

Family Sacramentals

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INTRODUCTION

I THINK it was the Japanese missionary Toyohito Kagawa who once said that a man reveals that he is a Christian even by the way he lights the kitchen fire. Kagawa was not so very wrong at that. For it is obvious how a man reveals his Christianity by attending Mass, or standing in line to go to confession, or making the sign of the cross in a restaurant; but it becomes more difficult to distinguish the Christian from the infidel when the former sits at the teller's window in a bank, or blows his whistle as a traffic cop, or plunges a hypodermic needle in a patient's body as a nurse or doctor.

Yet it is the genius of Christianity that it can touch a man or woman not only at Church during Sunday Mass, but even after they go home from church and begin wading through the Sunday comics and society news. It can touch them during the night when they lie side by side in the intimacy of love; it can touch the housewife on Monday morning as she bends over the wash board, or flips the switch on the new electric washing machine. It follows the man to his office or workshop or the farm. For even in the way a man transacts business in his office, or handles a rivet-

ing machine in his machine shop, or operates a combine he can reveal himself as a Christian.

Christianity does this by unifying daily life by the driving motive that God can be glorified in all things . . . in the changing of a baby's diaper, in the playing of a rubber of bridge, or settling down to a dish of orange ice and chocolate cake.

Christianity also touches the Christian and redeems him not only by the Sacraments which confer sanctifying grace and increase it in the soul, but by a hundred lesser instruments of Christian holiness known as Sacramentals.

By means of her blessings on machinery, on animals, on beer, automobiles and sick babies, the Church does a greater thing than Cinderella's fairy godmother who touched a pumpkin and mice and changed them into a coach and four horses. For the Church knows, wise mother that she is, that by touching the homely and intimate things of a Christian's daily life she can change these poor things into instruments of grace and personal holiness.

There are hundreds of these sacramental blessings listed in the Roman Ritual—which touch and sanctify the Christian at home, in the workshop or field, and during the hours of recreation, but we shall pass over them all for the present and begin with the sacramentals of the Christian Family . . . those bless-

ings which have for their purpose the sacramentalizing of domestic life.

Because the Church recognizes the integrity of Christian life on earth, she knows that every action, uncontaminated by the malice of sin, can be a stepping stone to holiness. The Church knows that by means of the sacramental blessings bestowed lavishly on the young married couple at the altar, they can better fulfill their partnership in Christ.

1. *The Christian Family's First Sacramental*

The nuptial blessing which is read over the newly married couple is both a prayer and a Christian manifesto on marriage.

The Christian family properly begins at the altar during the marriage ceremony, we ought to consider first of all the first family sacramental, the blessing of the ring. As soon as the bride and groom have exchanged their marriage vows and become thereby husband and wife, the priest receives from the groom the wedding ring and places it upon the altar. The priest then blesses it with these significant words taken from the ritual:

LET US PRAY

"Bless, O Lord, this ring which we bless in Thy name, that she who is to wear it, keeping true faith unto her husband, may abide in Thy peace and obedience to Thy will, and ever live in mutual love, through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Here in forty words the bride receives a working philosophy of Christian domestic life which she would do well to remember during all the days to come. At moments of serious temptation when faith unto her husband may become a difficult virtue to practice let her touch the blessed wedding ring, and deserve by her fidelity to abide in Christ's peace and obedience to His will.

In some religious orders of women a ring is blessed and worn by the nun as a symbol of her mystical marriage with Christ the Divine Spouse of the soul. The brothers of Mary, also known as the Marianists, wear blessed rings as symbols of their love and servitude to Our Lady. In the case of religious the blessed ring is a symbol of their service and union with Christ and Our Blessed Lady. In holy marriage the bride's blessed wedding ring is also a symbol—a sign of her love and fidelity to her husband. In the double-ring ceremony where bride and groom both exchange rings, the ring then becomes for both partners a constant reminder of their love and loyalty to each other until death do them part.

During the Mass on the day of marriage the celebrant interrupts the prayers after the *Pater Noster* to give the nuptial blessing to the couple kneeling before the altar. This blessing is directed particularly to the woman. Here the priest asks that the woman's marriage may be a "yoke of love and peace," that she may be faithful, chaste, long-lived, virtuous, fruitful in offspring. The blessing asks that the couple may see "their children's children unto the third and fourth generation."

This powerful family sacramental which is read over the newly married couple is both a prayer and a Christian manifesto on marriage. It is unfortunate that being read in Latin during the nuptial Mass, and not being carefully studied before or afterwards in a translation, its message is lost upon the marrying couple and their friends in church. It is a program for the Christian wife's entire married career, and if it seems to ignore the husband and spotlight all the Lord's attention upon the woman there is a very good reason for this; for the husband and children share in the wife's or mother's well being, physical or spiritual; if she collapses, who is the temple of human life in the home, the family will disintegrate. If she responds to grace, and this grace of matrimony is flowing into her constantly as a perpetual blood transfusion, then the husband and children are blessed in her, and the home becomes what Saint John Chrysostom once called it, "ecclesia domestica", a little church.

LET US PRAY

"Be appeased, O Lord, by our humble prayers, and in Thy kindness assist this institution of marriage which Thou hast ordained for the spread of the human race; so that what is here joined by Thy authority may be preserved by Thy help. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son."

Having asked God to preserve this marriage which His authority has made into a life-time union, the Church reviews the history of marriage and its natural origin in Eden, and then reveals how marriage from the beginning foreshadowed the close union of Christ with herself. The Church then proceeds to ask special blessings for the bride, protection and strength, fidelity and chastity, etc.

LET US PRAY

"O God, by Thy mighty power Thou didst make all things out of nothing. First, Thou didst set the beginning of the universe in order. Then Thou didst make man to Thy image, and didst appoint woman to be his inseparable helpmate. Thus Thou didst make woman's body from the flesh of man, thereby teaching that what Thou has been pleased to institute from one principle might never be lawfully put asunder. O God, Thou has sanctified marriage by a mystery so excellent that in the marriage union Thou didst foreshadow the union of Christ and the Church. O God, Thou dost join woman to man, and Thou dost

endow that partnership with a blessing that was not taken away in punishment for original sin nor by the sentence of the flood. Look, in Thy mercy, upon this Thy handmaid, about to be joined in wedlock, who entreats Thee to protect and strengthen her. Let the yoke of marriage be to her one of peace and love. Faithful and chaste, let her marry in Christ."

