

Chapter 1

Our Missionary Charism

We, Missionaries of the Precious Blood, are a Society of Apostolic Life (*Normative Texts, C2*). As such, we are dedicated to the apostolic and missionary ministry of the word (*NT, C3*). Our mission and our community life are founded in and guided by the spirituality of the Precious Blood. The goal of a Society of Apostolic Life is mission. It is for this reason that in the following reflections, the theme of mission will be treated first.

In the not so distant past the term "missionary" conjured up in the minds of people a person who was much admired and almost mythical. An aureole of heroism surrounded that person. And when one spoke of "the missions," that meant some far-off land where the



missionary was sent to combat the dark forces of evil or to bring God to a pagan land. That was a period when missionaries had a clear sense of what they were about. A missionary was a person who was chosen, trained and sent by the Church in order to animate the expansion of the Church in places where it did not exist or where it existed just recently. As such, missionaries merited the respect and admiration of the faithful.

At the beginning of the third millennium, the concepts of mission and missionary work previously held and described above are undergoing some radical changes. When the world celebrated the "500 years of Evangelization of the Americas" in 1992, for many in the "new world" it was not a cause of celebration at all. Rather, many indigenous peoples dubbed the celebration "the 500 years of resistance." They claimed that their cultures had been trodden upon by the missionaries who accompanied the conquistadors. To speak of "the missions" today reminds many of cultural devastation, neo-colonialism, and social and economic dependence. The missionary is no longer a person who is automatically accepted and praised.

Missionaries themselves have been going through a great deal of introspection of late as to their role in the Church and in society. The once clear concepts of what it meant to be a missionary are now foggy and missionary methods and tactics have been strongly challenged. In a time when the entire Church has become more aware of her basic missionary nature and when each baptized Christian is missionary by his or her very call to the Christian life, it is important that we re-look at what it means to be a missionary congregation. We must understand ourselves within the universal mission of the Church and at the same time discover what our unique contribution to that mission might be in the light of the spirituality of the Precious Blood.

Our own Congregation has not been exempted from this discussion on mission. Today in the Congregation of

the Missionaries of the Precious Blood we are living an awakening of the consciousness that we are all missionaries, and not just those who go or who are sent to mission in foreign lands. One indication of this new consciousness is the fact that in some sectors of the Congregation it has been decided to incorporate the word "missionary" into our title, better reflecting our official title in Latin. Obviously, something much deeper than a mere change in title is at play here. We need to rediscover our missionary charism as a part of our core identity.

We feel ourselves impelled by the force of the Spirit to carry out, according to the specific charism of each institute, the evangelizing mission of the Church, aware as we are that the consecrated life (witness and service) is already a proclamation of the Reign (Lumen Gentium, 44) (*Consecrated Life Today*, p. 251).

Called to be sharers of the mission of Christ in the world, the members of our Society, inspired by and living consciously within the mystery of the Precious Blood, exert themselves continually to attain that conformation to him—human, Christian, communitarian, apostolic—that best promotes the Kingdom of God. (*Normative Texts*, C28).

Our corporate mission in the Church is to collaborate with Christ in his work of redemption. We accomplish this mission by witnessing to God's love and ministering that love to others, especially the poor, the oppressed, and the deprived (*ASC Constitution*, # 3).

Our Model: Jesus, the First Missionary

The Missionary as One Sent

Jesus is the unmistakable center of religious life.

Religious men and women strive to live out a radical following of Jesus. He is our model, our way and our goal. Our mission starts with Him who calls us and who wishes to share mission with us. The foundation of our missionary activity rests upon this vital relationship and a constant reference to Jesus, the first missionary. Jesus Himself describes this close relationship in the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15, 1-12).

Jesus reveals Himself on many occasions, and especially in the Gospel of John, as "the One sent by the Father." From the moment of His baptism at the hands of John the Baptist (John 1, 6) to the sending of the disciples after the Resurrection (John 20, 21), Christ reveals His close relationship with the Father.

My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work (John 4, 24).

John was a lamp alight and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me (John 5, 35-36).

But I know him because I have come from him and it was he who sent me (John 7, 29).

