Devotion to the Precious Blood in our Community

A little bit of history:
Devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus is as old as the Church and has been promoted by early fathers of the church such Pope St. Clement I, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Ambrose, and medieval saints and mystics, including Sts. Gertrude, Catherine of Sienna, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as Julian of Norwich.

Nearer our time, devotion to the Precious Blood has its roots in nineteenth century Italy due to the work of Francesco Albertini who founded the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood in 1808. Living in an era in which the blood of countless men and women was shed in the name of equality and freedom, he saw in the Precious Blood of Jesus the source of true equality and freedom for the children of God who invoke Him as Father.

Albertini introduced Gaspar del Bufalo to the devotion. Del Bufalo in turn founded the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1815. A few years later, Maria de Mattias heard del Bufalo preach on devotion to the Precious Blood of Jesus, and, guided by del Bufalo's successor, John Merlini, was inspired to found the Congregation of the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ in 1834. In 1855 the order received papal approval. John Merlini gave Maria de Mattias a symbol of her commitment, a gold heart imprinted with three drops of blood.

Now we come to our story:
Father Karl Rolfus, ordained in 1842, had visited Rome and become acquainted with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and the Archconfraternity of the Precious Blood. He himself was enrolled in the Archconfraternity.

At the same time, devotion to the Precious Blood became fervent in Germany and the Confraternity was established in some places in Baden. Rolfus zealously promoted the devotion, seeing in it a spirituality to counteract the growing secularization of southern Germany. He shared his spirituality with his many directees, some of whom, including Magdalena Weber, our Mother Theresa would be enrolled in the Confraternity and would form the nucleus of the new band of sisters.

"Eternal Father! I offer You the precious Blood of Jesus Christ for satisfaction for my sins and for the intentions of the holy Church."
And so, when it came to naming the fledgling congregation, no better name could have been chosen than “Sisters of the Adoration of the Most Precious Blood in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.” Their purpose was “to offer reparation for the insults committed against Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Love, and for this purpose to continually adore the Precious Blood on our altars, and to offer it to the Heavenly Father in atonement for the sins of the world and the needs of the Holy Church [Foundation and Progress, p. 17].”

The prayer life of the Steinerberg community reflected this commitment to reparation. After their morning prayer and meditation in the convent, the sisters crossed the street to St. Anne’s church. Entering the church they placed themselves in front of the High Altar, prostrated while Superior intoned the "O Sacrament Most Holy," and made an Act of Adoration. Then they recited the Rosary of the Precious Blood, the Chaplet of the Precious Blood, and the Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood. After Mass and Communion they prayed aloud the Act of Reparation and then spent time in silent prayer.

Perpetual adoration, an integral part of their daily life, continued in church until 8:00 in the evening. Adoration continued during the hours of the night where the sisters prayed at a convent window from which they could see the sanctuary lamp. Hourly the Sisters prayed aloud for dying sinners. After the noon-day meal and recreation, they went to church to pray the Stations of the Cross.

Even their garb reflected their purpose and identity: They wore on the left side of the pelerine [short cape] an embroidered red cross with seven drops of blood. In 1860 they adopted the habit worn by the Sisters Adorers in Rome: a pelerine with seven buttons down the front, representing the seven sheddings of the Precious Blood, and a small white collar with three buttons in honor of the three nails; a red cincture around the waist to remind them of the scourging of our Lord and of the rope which tied him to the pillar; the white “sunflower” headdress symbolizing the crown of thorns. Especially significant was the gold heart with the three drops of blood incised on it.

Each item symbolized some aspect of devotion to the Precious Blood. Thus, the garb was the symbol of penance; the headdress symbolized the crown of thorns; the three small buttons on the collar reminded the Sisters of the three nails; the seven buttons down the pelerine represented the seven sheddings of the Precious Blood; the red cincture was a reminder of the scourging of our Lord and of the rope which tied him to the pillar.
Expressive of the earlier devotional piety is the altar illustrating the sheddings of Jesus' blood which stood in the Motherhouse chapel from its beginning in 1875 until the new chapel was built and dedicated in 1926. For 50 years the sisters prayed before these images of Jesus' suffering. This altar is in the St. Faustus chapel.