In the next place the Church will set before the bride the examples of three holy women of the Old Testament, Rachel, Rebecca, and Sara. Rachel is the model of all wives who treasure the love of their husbands, for this lovely woman so endeared herself to her husband, Jacob, that he served his father-in-law, Laban, seven years for her, and as the Holy Scripture says: "they seemed but a few days because of the greatness of his love." (Genesis, Ch. 29, verse 20) Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, is the model of all mothers who wisely plan a blessed future for their children. Finally, at a time when women consider the best years of their life on the sunny side of fifty, and stop counting birthdays after their thirty-ninth, Sara is set before the bride as a model wife who grew old in the love of her husband, Abraham, for of her the Scripture simply says: "Sara lived to a hundred and twenty-seven years." (Gen., Ch. 23, v. 1)

"Let her ever follow the model of holy women; let her be dear to her husband as Rachel; wise like Rebecca; long-lived and faithful like Sara."

Finally the Church asks God to protect the young bride from the devil's evil influence, and help her to keep the faith and the commandments. Remembering that penance and discipline strengthen character, the Church like a wise mother asks God to give the bride firmness in the hour when she is tempted to break her marriage vows; let her, the Church prays, be serious in behavior, revered for her modesty, well instructed in heavenly doctrine, and fruitful in children. After this the Church brings this long blessing to a close with the following words:

"Let her life be good and innocent. Let her come finally to the rest of the blessed in the kingdom of heaven. May they both (husband and wife) see their children's children unto the third and fourth generation, thus attaining the old age which they desire. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

If the bride understood only a part of these good things invoked upon her by the Church what a glow of thankfulness and joy would fill her soul, and what happiness and pride would fill the soul of the groom who knows that his wife's blessings will overflow into his own life and the life of his family. Yet the Church is not yet finished with her well-wishing for the marrying couple. Before the Last Blessing of the Mass, the priest once more turns to the bridal couple and concludes the nuptial blessing with these words addressed to both bride and groom:

"May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you; and may He fulfill His blessing in you; that you may see your children's children even to the third and fourth generation, and thereafter may you have life everlasting, by the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth forever and ever. Amen."

Although the modern world takes a dim view of the blessings of old age, and expects love and happiness to diminish with physical vitality, the Catholic Church still regards growing old as a special favor of God. Else why does she place on the lips of her children who sing Compline these words of the psalm: "I will fill him with length of days; and I will show him my salvation"?

But the blushing young bride in her fresh beauty may find it difficult to picture herself as a grayhaired nonagenarian dandling her great-grandchildren on her knees, and we cannot blame her lack of perspective at such a moment . . . when the world seems full of romance and adventure. Yet Holy Mother Church still insists on reminding her and her young husband that old age is the harvest time of life and that grandmas and grandpas get a thrill out of life unknown to the bride and groom . . . the thrill of the nuptial blessing fulfilled at last in themselves.

2. Children Are the Fruit of Love

Children may be considered as the fruit of love, or as hindrances to freedom depending upon whether the parents have been united as "children of the saints" or as . . . "heathens that know not God."

ANN had just shocked her fifteen-year-old girl friends. They had told her it was brazen to say such things—to admit having such an ambition. And Ann frankly didn't understand why.

When I heard her story I was glad that she couldn't understand why they were shocked, and I hoped that she never would. All she had told her friends was that some day she wanted to get married because she wanted to have children—four of them—two boys and two girls.

I hoped with all my heart that Ann *would* marry some day, for to her, children would be the fruit of

love and not mere hindrances to parties, new dresses, or new houses. I hoped that she wouldn't lose her vision about the purpose of marriage, because I knew she would be the sort of young woman who would wrap the family sacramentals of Mother Church protectively around her and her family. I think she would approach marriage as a young man approaches ordination to the priesthood. She would foresee its trials and its sufferings as well as its pleasures and consolations. And she would embrace it, not for the sake of the pleasures alone, but because she desired to offer herself to God as an instrument for peopling His heaven.

She would suffer to have her children. She would suffer to rear them as Christians. And, yes, she probably would suffer in her old age at being bruised by them. It would be her life's work, though, which she had done for God's sake and for love's sake. Her children would be the harvest which she would lay at God's feet as the fruit of her love for Him and for her husband.

The Church always has held out the protective cloak of her sacramentals to newly married couples in the hope that they might understand at the beginning of their new life that their homes are to be sacred workshops of God and should be kept as holy as convents—that they might realize that their bodies which co-operate with God to bring new life into the world are sanctified for that purpose by marriage—

just as the priest's hands are consecrated for Mass—and that they might offer their sufferings and sacrifices of rearing a family to God as contritely as the strictest monk offers his penances.

Just as all things which belong to God's house are blessed consecrated vessels, so should be the bodies, the home, and the nuptial chamber of the newly wed. If the activities which are to be carried on in their new life are to give honor and glory to God, they should all be blessed by Him. And so, the Church does not unite a couple, bless them at the nuptial Mass, and then stand like a prude at the altar while they proceed alone to make their new home. The Church is not a prude; many of her children are. Through ignorance, or prudery, many of them shut her out of their new home and out of their nuptial chamber. They bid her stay at the altar and wait there until they seek her again on Sunday. They want to be alone—and so they bid Christ, the Silent Partner of their marriage, to be quiet, and they ignore the blessing which would reassure them of His interest in the partnership.