Essential to the personal identity of Jesus was the consciousness that He was One sent by the Father. Jesus was a man sent on a mission. As He went about Galilee preaching the Good News in word and in gestures of healing and forgiveness, He began to gather others into His mission.

He now went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils (Mark 3, 13-15).

These texts describe the mystery of our having been freely called by Him. The call that we receive has nothing to do with our merits and worthiness. Jesus calls freely those He wishes. His will often challenges human logic as can be seen from the text of I Corinthians 1:26-31. We must never forget this. From the awareness of the gratuity of our vocation, song and thanksgiving will be born! We should feel happy and we should relish in our vocation. We share the joy of the apostles who were called and gathered around Jesus for the purpose of being sent into the world.

In Jesus' dialogue with Peter after the resurrection, He also lets it be known that ministry springs from the relationship of love which exists between Himself and the disciple. Only after Peter's clear declaration of love is he sent by Jesus to "feed the sheep" (John 21, 15ff).

And when Jesus was praying during the Last Supper (John 17, 14-18), He asks the protection of the Father over those who will share his mission and his fate, suffering for the cause of the Reign. This evokes memories of the invitation that Jesus made to James and to John when they were arguing over places of importance in the Reign of God: "Can you drink from the cup that I must drink?" (Mark 10, 38).

This relationship with Jesus is very clear in John 20, 21: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." The union of the missionary with Christ is "the fountain from which our missionary activity springs."

To be zealous for souls is a testimony to the love of God. Every work of the Lord is usually quite similar to plants which, though being tender, are assailed; still they continue to set their roots deeply. Eventually they spread out their branches, and finally produce their copious fruits. Let us allow ourselves to be cultivated by the celestial planter. He is the owner of the vineyard (Gaspar del Bufalo, January 24, 1836, Letter #3062).

Clearly, we are not about doing our own personal mission nor are we developing our own projects. This fundamental truth calls us to a deep humility, since sometimes we take ourselves too seriously. The truth is that we are "irrelevant" in a sense. We will suffer, surely, the same temptation that Jesus suffered when He was tempted to change stones into bread (Matthew 4,1-14). We must struggle daily against the temptation to try to make an impact, to be a success, and to be a popular star, thus converting Christ's mission into our own personal endeavor.

This sense of "being sent" is often lost. It seems to me that we must find ways to recapture it. Couldn't we celebrate our being sent on mission in simple ceremonies of commissioning as we once did at St. Charles Seminary when missionaries were sent to foreign lands to begin their mission? Personally, I will never forget that day in May of 1969 when the community of Saint Joseph's College in Indiana gathered in the Halleck Center ballroom to celebrate a festive Eucharist of commissioning for my seminarian companion and myself, about to leave for Peru to begin our foreign mission experience. I was only twenty-two years old then and had not yet begun my theological studies. The Provincial of the Cincinnati Province, Fr. John Byrne, presented each of us with a cross after his homily, symbolizing our being sent by the Congregation. In Chile, when the Vicariate sent for the first time a Chilean missionary to Guatemala, all the community gathered to impose our hands and to send our brother on mission. The truth is that all of us are sent and all are commissioned. We need to recover the sense that those who work in parishes and in educational institutions, or in whatever other ministry, share and exercise our missionary charism. All of us share in the same corporate mission of the Congregation.

Called from our Charism and from the Spirituality of the Blood

The Church is missionary by its very nature. And mission forms an essential and vital part of all the forms of Consecrated Life which are rooted in the Christian vocation. The mission, however, is diversified according to the variety of charisms. Since mission is an answer to being sent, we must ask ourselves: By whom are we sent? And, to whom are we sent? God calls us by mediations. The *Blood of Christ* becomes for us the mediation of that call which gathers us in *community for a particular mission*.

In the Old Testament it was the blood of the human person which was shed that provoked the compassion of God. Pope John Paul II refers to this in the first chapter of his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) under the provocative title: "The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground." It is a chapter which we should read with great care, in the context of the present reflection.

What have you done? Yahweh asked. Listen to the sound of your brother's blood, crying out to me from the ground. Now be accursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands (Genesis 4, 10-11).

