

Reflections on Postville and Christ's blood

The correct framing of the question of the immigration raid in Postville, Iowa on May 12, 2008, is neither political nor economic. For Christians it is more urgent than that. As human beings and as Christians we share a common blood. As humans, we speak of our family as our "blood relations," meaning that we share DNA – some of the same blood courses through our veins.

But the DNA image can end up being misleading and damaging, for while it ends up uniting us more closely to some by reason of heritage, it unnecessarily divides us from others for political reasons. To say that we share DNA with someone does not mean that we share the exact same DNA, unless we happen to be identical twins. It is more important and accurate to say that, as humans, we all share the DNA of humanity.

As Christians, we share blood in a different way. We share the blood of Christ in the Eucharist. As Christ's blood becomes part of us, our blood becomes part of Christ's and part of each other's. All Christians become blood relations through the Eucharist. This makes us one in Christ Jesus, in spite of past political divisions that were constructed in order to divide humanity and make it alright for one segment of it to take advantage of another.

Most notable among those political divisions are race, nation and clan. None of these is a physical reality. None is ordained by God to stand longer than God's reign. All are temporal political constructions that benefit some and ultimately injure others.

In the Eucharist, when we hear the words "the blood of Christ, shed for you and for many," we respond in one of two ways. One way is to say "I believe" or I entrust my life to that truth. The other is to say "Amen" or may it be so. When we hear the words of the Eucharist, we remember that, apart from all the political walls that have been and will be constructed; there is something different and redeeming about that common cup of blood.

Early on in the Christian faith, St. Paul recognized the grave danger presented when the culture began to construct its walls within the body of Christ. They were walls that gave privilege to one side and prejudice to the other. The very first wall was between Jews and non-Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised. Paul spoke of non-Jews as already guilty by law, but now made legal by the shedding of the blood of Christ. Paul said, "he has annulled the law with its rules and regulations... thereby making peace.... Thus you are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow citizens with God's people...."¹ In the same argument, he also said that Christ has "broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall...."²

¹ See Ephesians 2: 11-22. Quotation is from *The New English Bible*.

² Ibid.

The wall rising on the southern Border of the U.S. is just a physical manifestation. As Paul might say, enmity is the real wall, a wall constructed somewhere deep within the U.S. subconscious. When people talk about the need for the wall, their voices immediately betray a deep-seated anger, crying to come out. From a historical vantage, we have hated people who speak Spanish because the English did before us, because they chose not to be a pure race and therefore threaten ours, and because they were our nation's first foreign conquest. Remember the Alamo. Today we may say that's not so, but the truth has had a nasty habit of coming out in a history of lynching, forced repatriation and now blitzkrieg-styled immigration raids. This month we saw that wall rise faster than morels in the Iowa countryside, not in the reactions of ICE, but in the reactions of some staunch Christians who feel entitled to say, "They got just what they deserved." No one deserves what began to happen on May 12 in Postville and still is happening to over 300 undocumented people and their loved ones.

When we look at how "national security" in the U.S. has recently become little more than a kind name for harassing primarily Hispanic or Latino people, we owe it to ourselves to ask why. Why have we become like a school-yard bully who, as we know, is really just trying to mask a sense of personal inadequacy? The U.S. can't get Osama Bin Laden, we can't seem to put Iraq back together again, we can't get the price of gas to quit climbing and we can't avert the recession brought on by a corrupt marketplace that rode a housing bubble higher and higher until it finally popped. But, look at us; we can still push the Mexicans around. We are still a strong nation, right?

At this very moment the church has been transposed to a different kind of time, a time of kairos, of fundamental decision. What shall we do? On the one hand, the stranger among us will never have the papers that will give him or her even the simplest of the rights that you and I automatically enjoy each day. Most will have only the rights that Christians choose to give them, including the rights to hospitality and community. On the other hand, Jesus never said "Hate your neighbor because it will make you feel less helpless as a nation." Neither did Moses say, "Love foreigners among you as you love yourselves, but only until the King decides he doesn't like them and ships them off."

The next time we share communion let's focus on that cup. It's full of blood shed for us, and for many, so that sins like ours can be forgiven. It is neither brown nor white. It is the blood of Christ. It is the blood of us all.