At the altar they have been reminded of their duties to one another. These duties are not all physical, not all material. The most important duty is spiritual: to help each other become saints. If they fail in that, then they have failed in everything. With that duty foremost in mind, it would be well if every couple, approaching the beginning of their married life, could

be confronted with the words of Tobias to his newly wed Sara:

"Sara, arise, and let us pray. . . . For we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God." (Tobias 8, 4-5)

Tobias had been instructed on the difference between such unions by the archangel Raphael. Sara had been betrothed seven times before and each time her husband had died, killed by the devil, as her husband and she approached the nuptial chamber. Tobias feared that he would meet a similar fate, and he asked the archangel how to escape the power of the devil. The instructions of the archangel to Tobias are still good counsel:

"They who in such manner receive matrimony, as to shut out God from themselves, and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule, which have not understanding, over them the devil hath power. . . . Thou shalt take the virgin with the fear of the Lord, moved rather for love of children than for lust, that in the seed of Abraham thou mayst obtain a blessing in children." (Tobias 6, 17:22)

BLESSING OF A NUPTIAL CHAMBER

When one reflects upon the evils which have cursed the family through the abuse of the nuptial chamber, one can come to better understand why Mother

Church wishes to hover over that room with a special blessing as the couple starts life together.

If they will invite her in, the blessing which she asks upon them is this:

"Bless, O Lord, the bed chamber. Let all who dwell in it stand firm in Thy peace and may they persevere in obedience to Thy will; may they see many years and a numerous posterity and finally attain to the kingdom of heaven. Amen."

Upon the new structure into which eventually will come new souls to work out their eternal salvation, the Church also asks a blessing for all the things which so many homes today are ceasing to be. If couples are to help each other become saints—and their children with them—then all the things which they do together must have God's blessing. They must seek it, not only at Sunday Mass, but in their home, in their love for each other, and in their children, so that eventually their household will be so permeated with God's love that it will reflect peace into a peace-hungry world.

Mother Church is anxious to follow couples into their new houses and to ask God to help them make the structures into homes. Her blessing for a home is:

"Bless, O Lord, God Almighty, this place, that they may abide here in health, purity, victory, strength, humility, goodness, and meekness, the fulfillment of the law, and thanksgiving to God, the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Spirit; and may this blessing remain over this place and on all those who dwell here now and forever. Amen."

Within every human being is an urge to create, which may manifest itself in works of art, music, literature, inventions, or craftsmanship. But the greatest of all creative powers is the creation of new life—a new body with an immortal soul which will outlive the greatest works any man ever produced. It is significant that God has ordained that into the intimate expression of the love of man for wife He would pour the most wonderful of His creations—the immortal human soul—to be housed in a temple built and shaped by the expression of love. Into the hands of those who have appeared before Him and offered themselves as His instruments of procreation, God has entrusted this creative power which He might well have reserved for Himself alone.

But in His own great love, God wanted man to know the joy, the satisfaction of having created something out of love—something after one's own image and likeness. If man wants to use this power of procreation, it must be asked from God; it must be granted by God. God's true authority comes only to those who appear before His altar and pledge their lives to Him as instruments through whom he may people heaven if He sees fit.

When the young mother finds herself with child, the feeling of shame should be as remote to her as

it would be to a farmer gazing at a field full of ripe wheat waving in the autumn wind and glistening in the sunshine. The farmer's heart is not ashamed. His face is radiant and the sight fills his heart with humility and gratitude. He planted his field with faith and he accepts his bountiful harvest as God's love.

And so, when faith and love have borne their fruit in the young mother, she too should turn to God in thanksgiving. There she will find Mother Church waiting to visit her home and pray with her "that by the firmness of her faith she may be protected from every evil."

The liturgy blesses the mother and the growing life within her. It also blesses the home, praying that the angels may dwell therein and watch over the mother and child. There is hardly a time when she will appreciate such a blessing more than during pregnancy, when she is filled with hope and also with fear, with joy as well as sorrow.

THE BLESSING FOR AN EXPECTANT MOTHER

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

R. Who made heaven and earth.

V. Help Thy handmaid

R. O my God, who trusts in Thee.

V. Be for her, O Lord, a strong tower

R. Against the enemy.

Ps. Let the enemy not prevail over her.

R. And the son of iniquity not hurt her.

Ps. Send her, O Lord, help from Thy sanctuary

R. And protect her from Sion.

LET US PRAY

Lord God, Creator of the universe, Thou art strong and fear-provoking, just and merciful; Thou art good and gracious; Thou hast freed Israel from all trials; Thou hast made our fathers Thy favorites; Thou hast sanctified them through the hand of Thy Spirit; Thou hast prepared body and soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary through the co-operation of the Holy Spirit as a dignified dwelling for Thy Son; Thou hast filled John the Baptist with the Holy Spirit and made him rejoice for this in his mother's womb: Receive the offering of a contrite heart and the burning desire of Thy handmaid N., who in humility prays for the thriving of the child, which Thou hast entrusted to her womb. Care for what is thine and protect it against all persecution and spite of the enemy. Thy merciful hand lend her help, so that the young life will safely come to see the light of the world, and be saved for the sacred birth of Baptism. May it always serve Thee and gain eternal life. Through Christ our Lord. R. Amen.

The expectant mother is sprinkled with holy water, and Psalm 66 is said.

V. Let us praise the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

R. Let us praise and exalt Him in eternity.

V. His angels has He given command for your sake,

R. That they may protect you on all your ways.

LET US PRAY

"Visit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, this house and drive away from it and from this Thy servant N. all snares of the enemy; let Thy holy Angels dwell therein and protect the mother and her child in peace and may Thy blessing remain with her forever. Save them, O almighty God, and grant unto them Thy perpetual light. Through Christ our Lord."

It should indeed be difficult to forsake a Church that follows her children and stays with them in their most difficult hours, watching over them with maternal care. It *would* be difficult if her sacramentals were known to families and used as naturally in the events of their lives as they once were used. These beautiful traditions and ceremonies were not academically studied and forced into the regular pattern of family living. They came forth organically from the life of the Church, giving grace and peace to those who united the joy and sorrow of their family life with God. But as the world has reverted toward pagan marriages, which first seek companionship, pleasures, riches, and convenient living, the sacra-

mentals which regard children as the rightful fruit of marriage have been almost forgotten.

If Ann's little friends had known the liturgy of their Church, they indeed would have been shocked—at their own attitude and not at Ann's. It is as unnatural for a couple to present themselves to God in marriage and not expect—or not want—children, as it is to plant bulbs and never long for their flowers. For love which seeks nothing but its own pleasure in marriage is no love at all—is no marriage at all. Love is sacrificing—as the plant sacrifices its energy for the beauty of the blossom. Without the sacrifice, it can have no real maturity because it is all vine, consuming all the food and energy for itself. And it will die consumed by itself, leaving no traces of love, for it bore no fruit—it left no seed.