The Pope speaks of how the blood of Abel continues to cry from the earth today: in aborted children, in those who suffer persecution for their faith, in the victims of genocide and oppressive political systems, in those who suffer from malnutrition and starvation and in all those who suffer marginalization due to gender, creed, race, or economic conditions. The culture of death which engulfs us takes on many faces. The blood of so many innocent ones today is a continuation of Christ's Passion being lived out in today's world. Their blood continues to cry

out, awaiting a response.

And Yahweh said, 'I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow.' (Exodus 3, 7-8).

The Pope then speaks of the Precious Blood as God's response to the cry of Abel's blood (Hebrews 12, 24), as the source of perfect redemption and the gift of new life (*Evangelium Vitae*, #25). An essential aspect of mission is to make the blood of today's victims heard and to respond in compassionate solidarity. Then the Pope calls all Christians and peoples of good will to proclaim the *Gospel of Life* (*Evangelium Vitae*, #82-84).

In these words of the Holy Father I feel a call to our own Congregations which bear the name of the Precious Blood, to be "the voice of the victims of oppression and suffering," to be the eyes and the ears for our Church and for society, raising the consciousness of all peoples to the cry of the blood which shouts from our often blood-stained earth. The Holy Father calls all Christians to this mission, but aren't we being called in a special way? As religious congregations in the Church we are expected to enrich and to contribute to the mission of the Church from our particular identity as Missionaries and Adorers of the Precious Blood! We are being called to be a living voice of the Blood of Christ which cries from the earth in the blood of those who suffer today! Could this not become a way of focusing on our identity and on our mission, a way which crosses over the boundaries of culture and language, a way of understanding ourselves in whatever apostolate or ministry in which we are engaged?

Having spoken in the most diverse situations

around the globe about "the cry of the Blood" as a call to mission, I have been surprised at how this message has found an echo in women and men everywhere and in the most diverse cultures. It seems to offer a way for us to focus on identity and mission. Questions such as "Where do we hear the cry of the blood in our particular situation or context?" and "How can we respond to that cry in our ministries?" become questions which help us to focus on our mission from the perspective of our Precious Blood identity. They are questions which can unite us as we seek to respond with creative fidelity to our charism.

We are called to be "ministers of the word of God" (*Normative Texts*, C3), with a special focus or emphasis on the Precious Blood. St. Gaspar discerned the "call of the Blood" in his times and culture in the acute need of personal and ecclesial conversion in the Papal States, and in the violent situation of banditry in post-Napoleonic times. It was the Holy Father himself, Pius VII, who helped Gaspar to hear that cry and called him to a response.

What is the "cry of the blood" in our diverse situations today? And, how can we respond? I wish to outline briefly what that call might entail in some of the areas where we are present around the globe.

In North America

The cry of Abel's blood can be heard in our individualistic and fragmented society caught up in consumerism and materialism, in the isolation and loneliness of persons, in the marginalization and discrimination against women, to name but a few of the situations we face.

While visiting friends along the Eastern Coast of the United States some time ago, I went out to walk along the seashore. I was awed by the power and the rhythm of the waves beating against the shore. As I strolled I began to observe a couple who were also walking the beach. I heard shouts. And then I soon realized that

they were having a very violent discussion. The lady ranted and raved and shoved and punched her husband, who fortunately kept his hands in his pockets, probably to avoid hitting her! It went on and on, and I couldn't help but think of so many hurting and wounded people who call out for help, for understanding, and for healing. Images of the victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse come to my mind.

As I continued to walk the beach I observed another man and his teenage son while they were leaving the beach area. They were also engaged in a heated discussion about something. Again, I thought of the breakdown of dialogue and in the violent ways individuals and nations sometimes attempt to resolve their differences. I remembered the many wars past and present which are waged because dialogue, if it ever existed in the first place, broke down and people became entrenched in their positions.

In the matter of a few minutes, without making any effort whatsoever, I heard the cry of Abel's blood shouting from the earth. In today's society we are often called upon to respond to similar situations with the message of the Precious Blood, which speaks of community and covenant and interconnectedness and mutual commitment, about dialogue and bridge-building.