**Precious Blood devotion in the early Twentieth Century.**

The “Christum Dei” compiled by Maria de Mattias was integrated into our prayer life—and remains to this day—sometime after our incorporation into the Precious Blood Congregation in Rome in 1847.

Devotional prayers with reference to the Precious Blood were many in our earlier history.

In this *Manual of Prayers* dated 1922 are listed the following Precious Blood prayers: in Latin, a “Hymnus [the *Christum Dei]*,” and in both English and German, the “Chaplet of Most Precious Blood,” “Prayers and seven Offerings to the MPB, “Devotion” to the MPB, “Litany” of the MPB, “Invocations” to the MPB, “Act of Consecration” to the MPB, and “Ardent Prayer” to the MPB, “Act of Reparation before the Blessed Sacrament,” and “Prayer to the Five Holy Wounds.” In German is added a “Rosethan [Rosary] to honor the Precious Blood.”

**Note** that already the little graphic on the title page is the Paschal Lamb, a symbol that would replace the more traditional images of drops of Precious Blood and other passion-related symbols.

**Precious Blood in ART in our Community**

Space permits only a few examples of the many depictions of the Paschal Lamb

&lt; Chapel (1926): at the summit of the triumphal arch is the Lamb standing on the book with seven seals.

Full page Illustration in the 1945 booklet commemorating our first 100 years.

The symbol of the chalice is preserved in a Medallion in one of the arches in the chapel.

The Blood of the Lamb Shall Be Unto You a Sign

Vestment circa late 50s

Chapel window, 1964
Precious Blood in MUSIC in our Community

Chief among the Precious Blood hymns is “Jesu Blut,” both in the original German and in English translations. The sisters living in Ottmarsheim, French Alsace, learned this hymn in 1848 from the Very Reverend Theodore Lender, of the Diocesan Seminary near Freiburg, To this day, the sisters sing this hymn with full voice.

Translation: Refrain: Jesus’ Blood shall live in us; It lives, our Jesus’ Blood.
For us it has been given; It is our highest Good.

1. Fuer uns ist es geflossen Am harten Kreuzesstamm.
   For us this Blood has trickled down
   The hard wood of the Cross.
   Dort hat’s fuer uns vergossen Das wahre Gotteslamm.
   For there the true Lamb of God
   Has poured it out for us.

2. Dies Blut hat uns erkaufet, Aus Satan’s Sklaverei,
   This is the Blood that bought us back
   From Satan’s slavery.
   In diesem Blut getaufet, Sind wir jetzt wieder frei.
   In this Blood we were baptized
   And now again are free.

A contemporary [and preferred] translation:

Refrain: Precious blood of Jesus for sinful men (ones)
poured forth, The price of our redemption exceeding all in worth.

1. Lord, teach us while in exile
   To love that Sacrament
   Where in Thy Blood is written Th' Eternal Testament.

2. Alleluia, Jesus
   Our Paschal Lamb, our Life!
   Thy Blood be our salvation,
   Our victory in strife.

The Christum Dei has been set to music twice and is often sung as the Invitatory at Morning Prayer on Sunday and sometimes at festive Masses.

Other hymns, such as Salvete Christ Vulnera [Hail Holy Wounds] and “Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains…,” once popular, are no longer sung, due, perhaps to the shift from a devotional piety to a liturgical spirituality.

Finally, something about the Feast

The Feast of the Most Precious Blood was introduced to Italy by Saint Gaspar de Bufalo. Pius IX extended the feast throughout the Church in 1849 and assigned the feast to the first Sunday of July. “Precious Blood Sunday on the First Sunday in July is...celebrated for eight days.” Steinerberg Rule, p. 19. In 1908 Pope Saint Pius X fixed the date of the feast to July 1. The feast was removed from the calendar in 1969 by Pope Paul VI, as it was considered redundant; however, the Mass of the Most Precious Blood remains among the votive Masses of the Church, a Mass which we celebrate with joy each July 1st. The month of July is still consecrated to the Most Precious Blood.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, to him be glory and power. Amen. [Cf. Revelations 1: 5-6]