The full text for the blessing of an expectant mother, printed on a card and suitable for mailing as a greeting, may be obtained from the Pio Decimo Press, P.O. 53, Baden Station, St. Louis 15, Mo.

3. Thanksgiving for Life

The new Christian mother's first visit to Church after the Baptism of her baby is to give thanks for the new life God has brought into this world.

WHEN a Christian mother holds her new baby in her arms for the first time, she may not actually say, "Thanks, God," but her heart is praying

She has felt the breath of Death hot upon her neck, but she has been delivered along with this new being for whom she dared to embrace Death to deliver it to life.

And as she looks at this bundle of mysteries, which also can become an assortment of kicks, screams, and contortions, she is tenderly awed. This she can never understand—this mystery of life and death—but she knows that this little thing which she calls her son has enthroned within him an eternal force which God has released into the world through her body.

He, upon whom she is happy to gaze and ponder upon in her heart, started merely as a seed—an invisible seed—planted in love and brought to the fullness of life through a mystery of God. She doesn't hope to understand this seed, her son, because she has never been able to comprehend the power wrapped even in one tiny seed of her flower garden. And this, she knows, is infinitely more mysterious and wonderful, because into this seed was poured a human soul.

Since she doesn't understand his natural birth, in which she has played such an important role, she doesn't hope to understand this other more wonderful mystery—his rebirth—in which God alone acts. But she does know that just as it was necessary for the child to be nourished and protected within her own womb to bring it to natural life, so its soul must be placed within the sacramental womb of the Church at the baptismal font so that it might be reborn in Christ. Although she never hopes to understand even a flower seed, she knows it is not enough merely to plant the seed; it must be given food according to its nature. So also she knows that it is never enough to introduce a child to life; it must be introduced to wholeness of Life through rebirth.

Truly must she meditate on many things when her baby is brought back to her arms as a baptized Christian. She is awed to think that this helpless little fellow one day will become a man, capable of loving

and hating, of giving life or taking it, of doing good or evil. And as she turns one of his tiny hands over and places it within her own, she cannot imagine that he can ever grow up to do anything but good. He is *her* son.

Perhaps at this point she knows that the days and missions of the Prophets have not all passed—that Christian parents are Prophets who prepare and make ready the Way of the Lord in the hearts of their children. Here are hearts, minds—souls to be shaped into mature understanding of God and given to His service in love. This is the sublime work of parents.

It is only natural, then, that as soon as she is able the Christian mother goes to God's house to thank Him for the natural and supernatural gifts of life, to consecrate herself and her child to Him, and to ask for His grace and guidance for her life's task.

The Church has provided a ceremony not only for this natural desire to express thanks, but as an opportunity to welcome the mother back to an active life and to bless both mother and child. This sacramental is called "Churching of Women."

Occasionally we see a young mother kneeling with her baby in her arms in the church vestibule before Sunday Mass. It may be any day, but we will be sure to see it some Sunday. The priest is sprinkling her with holy water, and the conclusion generally is that she is being "purified." But from what? Does a mother ask her child to do an errand and then scold

it for having done as she asked? After having united a couple in matrimony, prayed over them for a fruitful union, blessed their ring, their nuptial chamber, and then rejoiced with the expectant mother, how could Mother Church "scold" the delivered mother by a penitential rite?

She doesn't. She is joyful with the new parents. She sends her priest to the church entrance to receive the mother—not as an indication of penance, but out of respect for her. The only other person who is honored by such a reception at the church entrance is the bishop, visiting the church officially. Unfortunately, this reception of the mother often is confused with the rite before baptism when the unbaptized person is not allowed to enter the church before answering the questions and receiving the exorcisms.

But Mother Church always provides a barometer for the onlooker who wants to know in what "mood" she is on any occasion or day. The "barometer" is the color of the vestments of her priest. For this occasion the priest wears a surplice, and the key to the mood of the occasion is the stole around his neck. He is wearing a white stole—not the penitential purple of the baptismal exorcisms or of the Sacrament of Penance; and it signifies that this is a pure and joyous occasion. The Church rejoices; the mother, the father, and their friends should join in the procession and rejoice together.

Just to make sure that this is no penitential occa-

sion, we draw closer to the mother who is kneeling in the vestibule holding a lighted candle, and we hear the priest saying to her:

"According to a very laudable custom, you have come to request the blessing of the Church upon yourself and the child that has been committed to your care. While you return thanks to God for the many favors which He has bestowed upon you, at the same time fervently consecrate yourself and your offspring to His holy service.

"Be careful, both by word and by example, to impress upon its youthful heart the principles of solid piety, that you may correspond to the views of Divine Providence in placing it under your charge, and may have the happiness of seeing your children attentive in their duties to God, and zealous for their own eternal welfare. You hold a lighted candle to signify the good works by which you should express your thanks to God for the benefits which He has bestowed upon you, and the pious examples by which you should lead your children, and all around you, to the love and practice of virtue. Endeavor to enter into the disposition needed to cultivate the blessings which I am about to ask for you in the name of the holy Church."

He has said nothing about "purifying" her, nor of cleansing her of any sin, before sprinkling her with holy water. But this sprinkling with holy water,

which is merely another indication of respect for the new mother, has been misinterpreted by the casual onlooker to mean that she has been cleansed of some guilt.

Although this sacramental has its roots in Jewish tradition, its significance to the Christian far surpasses the imperfection of that ritual origin. In keeping with the Jewish law of purification the mother had to visit the Temple forty days after the birth of a male child. The Law of the Old Testament proclaimed the universal reign of sin, and all men—even the just—were subject to the law. But the manifold legal purifications of the Old Testament were a promise of the universal absolution to be brought by the Redemption of Christ—the freedom of the sons of God from the reign of sin.