In a world of self-centeredness and selfishness and quick fixes, we respond with the Blood of Christ which speaks of the "gift of oneself" in solidarity and compassion as the true way to fulfillment and happiness.

Another aspect of our North American culture which strikes me more and more when I visit the United States, is the growing cultural diversity of our society. Lancaster, Pennsylvania lies in the heart of "Pennsylvania Dutch Country," a zone typically known for its German heritage. Today the city of Lancaster is 30% Hispanic! I read in *Time Magazine* recently a fascinating article on Tiger Woods, one of the world's leading golf champions. The article did not center on his

golfing abilities which are obviously exceptional, but on his multicultural identity, which seems to have become a problem for some people. As one cultural group after another wished to claim him as their own, Tiger insists that his multicultural background be respected. He is a blend of Thai, of African American, and of Native American. He wants to be accepted and valued as such. This is surely indicative of our society today. More and more we will be a truly mixed society, where cultures will blend and the clear distinctions between races and cultures will be blurred. Are we ready for this? How can we as missionaries of the Blood of Christ break down the barriers of prejudice and bigotry which keep people apart? Are we ourselves comfortable as we come into dialogue and mix with cultures other than our own?

And what about the Blood which speaks of Life? In a society where life is cheap and in which the rights of unborn infants are often not respected, where there are assisted suicides and euthanasia, of mass suicides and mass murders and the death penalty, it would seem that the "consistent ethic of life" would be an appropriate corporate stance for our Congregations which proclaim the sacredness of all life!

In Western Europe

While much of what I have said above concerning North America is readily applied in varying degrees to the European reality, I would like to emphasize here another "cry."

In an area where the influx of immigrants from the East, from Albania, and from northern Africa is creating a mixing of cultures, making an impact on all aspects of life in society, there has been an upsurge of racism sometimes expressed in an extreme nationalism. There is an upsurge of neo-nazism, of skinheads and the like, who express their prejudices and bigotry and who at times perpetrate violence against people of other cultures. The cry of the non-European Union people shouts to us from

the ground. What does the Blood of reconciliation and of Covenant mean in such societies? What does the Blood of Christ call us to as Missionaries and Adorers of that Blood?

In Central and Eastern Europe

Where countries freed from communist domination are struggling to reorganize and to reach a sense of identity and where long-contained ethnic conflicts have erupted in wars as in Bosnia and the ex-Yugoslavia, what does the Blood of reconciliation call us to today? Fr. Willi Klein, who introduced our Congregation in the Balkans, spent time in Serbia where he worked extensively with groups of laity who form part of the Union of the Blood of Christ in about twenty parishes there. He also spoke to bishops and priests conferences and in the minor seminary there about the Union. It received the bishops' blessing and the message of the Precious Blood was enthusiastically received. Fr. Robert Schreiber's books and reflections on reconciliation have been welcomed by the bishops and pastoral agents there.

In Africa

Where the world has witnessed the results of tribal warfare and the genocide and forced migrations of entire peoples and where starving and displaced persons appear across our television screens daily, the cry of the blood is particularly strong and challenges an apparently indifferent world. What are we called to as Missionaries and Adorers of that Blood which speaks of the inherent dignity of every human being? Once again, the message of the Blood of reconciliation which makes of two tribes one, and which is the guarantee of human dignity and worth seems especially relevant.

In India

Where the caste system still plays a prominent role in everyday life and in which women are blatantly

discriminated against; and where newborn girls are sometimes killed by their parents, because they know they will never be able to pay the dowries demanded of them someday to marry their daughters; and where in villages women who have the misfortune of outliving their husbands will sometimes prefer to throw themselves onto the funeral pyres with their dead husbands, rather than face the shame and the marginalization of being a widow, do we hear the cry of the blood of these women and children and of the "untouchables" of Indian society? What are we called to, as Missionaries and Adorers of the Blood of Christ, in such circumstances?

In Brazil

There young boys and adolescents are kidnapped off the streets of Altamira by a mafia of men and women who then torture and castrate their victims in order to use their sexual organs in black magic rites. The denouncement of this grave abuse by our missionaries in Altamira is what likely led to the assassination of Bro. Hubert in October of 1995.

