

Holy Thursday 2023
Promised Treasures

Back when my dad celebrated his 80th birthday, a couple of my nephews and their wives came up with a wonderful idea – a piñata.

For those of you who do not know what a piñata is, it's made of papier-mâché, most often in the shape of an animal. Now, here's the thing about a piñata – it's hard on the outside, but completely hollow inside. It's hollow inside so that it can be filled with good things. In our case, pieces of candy.

So at the appointed time, Grandpa was dutifully blindfolded, a baseball bat was placed in his hands (best thing we could find), and away he swung! The younger grandkids and great-grandkids laughed, and screamed, and cheered until Grandpa burst that piñata open and candy went flying all over the grounds, the kids scrambling, even on their hands and knees, to get it.

When Jesus Christ was brutally crucified, His body hung there like a piñata. Although this scene was very colorful, it was not beautiful. It was gory, as blood and sweat dripped profusely all over His dead body. People were laughing as well, but not with childlike joy. Instead, they mocked Him because they could not wait to see Him dead! It was not until the Roman soldier finally took the tip of a spear and poked deep into Jesus' side that real treasure poured forth -- not candy and chocolate but an eternal treasure, richer and sweeter to your soul. It was blood and water.

John is the only Gospel writer to refer to the Roman soldier who struck Jesus' side with a spear. And, the Evangelist adds this beautiful commentary later in 1 John 5:6–8:

“This is He who came by water and blood -- Jesus Christ; not by water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.”

The “water” that poured forth from Jesus’ side signifies Holy Baptism, and the “blood” from His side signifies what we celebrate tonight -- Jesus giving us the new testament in His own Supper.

Both Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are worthless and useless without Jesus’ crucifixion. This is why St. Ambrose, who wrote the hymn “Savior of the Nations, Come,” indicates that Jesus’ body is like a holy temple by which we take great treasures. The piercing of Jesus’ side produced incredible heavenly and eternal riches for the Church, and they will never cease to flow on this side of heaven. The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper literally transfer Christ, His love, His forgiveness, and His presence directly from the cross over two thousand years ago into our time and day right now. That is why Jesus said at His ascension, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

Even though Jesus Christ has ascended, now filling all things in the universe, He is closer than ever to His Church, which continues to grow by giving birth to new children. For just as God formed a bride, Eve, from Adam’s side, so the Church, the Bride of Christ, is formed from the side of Christ. Just as Eve is the mother of all people, so the cross and Holy Baptism are the birthplaces for all God’s children. St. Paul teaches us that all who are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death and buried with Him (cf. Romans 6).

But beyond the “water” of Christ’s cross referring to Holy Baptism, the Church Fathers and the reformers also recognized the connection of the

“blood” to what we celebrate this evening: The Lord’s Supper. This Table provides you with a regular, continual spiritual fountain of refreshment! In the Book of Exodus, the people of Israel often murmured because they could not find water. Moses was instructed once by the Lord to touch a rock with his staff. Water poured forth to quench their thirst. Isn’t it ironic that just as Moses struck a rock to bring out water, a Roman soldier would also strike the Rock of all ages, and blood and water would pour forth? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:4, “For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Water and blood still pour from Jesus’ side to cleanse and redeem from sin.

I pray that you will not leave here this evening without recognizing the tremendous treasure Jesus gives you right now with His true body and blood—the same body pierced for you and blood poured out for you. The reason we are talking so much about blood and water today is because this is the night when our Lord washed His disciples’ feet and initiated a new testament with the Sacrament of the Altar.

What you receive at this Table is far more meaningful than kids knocking down a piñata at a birthday party. The riches that pour out of Jesus’ side for you are the water of Holy Baptism and the blood of the Lord’s Supper. They are a fountain of life. They bring all the spiritual wealth from what Jesus accomplished over two thousand years ago to you now. You see, it is very easy for us to talk about what Jesus did and how He lived, taught, and died for us. That is laid out in the Holy Scriptures. However, the Holy Spirit works through the Sacraments to draw the cross of Jesus closer to you every day as you walk by faith through this valley of sorrows.

In baptismal water, you were reborn, and you die to sin because Jesus died and all that sin was buried with Him. You will rise with Jesus to celebrate Easter soon. Through sacramental bread and wine, you recall, again, not only the cross of Jesus but also how His body and blood still enter you to forgive all your sins. “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). Tonight, celebrate all the treasures that flow from Jesus’ side! Yes, it will always be fun to go to birthday parties and swing at piñatas until they burst open with candy, but what you receive from the stricken body of Jesus produces so much more: forgiveness, life, and salvation. His side is open now; come and gather this treasure.