So the "Churching of Women" has its Christian origin in the first visit of the Blessed Virgin to the Temple forty days after the birth of Christ. Just as there was no need for purification from corporal or spiritual defilement on the part of the spotless Virgin, so in the Christian Church the mother's visit suggests nothing of purification or penance. It is rather a visit of thanksgiving and a consecration of the mother and child to God, just as in the case of our Lady.

The priest, having sprinkled the mother with holy water, is now reading Psalm 23 over her. This psalm is wholly joyous over the mother's coming.

“Who shall go up into the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? The one who is innocent of hands and pure of heart . . . he shall receive a blessing from the Lord. . . .” And seemingly glimpsing Christ in this new-formed member of the Mystical Body, the psalm exclaims: “Who is this King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Ye gates lift up your heads and open wide ye ancient doors, the King of glory would enter in.”*

The antiphon which follows the psalm echoes the first theme, saluting the newly delivered mother with: “She shall receive a blessing from the Lord and mercy from her Savior; for this is the generation of those who seek the Lord.”

Placing the left end of his white stole in the mother’s hand, the priest then invites her into the church. The mother, carrying a lighted candle and her child, follows the priest to the altar where she kneels while the priest prays:

“Almighty, everlasting God, Who through the delivery of the Blessed Virgin Mary hast turned the pains of the faithful at childbirth into joy, look mercifully upon Thine handmaid, coming in gladness to

* Translation from “The Blessing of Mothers after Childbirth” as given in *The Christian Observance of Candlemas*—booklet of suggestions for the Christian observance of Candlemas in the parish, in the family, in the apostolic group; with literature and songs for the feast. Grailville, Loveland, Ohio, publishers. “The Blessing of a Mother After Childbirth” can also be obtained on a beautifully decorated card suitable for congratulatory greeting, from Pio Decimo Press, St. Louis, Mo.

Thy temple to offer up her thanks and grant that after this life, by the merits and intercession of the same blessed Mary, she may merit to attain, together with her offspring, to the joys of everlasting happiness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The priest then sprinkles her again with holy water in the form of a cross pronouncing a blessing over her: "May the peace and blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit descend upon you and remain with you always. Amen."

Remembering the exhortation of the priest at the church entrance, the young mother's heart must be praying many things as the priest blesses her. In the flickering, leaping light of the candle she holds with her child she may look into his face and see some resemblance between their purity and their newly lighted lives.

Noticing that the candle started to consume itself from the moment it was first lighted, she is impressed with the incessant war which life and death wage from the start. Death, she knows, is not something one should prepare for in old age only, but from the beginning, since "the last hour in which we cease to live does not bring death but only completes it."

The candle's flame, feeding on the purest beeswax is very like the light and example shed from the flame of God's love feeding in a pure soul. Perhaps she prays that her infant son's pure soul may always

be pure, and that the flame so recently lighted by baptism may never be snuffed out by mortal sin.

Perhaps she'll dream a dream too about what he may become—a doctor . . . a statesman . . . a father . . . perhaps a priest. But deep in her heart she has just one prayer: that he will be a faithful son of his eternal Father—a saint, and that she, his mother, may not fail to show him how.

4. *Sacramental of the Domestic Hearth*

You may not be rich, but one thing you can give your children, the heritage of your blessing.

OUR LORD used to gather little children around Himself and bless them. "Suffer the little children to come unto Me," He said. "And embracing them, and laying His hands upon them, He blessed them." Parents of today love their children. They embrace them. Why do they not lay their hands upon them and bless them? Jesus wants children to be blessed.

Certainly the blessing bestowed on children by

This chapter is by Abbot Ignatius Esser, O.S.B., and is available in pamphlet form under the title: **BLESS YOUR CHILDREN**, 10¢ a copy postpaid. Order from The Grail Office, St. Meinrad, Indiana.

Jesus was more efficacious than that which is bestowed on them by their parents. So also is the blessing imparted by a priest more efficacious than the parental blessing. Even so the parental blessing is something so holy, so efficacious, that it deserves to be called the "*Sacramental of the Domestic Hearth.*" How beautiful is the picture of a young mother, imposing hands of benediction on a child of tender years and spotless innocence. No less beautiful is the picture of an aged parent, bestowing with trembling hands, a blessing on a full-grown son and daughter.

Parental blessing is as old as the human race. It began with the oldest patriarchs. Throughout the Old Testament it was the usual method of transmitting divine favors. The blessing conferred on their children by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are known to all that read the Sacred Scriptures. These same Scriptures give us an authoritative statement on parental blessing. "Honor thy father, in word and work, and in all patience, that a blessing may remain in the latter end. The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children; but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation." (Ecclus. 3, 9. 11)

Many are the Scriptural instances whereby the efficacy of a parent's blessing, and also a parent's curse, is proved. We know the interesting story of Tobias, how he made a long journey with the Angel Raphael, who in disguise acted as a travelling companion. That was a most successful and profitable

journey. Besides a safe return it included: the collection of money, the deliverance of the young Tobias from the dangerous fish, the winning of an excellent wife for the son, and the curing of the father's blindness. Before setting out, the young Tobias received his father's blessing in words: "May you have a good journey, and God be with you in your way, and His angel accompany you."

Nowadays a person so rarely sees parents bless their children, that he is inclined to think the privilege no longer exists. Has the parental blessing lost its efficacy in the New Testament? Has Christ's coming changed the essential relations between parent and child? Has matrimony, elevated by the Savior to the dignity of a Sacrament, been lowered in spiritual values? Most certainly not! Jesus, in the New Testament, has increased the number and capacity of the channels of grace, of which the parental blessing is one.

Parental blessing is parental blessing still. The scattered family and the empty home are but the concomitant of parental blessing neglected. If this "Sacramental of the Domestic Hearth" were more frequently administered, there would be more happy and contented families. Two indispensable factors of happiness in a home are amiable authority on the part of parents and loving obedience on the part of children.

Parents that bless are more keenly conscious of their

responsible dignity. In their power to bless they recognize the channel of grace that they do not want to obstruct by disedifying example.

It is easy for a child to see God's representative in a parent before whom it frequently kneels for blessing. With this recognition come the love, reverence and obedience that children owe to their parents.