In a society in which the indigenous are stripped of their lands by the rich and powerful landowners, how do we respond to the cry of the blood? A news bulletin of the Associated Press sometime ago reported that nearly 100 Indians had threatened to commit mass suicide unless a judge suspended an order evicting them from their lands in western Brazil in Mato Grosso do Sul, a remote brushlands state south of the Amazon jungle. The ruling favored a rich rancher. These Indians have already lost more than half of their ancestral lands to the rich landowners who are expropriating it and robbing them. In protest, at least 235 Indians have already taken their lives in recent years! Their blood is like that of Abel shouting from the blood-stained earth. Is anyone listening?

In Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest and richest city of 16.5 million people, a police report claims that there are more

Faces of farm workers, who as a social group live in situations of abandonment in most of the continent, with little land, and in situations of both internal and external dependence, submitted to systems of commercialization which exploit them.

Faces of workers often badly paid and often unable to organize themselves in order to defend their own rights.

Faces of the underemployed and unemployed, written off due to the hard realities originated in the economic crisis and often due to the models of development which often submit the workers and their families to cold economic calculations.

Faces of the marginalized in the ghettos of urban areas, who suffer the double impact of their own lack of material goods and the ostentatious display of the riches of other social classes.

Faces of the elderly, always more numerous, often marginalized by a society based in development which does not take into consideration those who do not produce (Document of Puebla, #32-39).

Confronted with this reality of extreme and generalized poverty we must discover our response as Congregations.

I have just touched the surface of some of the situations facing our Missionaries and Adorers around the globe. Wherever we live, we can hear the cry of the blood! It would seem to me that an important part of our mission is to hear that cry and to make the voice of the blood heard in today's society which would much rather ignore it or wish it away. For to hear the cry of the blood

people employed by drug-traffickers than by the nation's booming auto industry. About 50,000 people in Sao Paulo work as drug dealers, security guards and look-outs as compared to the auto industries' 40,000 employees. What about the blood of all these people addicted to drugs and whose lives are being drained from them by the drug lords? Do we hear their cry? What does the Blood of Christ call us to in those situations in Brazil and elsewhere?

In Guatemala, Perú, and Chile:

Years of civil strife or dictatorship have left these societies with festering wounds crying out for healing, reconciliation and justice. What resources does the spirituality of the Blood bring to these societies?

The Latin American Bishops' Conference in their meeting held in Puebla, Mexico, described in an extensive list, different ways in which the "faces of the suffering Christ" question and challenge us:

Faces of children, ravaged by misery even before birth, their own capacity for development compromised from the very beginning due to irreparable mental and physical deficiencies which will accompany them for all their lives; children abandoned and often exploited in the cities, the results of the misery and of the moral disorganization of the family.

Faces of young people, disoriented by the fact that they cannot find their place in society; frustrated, above all in rural and marginal urban zones, due to the lack of possibilities for education and work.

Faces of indigenous and frequently of African Americans who, living in marginalization and in subhuman conditions, are the poorest among the poor.

is unsettling. It disturbs our peace and challenges our comfort and securities. Just as the cry of the blood of Abel moved God to compassion and intervention to liberate humankind from all that oppresses, so too are we called to take a stance. Ultimately, the cry of the blood of Abel is what led to the shedding of Christ's Blood in response. And so we who hear the cry of the blood, are also called to respond to that cry with the Blood of Christ, a blood which speaks of covenant, of cross, and of reconciliation.

The circumstances may be different from one place to another and in one culture or another, but wherever we find ourselves, and in whatever ministry we are involved in, *the cry of the blood rises up from the very earth we tread!*

When one travels from the international airport of Santiago, Chile towards the center of the Capital City, one travels on a four-lane highway which takes you between the fields and near some apartment buildings. One would think that all is very beautiful, but the tourists don't realize that behind those buildings poverty and misery are hidden. And so it is that many times in our daily lives, we would like to live and to act as though the poor did not exist. We cover our eyes and our ears so as not to see the blood shed daily nor hear the cry of the blood. As missionary men and women, we are called to be the "living memory," the voice of the voiceless, the critical conscience of society and of the Church, so that they do not remain deaf and indifferent to the cry of the Blood of Christ today.

