

The Cry of The Blood

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There are moments in life when spirituality ceases to be merely an idea and becomes a way of seeing. I grew up in the spirituality of the Precious Blood. Like many members of the Precious Blood family, I prayed its prayers and celebrated its feast days. Later, when Robert Schreiter and other Precious Blood Missionaries began writing about Precious Blood Spirituality, they gave words to what had previously been more devotion than vision.

Then came a time when I began to experience what Schreiter described. The Precious Blood of Jesus acquired faces, names, and voices. Gradually I learned to hear what the Missionaries call the Cry of the Blood.

Schreiter helped the Church understand how the blood of innocent victims continues to cry out to God, echoing the blood of Abel that cried from the earth. I have no desire to improve upon his theology. My purpose is much simpler. I want to tell the story of how I learned to hear that cry—and how it forever changed my understanding of the Precious Blood of Christ.

For me, it began in Guatemala.

In the early 1990s, I joined a Precious Blood pilgrimage there. Guatemala was still living with the wounds of a long civil war. I arrived expecting to learn about the country's history and culture. Instead, I discovered that before I could serve, I first had to listen.

One of the places that marked me most deeply was the church in Chichicastenango. I can still picture the prayer stones in the center aisle, blackened by the smoke of

countless candles. People prayed there for husbands, wives, and neighbors who had disappeared, for children who had died, and for families torn apart by violence.

As I stood there, I heard the tears and prayers remembered and held in those stones.

In that silence, I heard the Cry of the Blood.

The experience awakened another memory.

Years earlier, I had visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. While most pilgrims crowded around the tomb, I wandered into the lower level. It was almost empty. Ahead of me was an immense wall of rock. Drawn to it, I felt a spiritual power emanating from it.

I reached out and touched the stone.

In that moment, I knew that this rock had received the Blood of the crucified Christ

Those two experiences belonged together. In Guatemala, the Blood of Christ was no longer simply an event in the past. I encountered it wherever people suffered.

Later, in the chapel where Father Stanley Rother was murdered in Santiago Atitlán, I heard that same cry again. It was not simply the memory of one martyr. It was the cry of an entire people whose suffering seemed to rise from the earth itself.

There I heard an invitation. The Blood of Christ was calling me. It was calling me to accompany those whose lives were being crushed by violence.



I returned to Guatemala in 1994 and spent the next fifteen years helping to train community mental health promoters in Quiché and San Marcos. During those years I listened to stories of massacres, disappearances, trauma, grief, resilience, and hope. Again and again I found myself thinking of Jesus' words at the Last Supper as he offered the cup to his disciples: "This is my blood."

What I witnessed in Guatemala was still that Blood being shed. I had begun to drink from the cup of suffering with the people.

One day our team stopped at a small store along a mountain path. As we talked with the owner, he told us about the armed conflict. He never knew whether the men who came into his store were soldiers, patrol members, or guerrillas. It made no difference. They shoved a handgun into his mouth and demanded whatever they wanted.

When we met him more than fifteen years later, he could still taste the gunmetal. We worked with him, and within minutes the taste was gone.

On another occasion we were meeting with villagers along the road to the coast when someone told us about a woman who had not left her house for fifteen years. During the war, an artillery exchange had taken place over her home, and the terror had never left her.

We went to see her.

She told us her story.

We worked with her for a while.

When we finished, she walked out of her house.

It was only a few steps but, for her, it was the beginning of freedom.

Not all the suffering I encountered in Guatemala came from the armed conflict. One woman had endured years of brutal torture at the hands of her grandmother. Another had been trafficked by her own mother. Everywhere I turned I encountered lives marked by profound suffering.

I came to understand that my ministry was not to solve people's problems but to accompany them, helping them recover hope and begin to flourish.

Looking back now, I see that Guatemala changed not only my ministry but my spirituality.

Before Guatemala, I thought of the Precious Blood primarily as something Jesus had shed long ago. Guatemala taught me to hear the Cry of the Blood.

Years later, when I returned to the United States, I wondered whether I would ever again hear the Cry of the Blood as intensely as I had in Guatemala.

I was wrong.



At Central City Lutheran Mission in San Bernardino, California, I found myself serving people who were homeless and living with HIV, many also struggling with addiction, mental illness, incarceration, or chronic disease. The context had changed completely, but the cry was the same.

One afternoon, I visited one of our homes. A resident was overwhelmed with despair because his former wife was trying to prevent him from seeing his children.

As we talked, he showed me two razor blades. He had decided they would end his pain.

We talked and prayed together.

Slowly, something changed.

He handed me the razor blades and promised that he would live.

He was living with HIV. He was on parole. He was recovering from addiction. Many people might have seen only his failures.

I saw something else.

He was precious.

Then there was Anthony, who lived with HIV, hepatitis C, diabetes, pneumonia, and eventually cancer. He was Jewish and deeply devoted to Father Abraham. He possessed a remarkable sense of humor and a gratitude that endured through extraordinary suffering.

During his final days I prayed the traditional Jewish prayers for the dying at his bedside. His illness was difficult to witness. His coughing exhausted him. His body gradually failed him. Yet his life remained precious. God sat beside him as the respirator breathed for him during his final hours.

Anthony taught me something no theology book could have taught me. Sometimes our greatest ministry is simply to remain beneath another person's cross, refusing to leave them alone.

What I remember most from those years is our shared table.

The thirty-six residents living in our twelve houses represented an astonishing diversity of humanity. They were Black, White, Latino, Native American, gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, recovering addicts, former prisoners, people of faith, people searching for faith, and people who had almost given up on faith altogether.

Our meals together, usually picnics, became celebrations of life. Nobody had the luxury of judging anyone else. Everyone needed mercy. Everyone needed hope. Everyone belonged at the table.

Years later I realized that those meals reminded me of another table—the table where Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners, the table of the Last Supper, and the table where the risen Christ was recognized in the breaking of bread. The Cry of the Blood had led me, once again, to the banquet of God's love.

As I look back over these experiences, I realize that the word that has most shaped my understanding of the Precious Blood is not "blood," but "precious." The spirituality of the Precious Blood has taught me to see every person as precious beyond measure because that is how God sees them.

The cry of victims, the despair of a man holding razor blades, the quiet dignity of a dying man, and the laughter around a table where everyone belonged have become, for me, the way I have come to understand Precious Blood Spirituality.

It is important to think about the Precious Blood of Jesus, not just related to the moment of his death, but also to his life, his teaching, and his proclamation of the Reign of God.



Questions for Reflection:

- Sr. Terry came to recognize the Cry of the Blood in the lives of people experiencing violence, trauma, and suffering. Where have you encountered this cry in your own life or community? How might God be inviting you to listen more deeply?
- Sr Terry discovered that his ministry was not to solve people's problems but to accompany them, helping them recover hope. When have you experienced the gift of someone simply being present with you? How might you offer that same gift to someone who is suffering?
- Sr. Terry writes that the word that most shaped her understanding of Precious Blood Spirituality was not blood, but precious. How does your understanding of the Precious Blood call you to recognize the dignity and sacred worth of every person, especially those whom society overlooks or judges?