can't light my tall candle. I can't blow my high note any more...sometimes I have to fight some weird and deep dread just to muster up the courage

to leave the house.

I have only to bring to mind the suffering world - the aching bravery of the Ukrainians, those who lost loved ones in the pandemic, or the vast number of health care workers who may be left indefinitely with lingering trauma. Then my wailing wall crumbles and I feel ashamed to be so selfish, so caught up in my own fixed hatreds. But at the same time, I realize suffering has no rating system. I can only deal with what I am given at this time, right here in the world. I wonder what he must think of me now. No wait, I know. The Jesus of my dream...so sweet, such a softie, kind and just wanting to help. I know for sure that he will help me find my way back to kindness, back to delight in life...with no judgment, only love.

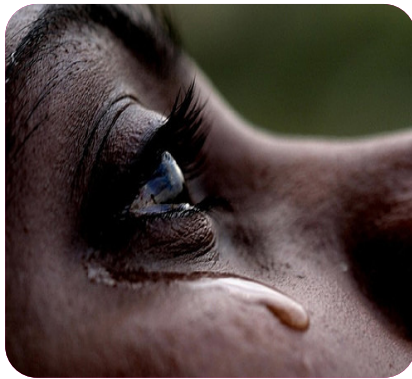
I see Jesus' suffering mingling with that of his sad world. I feel a certain need coming from him back to me. I imagine myself in the crowd, following just behind him on the way to Golgotha. I see him stumbling and then falling under the weight of the cross, his gaze fixed straight ahead. I know his heart is devastated. I think of his short time on earth, how in that short span he lived every nuance of human emotion and knew every subtlety contained in the human sigh, "I feel..." Were his present thoughts on his betrayal, on the otherness that marked his life, or were they on the beautiful world he was leaving? I make a mental list of these earthly joys that can only be experienced by being human: feeling hot earth beneath your feet, awaking to the dawn bird-chorus, the pink sky as night turns into day...crying your heart out...or falling in love. Now he is fully aware of what is coming, and I want to be for him what he was for me in my dream. As I follow along, I see his back stained with blood through his garment, and I see drops of his blood lying yet unsoaked into the dry earth. "It's me", I whisper. "I'm with you. You can't see me, but I'm here....right behind you and a little to the right."

*Linda Seitz is a member of the Rochester
Mission house community.*

- ST. GASPAR ON THE MONTH OF JULY -



“To utter the name of Jesus is to make known the dignity of the Redeemer..by referring to the Blood of Jesus Christ is to make know the dignity of the Redemption.”



“Oh crown, loosen thyself so that I can place my head therein. Oh nails, release those innocent hands of my Lord and pierce my heart with compassion and love.”



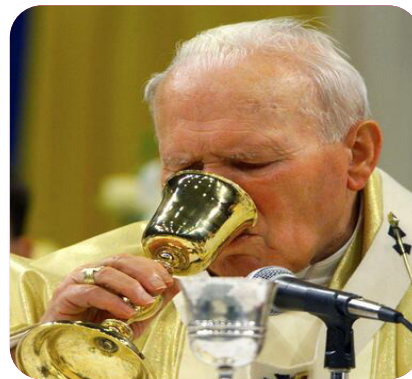
“You can imagine Jesus walking in front of you in every situation, bearing his cross; or, with a chalice in hand, he has you swallow from it drop by drop.”



“In time of temptation, invoke the Divine Blood.”



“It is an incontestable thing that the Most Blessed Sacrament should be the center of our hearts.The sacred ciborium is the wine cellar wherein Jesus captures our affections and draws us to himself.”



“Blessed are we, therefore, to whom it is granted to drink some little drop of that bitter chalice, which Jesus drank in love for us to the very last drop.”

“We are living in times in which the Divine Blood must
cleanse the entire world.”

CROSS PURPOSES

PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

We see suffering, rejection and murder. But in the cross, Bonhoeffer proclaims that Christ does indeed vanquish the real enemies of humankind: sin, suffering, death, and hell itself. Bonhoeffer proclaims that these are all disempowered and shattered precisely because Christ disempowers them all by taking on the emptiness and desolation of death on the cross. Jesus removes the power of human suffering by undergoing it in his own person.