In the lives of the saints and the saintly, we find many beautiful examples that help to spur us on in fostering this worthy custom. The last words of the mother of St. Gregory of Nyssa were her words of benediction pronounced over her ten children, some of them absent, some present. The dying mother of St. Edmund called her boy from Paris to England to bestow on him her blessing. The Blessed Thomas More, even when a married man, advanced in years and official dignity—he was Lord Chancellor of England—never left his father's house without that aged parent's blessing.

The Little Flower of Jesus, whose charming child-like sanctity has made her so popular, undoubtedly owes some of her exalted holiness to her parents' blessing. The custom of blessing the children prevailed in the home of the Little Flower. In her autobiography she expressly mentions the blessing received from her father on one momentous occasion. It was the day she entered the convent. Hear her speak for herself: "The next morning, after a last

look at the happy home of my childhood, I set out for the Carmel, where we all heard Mass (April 9, 1888). I embraced all my dear ones, and knelt for my father's blessing. He, too, knelt down and blessed me through his tears."

A little more than two years ago our Catholic papers attracted the attention of readers with the headline: "Bishop Kneels for Mother's Blessing." It was the Right Reverend F. T. Roch, D.D., Bishop of Tuticurin, India. He met his mother at the railway station. There, in presence of a multitude of people, he "knelt before his mother to receive her blessing, and the grand old lady, placing her wrinkled hands on the head of her illustrious son, moved many a spectator to tears."

You may wonder when parents ought to bless their children. They ought to bless them often. At night after evening prayers is a very good time to bestow a daily blessing. Before going on a journey or undertaking an important or dangerous occupation; also during sickness, sons and daughters ought to get their parents' blessing. At the more important turning points in life, fathers and mothers ought solemnly to bless their children, thus, upon their entering school, on their First Communion day, on their wedding day, or when they leave to enter military service, the convent or monastery, or the holy priesthood. Send a blessing even to your absent children. Before you go to bed at night, think of the absent son or daugh-

ter. They may be in sore need of your help. Your blessing is the most powerful help that you can give them. Protect them with the Sacred Cross that you make over them. Include a "God bless you, my child," in the letters to your children. Your last blessing should be given to all your children, when you are at the point of death.

How is the parental blessing given? In the most simple, yet impressive manner. Place your hands on the head of the kneeling child. Say: "*I bless you, my child, in the name of the Father,*" etc., make the sign of the Cross upon the forehead with the thumb of the right hand. If you bless all your children at once, simply extend your right hand over all, and trace a cross over them, while you pronounce the above words. Any other appropriate words of your own choice may be used. Vary them to suit the occasion. The words of Tobias quoted above are beautiful words of blessing for one about to make a long journey. Simply let the words of blessing indicate what you wish your children.

After reading this, what will be the attitude of parents, sons, and daughters towards the practice of parental blessing? Young parents will welcome this happy privilege of which they perhaps knew absolutely nothing. With joy will the proud young father and the jubilant young mother lay hands of blessing upon their precious baby. The practice once begun will be easily kept up.

But what about older families, where through ignorance of this beautiful custom, the parental blessing was never given? Rather reluctantly will aged parents make this start in the evening of their married life. Yet they surely will not refuse their blessing if their grown-up sons and daughters ask for it. Nor ought they to hesitate in asking for a gift that surpasses all natural gifts that parents can give them.

St. Ambrose says: "You may not be rich; you may be unable to bequeath any great possessions to your children; but one thing you can give them; the heritage of your blessing. And it is better to be blessed than to be rich."

5. *The Little Church That A Home Is*

By their very vocation to Christian marriage, a husband and wife make their home a sacred place; for the marriage contract has three partners, husband, wife and God.

IT IS A FACT that people usually become holy or worldly by living in a holy or worldly place; since it is not possible for the Christian family to remain night and day in the parish church, the home itself where most of life is lived must become a sacred place . . . a little church where the members not only feed the body, but where they also nourish the life of the soul.

This is the teaching of one of the greatest apostles of the Christian family, St. John Chrysostom, who once said: "After the public worship of God (in church) we will spread two tables in our houses, one

with the food of the body, and the other with the food of Holy Scripture; one with the fruits of the earth, and the other with the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Prayer and teaching in the church are not enough; they must be accompanied by prayer and reading at home: for the home is a family church.”

If this idea sounds fantastic to Christian ears today, it is only because the virus of secularism has deafened them to the advice of Holy Mother Church. If the words of the holy doctor sound far-fetched, it is not because he is old-fashioned, but because twentieth-century Christians no longer think of religion except as a matter of church-going.

Of course, the Christian home is more than a little church where mother and father and children serve and worship God; it is a school of perfection, the best and most hallowed of all academies; it is a workshop, a love nest for husband and wife, a house of hospitality, a playhouse, a little theater, a music-lyceum, a quick-lunch counter for hungry kids and a university of hard knocks; above all, home is a place where the father's love and the mother's faith glow like a beacon in the midst of a dark night . . . or at least a place where love and faith shine most of the time, even if storms of passion sometimes bring a momentary blackout.

If the name, “family church,” used by St. John Chrysostom for the home, seems a pietistic exaggeration

tion to the reader, it is because moderns are forgetting the deepest meaning of marriage and the family: to add to the population of heaven by bringing up new children of the saints. The highest purpose of the family is not material security, helpful as it is; rather the God-intended purpose of family life is to help the members become holy. Married folk and their offspring are not to be half-Christians simply because they live in the world and in a state of life surrounded by carnal consolation and tenderness. Married folks and their children are called to the same holiness as the barefooted Carmelites who spend their hours in contemplation and work, or the cowled monks treading the silences of their cloisters. The home must be for the family an instrument of holiness, a domestic temple of God.

A home is as much a school of perfection as a monastery, and as much a place of prayer as a chapel for the little ones are to be brought up in the family as children of the saints. This task is doubly hard when the parents themselves are not strong in the faith, and ill-prepared to be father and mother of devout children. It is doubly hard also when there is no environment or atmosphere of the faith inside the walls of the home to reinforce the parental care.

This atmosphere of faith in which mother and father and children develop spiritually does not mean that the home has to be a religious picture gallery, or a monastery with a round of pious exercises all

day long. This atmosphere of faith doesn't mean a crucifix on the parlor wall, or grace at meals, or votive lamps blinking before an image of Christ or the Virgin Mary; it doesn't mean the generous use of holy water and the saying of night prayers in common . . . though it supposes some of these things.