Mobility-Flexibility-Availability

Pope John Paul II has called religious to a "creative fidelity" to our foundational charisms. It is only in being "creatively faithful" to the dreams and inspirations of St. Gaspar and of St. Maria De Mattias, our Founder/Foundress, that we will have a future at all.

Let us take time to dream dreams and to see visions! This is what Pope John Paul calls us to in his Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* when he says, "Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things" (#110). We must always be open to a better understanding and application of the source idea of our foundation, in all of its richness and originality. Our call is future-oriented, open to the unexpected, and free to be uprooted. The very term "creative fidelity" implies that we are constantly moving in a healthy tension between our origins and transformation in new expressions of our charism.

Historically, at the beginnings of our Congregation, the notion of the "itinerant missionary" was widely prevalent. Gaspar and his companions came and went from the city to the countryside, crisscrossing the Papal States preaching popular missions and conducting spiritual exercises. In 1986 while in Italy for a sabbatical year to deepen my own insights into St. Gaspar and Precious Blood Spirituality, I spent two months in the University for Foreigners in Perugia to begin my studies of Italian. While there I resided at the House of Clergy. Usually I would spend the weekends at the House studying and relaxing, as well as exploring the local sights. This was great until one day the priest who was in charge of the House asked me what Congregation I belonged to. When I responded that I was a Missionary of the Precious Blood, he immediately identified me as a Son of St. Gaspar del Bufalo. And then very energetically he "commissioned me" to spend the following weekends preaching in the local parishes, since a Missionary of the Precious Blood has to be out on the road preaching and not sitting at home! And so, with only two weeks of Italian under my belt, I had to begin to preach in the parishes on the weekends.

Still today this concept of missionary as itinerant is valid and in some countries it once again is beginning to gain strength. But, our concept of missionary has also

been widened. At any rate, there will always be a certain element of "itinerancy" connected with the image of a Missionary. In the light of what has been previously said about the cry of the blood, I would like to propose another way of understanding "itinerancy, mobility and flexibility" for the Missionary of the Precious Blood in today's world.

We have seen that the Blood speaks to us eloquently of the choices of God, from Exodus (12, 1-14) when the doorposts of the houses were painted with blood in order to protect the Israelites from the destruction and extermination, until the cross when Jesus was hung in the garbage heap outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, dying among the marginalized (Hebrews 13,10-15).

As congregations, we are missionaries "painted with the Blood of Christ," taking up in our lives and in our works the very same choices of Christ, identifying ourselves with those who suffer, with the poor and with the marginalized. And as the warrior in Isaiah 63, "Our clothes are stained with blood" in a sign of our commitment to defend the innocent and the little ones in their struggle for a better life. We need to ask ourselves, "Where is the blood of the innocent Lamb being sacrificed today?"

Our identity and our mission are centered in that cry and in our response to it. The cry of the blood crosses over the boundaries and involves us all. As international Congregations under the banner of the Precious Blood, we are united in a common discernment, a discernment which helps us to discover the call of the Blood and which challenges us to a creative response in fidelity to our spirituality and to our missionary charism. By being persons who constantly ask the question and in seeking to respond to the call, we acquire a particular identity in the midst of our diversities. We will be at once "faithful to our founding charism" while at the same time, responding "creatively" to the new forms the call of the Blood takes in changing and diverse circumstances.

In order to fulfill our mission today, mobility and flexibility are needed. The biggest threat to our missionary identity is the tendency to "become settled," whether as individuals or as congregations, whether because of shyness, caution, fear, exhaustion, depression, external threats which limit our pastoral activity, or simply due to the lack of creativity.

We are called to live in "nomads' tents" as the Israelites did in the desert, when they carried the Ark of the Covenant as pilgrims. We should be willing to be led, in response to the cry of the blood which calls out to us from the earth. This becomes for us an expression of our "missionary poverty." It is the Blood which will take us "to where we would rather not go" (John 21, 20ff). To let the poor be our guides, making them the center of our apostolates and of our mission and to evangelize from their vantage point, is our call! This is living in obedience to the call of the Blood! This option lies at the heart of our apostolate and helps us to prioritize our activities as well as serve as a criterion for selecting or of giving up our apostolates.