THE SIXTH
BLOOD-SHEDDING:
THE CRUCIFIXION

06

At times I revert to ideas of God that I have honestly grown beyond but which seem to invite me to “relapse” as I try to deal with tricky life issues that confront me. So sometimes I envision a God who resembles the cartoon character Mighty Mouse. In this version, God comes, like Mighty, to ‘save the day.’ If there is a problem I face or a worrisome difficulty in society or the world, in this mode I concoct a God who hops in to set things right.

At other times, perhaps when trying to comprehend the reality of suffering in someone’s life or in the world, I find myself relapsing into a version of God that I learned very early in my life and that I know is inadequate. In this version I try to posit a God who is the “unmoved mover.” God must be distant from human suffering and unaffected by it. Since God is beyond suffering I should anticipate being beyond suffering too someday. For now, I should simply endure whatever causes me grief and be immune to it.

In still another mode I can try to act in morally excellent ways, taking on extra acts of charity or virtue, relying on an image of a God who rewards my efforts and who has already died for my sins. In this creation I remain pretty much in control and God simply responds to my goodness.

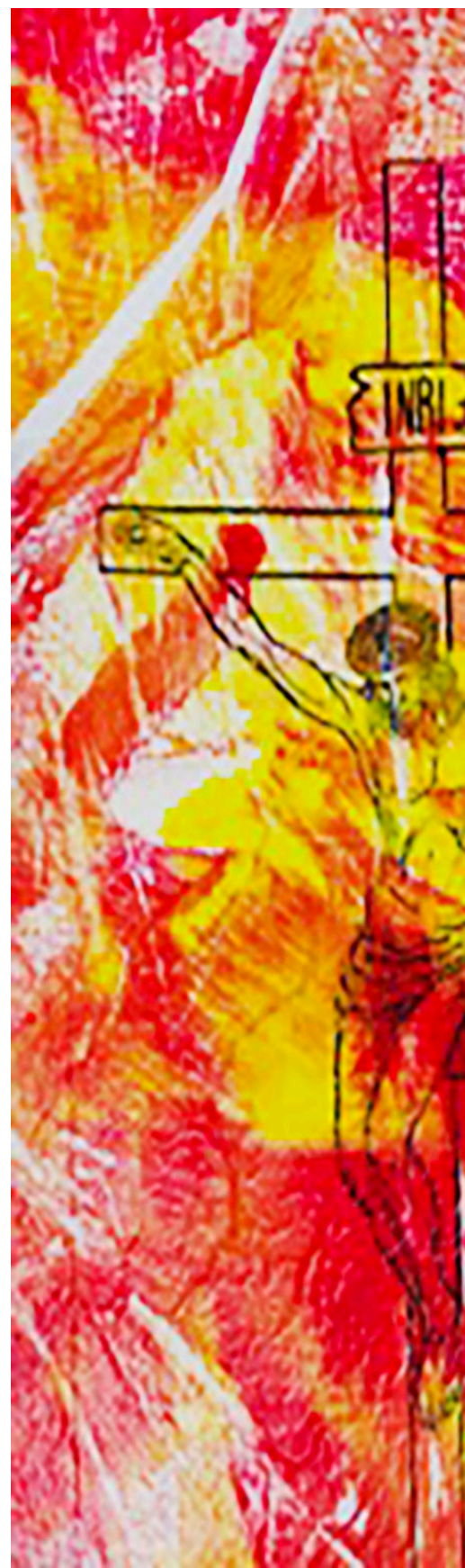
These may be comforting ideas to assist me in a variety of situations, but they are inadequate in any real way. And they are fundamentally challenged in very basic ways by theologies of the cross that struggle to deal with the suffering and death of Jesus in the light of the suffering, death and evil that appear so dominant in modern life on this planet.

I think in particular of writings by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor whose life was ended in a Nazi concentration camp near the end of World War II. Bonhoeffer grappled with the evil of Hitler’s Germany and his interpretation of the church’s failure to resist the incursion of anti-Christian beliefs and practices into its very life. In fact, he worked with others to form an alternative ‘Confessing Church’ to the German protestant churches of the time. This alternative church would reject what Bonhoeffer thought was a “cheap” version of grace that denied the cross and its true interpretation.

