

**Homily for 175th. Anniversary of the Sisters of the Precious Blood,
Precious Blood Church, Dayton, October 4th, 2009.**

We Catholics have certain devotional practices that require clear understanding if they are not to lead to confusion. We have to know what it is we are talking about.

For example, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When we do that, we are not reverencing the physical organ that was in Jesus' chest with aortas and veins. No, we are celebrating the love of Jesus for all of us, a love that is signified by the image of His heart.

We have a votive Mass of the Holy Name of Jesus in the Sacramentary. When we celebrate that votive Mass we are not celebrating four or five letters of the alphabet that go together to make us the name Jesus, but rather the holiness of the incarnate second person of the Trinity.

It's the same with devotion to the Precious Blood. When we honor the Precious Blood of Jesus, we are not paying honor to the liquid that flowed in the veins of Jesus, complete with white and red corpuscles. No, we are paying honor to the dedication of Jesus to His saving mission. We are remembering that Jesus loved us to the very end of His life, that He gave everything He had to bring us into an eternal union of happiness with Him and the Father and the Spirit. Devotion to the Precious Blood of Christ is one of the ways the Church responds in love and gratitude to Jesus' full and final sacrifice of Himself for the salvation of sinners. Jesus gave everything He had in order to redeem humanity, in order to free us and justify us and cleanse us from our sins. We symbolize that total self gift of Jesus by our devotion to His Precious Blood, by being grateful to Him for giving Himself on our behalf to His last drop of blood.

Today we are here to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the foundation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, a congregation devoted to the adoration of the Precious Blood. The primary apostolate of the Sisters of the Precious Blood as established by Mother Brunner

was the veneration of Jesus' sacrificial gift of Himself for the salvation of all human kind as expressed by the outpouring of His precious blood.

The work of the Sisters of the Precious Blood extended into many states and to Latin America, but their central area of activity has been right here in western Ohio. The work of the sisters was devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus, but they expressed that devotion in many contexts. The sisters of the Precious Blood engaged in training orphans and in teaching school. They undertook care for the aged. They provided facilities for lay retreats. One of their most characteristic works was service to episcopal residences and seminaries. For many decades, every priest ordained in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati had the benefit of the care of the Sisters of the Precious Blood.

Today we remember 175 years of these various apostolates. I am sure that you sisters remember many details of the life of your congregation that we outsiders cannot share. But I want to assure you that those of us who are not members of this religious congregation have memories, too. We remember dozens of ways in which the sisters served the Church here in this part of our country – and elsewhere - for almost two hundred years! The tonality of our Catholic life in the counties you have served would be much different if you had not been here to witness to the saving generosity of the Lord Jesus and to the persistence of His love for us.

In the name of all those who experienced your dedication for these 175 years I offer thanks, thanks for what you have taught us about the generosity of God, thanks for the countless ways in which you enriched the faith life of us all.

I'd like to conclude with a little personal memory. Some time ago I was making a private retreat at Maria Stein. I was walking around the grounds and came upon the cemetery area. This is where sisters are buried from all the convents that have been closed over the years. I don't know how many sisters are buried there. Surely, it's in the high hundreds. There aren't any big monuments, just row upon row of sisters who had served the Lord over the decades. I remember thinking how generously the Lord had been served by these

now anonymous, but dedicated religious. I reflected on how intensely God had been known and served by the members of this congregation.

As we celebrate this anniversary today, I once again want to offer thanks. Thanks be to God for all of them who have gone to their reward. Thanks be to God for all of you.

Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati

S.D.GI.