This atmosphere of faith is part of the life of the family; it is their life; it is their sense of the presence of God; it is their charity for one another and for the stranger in their midst; it is a reverence and love for God's word welcomed as family reading; it is a turning to the crucifix or the image of Christ in hours of deep distress and in moments of unexpressible bliss; it is a deep trust in God's providence even when the pantry is bare and the family breadwinner is without work. It is all of these things and more which change a house into a little church.

Perhaps no priest of our times worked harder to make the Christian home a little church than Father Mateo Crowley-Boevy of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Wisely, Father Mateo, as he was affectionately called, went to the heart of the matter by enthroning Christ in the home by means of a simple ceremony.

In a letter addressed to Father Mateo April 27, 1915, Pope Benedict XV wrote: "Beloved Son, we have read your letter with interest and scanned the documents. They give proof of the untiring zeal with which you have devoted yourself for many years to

the work of consecrating families to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in this particular way: by placing an image of Our Lord in the most prominent place in the house as on a throne as a sign that Christ reigns visibly in these families."

The Pope, after reviewing the evils of the times which direct their heaviest attack against the home and family, continues his letter to Father Mateo: "... You do well, then, to awaken and spread, above all things, a Christian spirit in the home so that the love of Jesus Christ may permeate the families, and this love reign there as queen."

By this ceremony called the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the Family, Christ Jesus is placed as it were, on a throne as the King of Love, as the very center of domestic life, and there He exercises His benign influence: By the enthronement, Christ has become not an overnight guest, but a member of the family, forever the invisible witness of all that happens there. From His throne of honor, the Sacred Heart of Jesus extends to the tired father just returned from his shop, to the mother busy about the home, and to the babies romping underfoot, His graces and blessing.

The enthronement is more than a mere veneration of the image of the Sacred Heart; it is more even than a transient act of consecration; it is really a permanent state of devotedness and love, full of grace and joy.

The enthronement of the Sacred Heart is not an elaborate ceremony. It consists simply in the erection of a throne of love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the house, and the avowal of His sovereign rights over the family. A picture or statue of the Sacred Heart is then set up in a place of honor in the home, and before this image the family daily assembles for their prayers. Thus the house is placed under the mild and secure influence of the Divine Heart, which, in a benediction-bringing manner, asserts itself in all the joyful and sad occurrences of family life.

The father or mother of the family may read the act of consecration together with their children. All the members of the immediate family should be present. Pictures of the deceased members of the family may be placed beside the image of the Sacred Heart to indicate that, in Christ, the living and the dead are one. For the more solemn ceremony of the enthronement of the Sacred Heart the parish priest should be asked to preside. A leaflet with the prayers and rite of enthronement may be obtained from the Academy of the Sacred Hearts, Fairhaven, Massachusetts. This is the national center of the enthronement for the United States.

The consecration of the family to the Sacred Heart is especially appropriate during the month of June. But there are other ways of dedicating to God the little church that a home is. If we turn to the Roman Ritual we shall find several house blessings for var-

ious occasions of the year. For instance, there is the little-known blessing of homes on January 6, Feast of the Epiphany. After entering the house the priest prays the antiphon, canticle of the Blessed Virgin (the Magnificat) and two beautiful prayers which refer to the mystery of the feast. In conclusion this lovely prayer is said over the house: "Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this house that it become the shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May blessing remain for all time upon this dwelling and them that live herein, through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

There is the blessing of homes on Holy Saturday and during Eastertime. Since the average parish priest is especially busy on Holy Saturday, it is not likely that he will find time to visit the houses of his parishioners. If he does wish to visit the homes of his people between Easter and Trinity Sunday, he may use this significant sacramental which begins with antiphon, versicles, and the following Easter Collect:

"Hear us, Holy Lord, Father Almighty, eternal God. And as on their departure from Egypt Thou didst guard the homes of the Israelites from the avenging angel . . . so likewise send Thy holy angel from heaven to guard, cherish, protect, visit, and defend all who dwell in this house. Amen."

Then in the Roman Ritual under the heading, "Blessing of places destined for a sacred purpose," we find the blessing of homes outside of Easter time. The translator of the Roman Ritual, Father Philip Weller, has this to say concerning the sacredness of the home: "... the Christian home is a sacred place in a broader sense. It is also a place of liturgical worship, and therefore very sacred. Often it witnesses the celebration of great mysteries, the sacraments of Eucharist, last anointing, and the perfection of matrimony. In a home worthy of the name of Christian is continued the communal praise of God (family prayer) begun in the church building and continued in the home through family prayer. Here a soul falling asleep in Christ is commended to the merciful hands of its Author . . . and to the Christian dwelling the Church reaches out with her consecratory hand and dispenses the sacramentals." (Roman Ritual . . . The Blessings, Vol. III. Translation by Rev. Philip Weller. Bruce, Milwaukee.)

The prayer is very brief. After the usual greeting, "*Peace be to this home, and unto all who dwell herein,*" the priest prays the antiphon of the Asperges and this Collect: "*Hear us, O Holy Lord, Almighty Father, Eternal God, and deign to send Thy holy angel from heaven to guard, cherish, protect and defend all who dwell in this house. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.*"

For the apartment-dweller, or the humble renter of

a single room second floor back, there is this consoling benediction which may, in the absence of the priest, be used by the lay person: "*Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this room (or apartment) that it be the shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May blessing remain for all time on this place and them that live here. Amen.*" After all these blessings the place is usually sprinkled with holy water.

· There may be some who feel that all has been done that is needful to make a home blessed and holy if the priest blessed the house, or if the ceremony of enthronement to the Sacred Heart takes place; but the family must remember that there is no magic in the rite of a house blessing or an act of consecration. A simple blessing cannot transform a worldly house or apartment into a little church where God dwells. It is nothing if a parlor or kitchen are sprinkled with holy water, and votive lights glow before the image of Our Lord. . . . It is nothing at all unless the ones who live and work and play in these places sing God's praises by a Christian life.