For Bonhoeffer, his almost two years in the concentration camp led him to reflect on the true nature of Christianity, and particularly on the reality of suffering. Much of what we know about these reflections comes to us in the form of letters he wrote to friends and colleagues during his imprisonment. In particular, he tried to interpret the theology of the cross in the light of the failures of both church and society and his own personal experience of suffering and loss.

Bonhoeffer wanted to interpret the Christian message for a suffering world thoroughly marked by evil. He writes about God allowing Himself to be “pushed out of the world and onto the cross.” God thereby becomes subject to death and nothingness. The cross displays God’s utter self-giving and powerlessness that is anything but the ‘Mighty Mouse fix-it’ Savior that I sometimes want. In the cross, Bonhoeffer will not tolerate a God who is an ‘unmoved mover’ distant and removed from human suffering. In the cross, Bonhoeffer sees not a reward for the good behavior of religious people but the utter self-emptying pure gift of God in Christ.

For Bonhoeffer God’s self-giving is in the suffering and cross of Christ. God saves us not through triumph and glory, not as a bonus for good behavior. Bonhoeffer





realizes the world is in a terrible mess, and he repeatedly asserts that “only a suffering God can help.” Where we today might imagine that it is the Christ of power and glory who will restore so fallen a world as this, what we actually witness in the cross is a God of profound weakness. We see suffering, rejection and murder. But in the cross, Bonhoeffer proclaims that Christ does indeed vanquish the real enemies of humankind: sin, suffering, death, and hell itself. Bonhoeffer proclaims that these are all disempowered and shattered precisely because Christ disempowers them all by taking on the emptiness and desolation of death on the cross. Jesus removes the power of human suffering by undergoing it in his own person.

Bonhoeffer tells us that the crucified Jesus is pushed out of the world and onto the cross. The very ones that he intends to save are the ones who kill him. In the events of the crucifixion, we find this incredible act of self-giving. We discover the identity of God not as the fixer, not as someone immune to suffering, not as reward granter. None of that.

In the cross of Christ, we discover the paschal mystery of love at the heart of divinity, the heart of the Christian God. The dying and rising of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, mean that death, evil and suffering are defeated and enveloped in the mystery of the self-gift that is the trinitarian love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In his letters from prison (published in English as *Letters and Papers from Prison* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer), Bonhoeffer uses a phrase that became something of a stumbling block for theologians trying to grasp the meaning of his recommendations for church life and thought in the modern world. That phrase is “religionless Christianity.” Some people thought Bonhoeffer had become an atheist and was proclaiming the end of religion. Some thought he recommended an end to religious practices or spirituality among Christians. Some thought he had meant to endorse a totally secular program of political activism or personal virtue to reform the world.

I think his theology of the cross helps us to interpret his use of the phrase “religionless Christianity.” In the prison letters he explains that at last he has learned to see the world “from below.” As a prisoner, he no longer held what power or prestige or resources that are common in most everyday life. He no longer enjoyed the respect of those with whom he formerly associated. He likely came to see many of his efforts as without results in any ordinary sense. From reading his letters, I think he came to understand that by being pushed out of life, by into suffering and death, God actually brought life from death through this unexpected, unimaginable act of self-giving on the part of Jesus Christ.

In the cross of Christ, God draws us beyond images of a God who fixes things, beyond images of God who is far removed from a suffering world, beyond visualizations of a God rewarding us for good behavior by suffering in our place.

I think as he served in prison and faced his own inevitable death, Dietrich Bonhoeffer likely categorized those three tempting notions of mine as the “religion” he thought as unhelpful in a suffering and evil world. I think what he wanted to promote at this juncture of his life was a rightful understanding of the cross of Christ, experienced and available to all of us who are also willing to enter into the way of self-giving that impels us beyond power and glory to the self-emptying that is the incredible path to the love that is the heart of the Trinity.

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The Seventh Blood-Shedding: the Piercing of Christ's Side

FR. JOHN COLACINO,
C.P.P.S.