This demands of us an openness to the possibility of responding to the signs of the times as discerned in community. Tensions between traditional and established apostolates and the new ones which should and must be opened, will surely emerge. We are being called to renew our current commitments in the light of the spirituality of the Blood and of our missionary charism, making the poor and the "other," the emphasis of our apostolate. The Blood calls us to make our parishes and our educational centers more missionary in their focus. A missionary community is always standing in the doorway, waiting and discerning the call (*Normative Texts*, C32).

the Missionaries who work in areas of conflict and violence, as is the case of our parish of St. Agnes in Los Angeles, California, or in the "Back of the Yards" area of Chicago, fall within this group. Some will be called to pay the maximum price for their fidelity to Jesus and to the cry of His Blood, and will shed their own blood in martyrdom, as did the five Adorers of the Blood of Christ, "martyrs of charity" in Liberia, or as Brother Hubert Mattle did in Brazil.

All this requires of our communities a profound discernment in an apostolic and community dialogue, nourished and enlightened by prayer and the meditation of the Word of God and within the context of the reality of the local Church. Only thus can we discover the call of the Blood and our specific mission today.

We minister as ecclesial women, sent in obedience by our congregation, aware that it is in and through the Church that we share in Christ's saving mission (*ASC Constitution, #35*).

Coordinated apostolic action will bear fruit if it conforms to the directives of the Holy Father and the bishops, and is supported by cordial collaboration with the diocesan clergy, the religious and the laity (*Normative Texts, # C27*).

In the light of the above reflection, the words of the Holy Father addressed to the delegates of the XVII General Assembly (September, 2001) of the Missionaries are particularly relevant and challenging.

Two centuries later, another Pope summons the sons of Saint Gaspar to be no less bold in their decisions and actions - to go where others cannot or will not go and to undertake missions which seem to hold little hope of success. I ask you to continue your efforts to build a civilization of life, seeking the protection of all human life, from the life of the unborn to the life of the

We Live Mobility in Obedience to the Cry of the Blood

To be missionaries implies a mobility and an availability to respond to that "cry" whether individually or as an institution. The concept of the missionary is one that is opposed to the idea of settling down, of the search for securities. As a Polish priest once said to me, the missionary is one who has to plant his roots only in God. And I would add this phrase: and we must plant our roots in the heart of a *pilgrim God* . . . in the heart of the same God whose presence accompanied the Ark of the Covenant through the desert, designed as it was to be portable.

This requires of the missionary a great openness to being guided as Jesus indicated to Peter in John 21, 20. When we promise obedience in our ceremonies of incorporation as members of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, what we are actually promising is fidelity to the voice of the Blood which is calling us. This is the most radical and fundamental call of the missionary. As missionary women and men, we must be willing always to renew our apostolic commitments, living new styles of community and apostolic life which answer to this call of the Blood.

St. Gaspar himself once wrote, "Unlike statues, missionaries are not motionless. They serve wherever God wills to call them" (to D. Domenico Silvestri, February 24, 1825, Letter # 1063).

We know that radical fidelity to the call of the Blood today can bring us to the threshold of danger and risk. Contemporary examples of this are Fr. Marco Tulio and his catechists in Guatemala, and Monsignor Erwin Krätuler in the prelacy of the Xingu in Brazil. For years, our Missionaries in Peru had to confront danger for their commitment to remain by the side of the indigenous of the central Sierra, despite the threatening presence of the Shining Path revolutionaries. I would also say that

aged and infirm, and promoting the dignity of every human person, especially of the weak and of those deprived of their rightful share of the earth's abundance. I urge you to pursue a mission of reconciliation, as you work to rebuild societies torn by civil strife, even bringing together victims and perpetrators of violence in a spirit of forgiveness, so that they may come to know that "it is [the Blood of Christ] that is the most powerful source of hope; indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 25).

Our first challenge is to overcome our paralysis, our exhaustion and our motionlessness. The Missionary of the Precious Blood is a mobile and flexible person, always available to go to where the Blood of Christ calls us today.