

- Today in Indianapolis the National Eucharistic Congress is coming to a close. This has been a gathering of Catholics from across the country to honor our Lord for the great gift of the Eucharist, much like we celebrate here every fall with our diocesan Eucharistic Congress.
- Truly, it's amazing that our sovereign and all-powerful Lord humbles Himself to become ordinary bread and wine for us that we can both look upon and consume.
- Interestingly, in the city of Bruges, Belgium, is a glass phial containing the cloth Joseph of Arimathea used to wipe the blood from our Lord's body after He had died.
- The relic was preserved safely in the Holy Land until the Crusades, when legend says that it was given to the Count of Flanders by his brother-in-law, King Baldwin III of Jerusalem.
- Since that time, this cloth stained with the Precious Blood of Jesus has been housed in Bruges in the rather small but beautiful Basilica of the Precious Blood.
- Every year, on the Feast of the Ascension, the local bishop carries this amazing relic in procession through the streets of Bruges as a means of honoring our Lord Who so generously shed His blood for us all.
- While it's true that we can see our Lord's Body and Blood whenever we attend Mass or go to Adoration, there is something very special about seeing the blood that actually flowed through Christ's veins, the blood that was spilled in His Passion, the blood literally shed for our salvation.
- For indeed, this relic bears witness to the historicity of Our Lord's suffering and death. It reminds us that what we believe about Jesus is a historical fact and not a fable.
- This is what I love about relics. They reinforce the mysteries of our Faith; they put flesh and blood on our Faith so that we can more readily believe in these mysteries.
- Unlike the angels, we are creatures who rely upon physical senses. And being able to see or touch something that connects us so intimately with our Lord naturally deepens our faith in Him. It makes it easier for us to love and trust our Lord.
- Moreover, that the Church has managed to preserve so many precious relics over 2000 years of history is no surprise to me – but rather a sign of God's generosity and love for us.
- You see, God wants us to believe in Him, and He's willing to do whatever's necessary to help us. So, He leaves us signs of His love everywhere.
- As our Gospel reminds us today, our Lord's heart is moved to pity for His creation. Jesus spares nothing in giving Himself to us. His Most Sacred Heart, all on fire for love of us, will not permit holding anything back from us that we need for our salvation!
- In allowing the centurion to pierce His heart with a lance, Jesus threw open the doors to His Sacred Heart so that all might enter therein and find mercy, peace, and consolation.
- From this Heart, open to all, flows our Lord's Precious Blood, which as St. Paul reminds us today in his Letter to the Ephesians, makes it possible for us to draw near to Jesus.
- Christ's Precious Blood redeems us from our sins, which separate us from God. His Blood reconciles us to Himself, which is why Jesus was so quick to shed it for us on the cross, and it's why He so generously gives it to us whenever we receive Holy Communion.
- In his sinfulness man has gone astray, introducing an obstacle between God and himself. This all began in the Garden, when Eve was seduced by the serpent and with Adam committed the Original Sin that has sadly marked us all.

- While it's true that baptism forgives this sin that marks us all, we all still suffer the effects of this primordial wound. We all suffer with a disordered inclination toward sin.
- And when we give in to temptation and sin, we create a breach in our relationship with God; we damage our relationship with Him. And if our sin is mortal, we cut ourselves off from His sanctifying grace and risk eternal damnation.
- But unlike the shepherds mentioned in our first reading, Jesus is a good shepherd: a shepherd who earnestly desires to gather His flock unto Himself. He desires to remove whatever obstacles may stand between us and Him, and this He does through His Precious Blood.
- You see, the Precious Blood of Christ, poured out on the cross, is the price of our salvation, and without it there is no forgiveness of sin.
- When we receive our Lord's Precious Blood in Holy Communion (which is given to us even when we receive only the Host), it gives refreshment to our souls.
- And when we humbly and honestly confess our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that Precious Blood is lovingly applied as a salve to our wounded souls.
- In these ways, through the sacraments of Holy Communion and confession, which we can receive as often as we wish, the obstacles we placed in our relationship with Jesus are removed by His Precious Blood.
- In fact, whenever we receive any sacrament, it's as if we press our lips to that wound in Jesus' side and drink from that stream of mercy and love flowing from there. But this is only true if we are sorry for our sins and desire to live according to His will.
- Contrition for our sins and a desire for His mercy are the necessary prerequisites for us to experience the salvific effects of His Precious Blood.
- Yet Jesus desires to do more for us than simply forgive our sins and refresh our souls. He desires to have a relationship with us, to be our friend as well as our Savior.
- Back home in Indiana, there's a beautiful church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist that I often visit. Having chosen him as my confirmation saint, I've always had a devotion to this saint so beloved by Christ.
- High in the apse wall behind the altar in this church is a small, stained glass window with a depiction of St. John laying his head upon the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper.
- It's a tender image that I've always found consoling because it reminds me of what Jesus desires for us all. Like St. John the Evangelist, we are all invited by Jesus to lay our heads upon His heart, which is the living font of His Precious Blood.
- No matter what our faults and failings may be, no matter how numerous or terrible our sins, Jesus still wants us to be His intimate friend. He invites us all to draw near to Him, to be close to Him, to listen to His heart.
- So, as we prepare to receive Him today in Holy Communion, as we prepare to press our lips to His wounded side and drink deeply of His Precious Blood, we must ask ourselves what obstacles we have placed in the way of our relationship with Christ.
- Are there sins and vices that we refuse to surrender? Are we unwilling to trust Him and to follow His will for our life?
- By the merits of our Lord's Precious Blood so lovingly poured out for us on Calvary, may we each know our Lord's mercy and tender love. May our sins be forgiven, our wounds healed, and may we each know Jesus as both our Savior and our friend.