OPEN WIDE

Here theologian James Alison goes so far as to see the opened side of Christ as a womb with the blood and water as the afterbirth--signs of a new creation freshly-formed and newly-oxygenated by the Spirit now handed over to its first, ideal, representatives.

A lone among the evangelists, the "disciple whom Jesus loved," claims to have been an eyewitness to the events he records and in particular to the opening of Christ's side after his death: "One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe" (Jn 19:34-35). The author of the first letter of John, writing in a similar vein, seems to have this scene in mind when he connects belief in Jesus as the Son of God to the outpouring of this blood and water on the cross but he broadens testimony to include what was implicit in the Gospel, namely Jesus' "handing over the spirit" at the moment of his death (cf. Jn. 19:30). The author of the Epistle thus sees a tight nexus between all of who bear witness to the event witnessed by the Beloved Disciple: "This is the one who came through water and blood. The Spirit is the one that testifies, and the Spirit is truth. So there are three that testify, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord" (1 Jn. 5:6-8).

Given the richness of the symbolism inherent in water and blood, it is no wonder that, of all the incidents associated with Christ's passion, the piercing has received much of the attention. A common interpretation can be seen in the following passage from St. John Chrysostom who writes,

Beloved, do not pass over this mystery without thought; it has yet another hidden meaning, which I will explain to you. I said that water and blood symbolized baptism and the holy eucharist. From these two sacraments the Church is born: from baptism, "the cleansing water that gives rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit", and from the holy eucharist. Since the symbols of baptism and the

Eucharist flowed from his side, it was from his side that Christ fashioned the Church, as he had fashioned Eve from the side of Adam. Moses gives a hint of this when he tells the story of the first man and makes him exclaim: "Bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh!" As God then took a rib from Adam's side to fashion a woman, so Christ has given us blood and water from his side to fashion the Church. God took the rib when Adam was in a deep sleep, and in the same way Christ gave us the blood and the water after his own death. Do you understand, then, how Christ has united his bride to himself and what food he gives us all to eat? By one and the same food we are both brought into being and nourished. As a woman nourishes her child with her own blood and milk, so does Christ unceasingly nourish with his own blood those to whom he himself has given life.

I would like to pursue this line of interpretation a little further because there seems to me something, or better, someone, missing. For the piercing was witnessed not only by the evangelist who recorded the event but also by several women, including the one who is addressed by Jesus, first at the wedding feast of Cana and then as she stood near the cross, as "Woman," namely his mother.

At Cana, where the abundance of water-made-wine might be seen as foreshadowing the tide that would flow forth from the cross, there is an exchange between the Woman and her Son fraught with irony. At her insistence that the stewards do whatever her Son tells them, he responds with a common Semitic expression, "What is that to you and to me?"). But rather than showing reluctance as translators usually convey, John's (who often uses double entendre) Jesus' question might well mean something more like this: "How is what you are asking going to show our mutual association?" -- since the "hour" that awaited them both had not yet come (cf. Jn. 2:1ff.)

I say this because the only other time “the Woman” appears was when that “hour” finally came, when the “Beloved Disciple” received her as his mother and she her son. There she is associated with Jesus once more as his mission is accomplished as she was at its inauguration at Cana. Standing near the cross, Jesus once more addresses her as “Woman” suggesting a maternal role in the new community about to be birthed (Jn 19:26-27). Here theologian James Alison goes so far as to see the opened side of Christ as a womb with the blood and water as the afterbirth -- signs of a new creation freshly-formed and newly-oxygenated by the Spirit now handed over to its first, ideal, representatives:



“The elective family which has been brought into being by Jesus’ birthing stretches towards and welcomes into it the woman whose motherhood was both honoured and yet had its cultural meaning transformed as it was stretched into a sisterhood in the new creation....[Mary] patiently helps us undo the knots that tie us into the old creation, so as to help us come to reflect the new.” And while probably not by the same author as the gospel or the epistles of “John,” though with clear resonances, the Book of Revelation also reflects this symbolism as “the Woman” of the Apocalypse who gives birth to the Messiah represents at the same time the persecuted church, those John calls “the rest of her offspring” (cf. Rev.12).

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