6. *Eat, Drink, and Be Saints*

A man is no less a Catholic at meals than at Mass, for eating and drinking are also a way of going to God.

PROBABLY the last part of a convert to enter the Catholic Church is his stomach.

Long after he has renounced heresy and confessed to believe in everything in the Creed from "in unum Deum" to "vitam venturi saeculi," he still hasn't a Catholic stomach. It lags behind like a school boy reluctant to enter into the discipline. It's still Methodist, or Baptist or pagan—for it rebels at getting up on a frosty morning and going to Holy Communion without the warming aid of a cup of coffee.

Every woman recognizes that there is a "romantic" route from the stomach to the heart of a man. There is also a direct route between the heart and the Catholic stomach, but it's the heart which is the gateway to the stomach and not vice versa. The praise of God's goodness springs from the heart, and it is

This Chapter was written by Frances King.

through the heart the Catholic comes to understand the practice Holy Mother the Church's attitude toward food and drink—both in the joyful, wholesome use of it and in the penitential abstinence from it.

People can never ignore the flesh to the advantage of the spirit any more than they can ignore the spirit to the advantage of the flesh, because man is a composite of spirit and flesh. Man is a microcosm—a little universe in himself—made of minerals like salt deposits, gall stones and calcified tubercles, as well as vegetable growth like hair, and animal life like sex and hunger.

The ancient Manicheans taught that matter and flesh were evil in themselves and that only the spirit was good. But this oversimplification could never lead to true holiness because it ignores the kind of thing a man is—a composite of spirit and flesh.

The modern materialists, on the other hand, believe that only the flesh is true and lasting joy is to be found in food, sex and sleep. So we read hundreds of pages of advertising copy dealing with Mix-masters, Mojud nylons and Beauty-rest mattresses. Headlines with their description of lust and crime scream at us. The materialist ignores the greatest life within man—the immortal spirit which makes him a little less than the angels.

The Catholic Church's attitude toward worldly things is realistic. She knows that men have to live

in a world that is material on all sides and spiritual within, so she reaches out and sacramentalizes matter with the sign of the cross. Her attitude toward sex is to sacramentalize it by marriage. Her attitude toward food is to revive within the home the notion of the quasi-sacramental nature of eating and drinking. For a Catholic is no less a Catholic at meals than at Mass, and perhaps he reveals the real depth of his understanding of the Catholic faith more readily by his attitude toward food and drink than he does by a perfunctory attendance at Mass.

Before the Reformation the silence, reverence and good manners, which today are reserved only for monastic refectories and very few homes, were observed by all Christian households. It was only in the wake of the Reformation that reading of Scripture at the family table was abandoned. Without God's word being read during meals, the family table has become no more than a corner hamburger joint where a certain group dashes to eat just because they live in that vicinity.

Only in the aftermath of the Reformation could such a movement as Prohibition have been successful. Instead of condemning food or drink or anything in itself as evil, Mother Church instructs Her children that all things are good when used for the honor and glory of God. She prays over them—from beer to lard—that they may be used for God's glory and man's benefit. Her warning to Her children is to

guard their own evil tendencies which prompt the misuse of God's gifts.

It might shock some to learn that the Catholic Church has a special blessing for beer. Mother Church teaches that temperance, moderation and charity in the use of it are more highly esteemed than the complete abstinence from it—much less the total condemnation of it. If there be anything wrong with the drinking of beer, it is that too few approach it with the attitude of the Church's blessing. Most people who drink beer drink to satisfy stomach and passions. They don't drink it to praise God Who created its ingredients.

The prayer used in blessing beer attributes power to God and asks God to make beer a help to man:

"Bless, O Lord, this created thing, beer, which by Thy power has been produced from kernels of grain. May it be a healthful beverage to mankind, and grant that through the invoking of Thy holy name all who drink thereof may find it a help in body and protection in soul, through Christ Our Lord."

It may seem inconsistent to some that the same Church which bestows blessings so generously on so many foods—bread, cake, beer, wine, lard, fowl, meat, cheese, butter, oil, grapes, eggs, new produce and any victual—would at times advocate the abstinence from it. Not because She regards food and drink as evil does She regulate their use, but because She knows

abstinence is beneficial to the soul. She requires Her children to abstain from meat on Fridays and to fast during Lent because love is love only when there is sacrifice, and sacrifice is real only when the sacrificed is esteemed. Her true children willingly abstain and fast from good things for their love of God and to strengthen their wills against intemperance and excesses.

Food and drink are to nourish the human body just as the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist nourish the soul. Through a mystery beyond our understanding, the identity of Christ is lost, or hidden, in Holy Communion. Through a plan, likewise of God, food is taken into the human body and not only loses its identity but actually becomes a part of the living temple of God which a man is.

By choosing daily bread as the means of giving Himself to us, Our Lord has dignified physical refection. Because of this we should approach our meals with reverence and praise. The official table prayers of the Church show the principal purpose of prayer—the praise and worship of God.

Modern life may make the reading of Scripture at table impractical, but our meals can still be sanctified by the practice of saying grace.

Several versicles praising God precede the Our Father. Then follows the familiar: "*Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive*

from Thy bounty, through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Then a young member of the family addresses the father, "Pray, sir, a blessing," and the father replies: "May the King of eternal glory bring us to share in the heavenly table." This is the blessing for the noon meal.

At night the father's blessing is this: "May the King of eternal glory lead us to the table of eternal life." The others respond, "Amen."

The short form, using only "Bless us, O Lord," is approved by the Church but does not convey the Catholic family spirit well, nor does it allow for the expression of the Church's moods as do the versicles which change with the feasts and liturgical seasons.

It is inconsistent to thank God for what He has put upon our tables and then murmur about it. It is part of acquiring a "Catholic stomach" to accept the food that is placed upon the family table. St. Benedict was careful to caution about murmuring in his Holy Rule. "Above all, let not the evil of murmuring appear for any reason whatsoever in the least word or sign." Murmuring makes everyone else dissatisfied.

After the meal, the family rises together and the father says: "We give Thee thanks for all Thy benefits, O Almighty God, Who livest and reignest forever, and may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen."

As the family meal prayers change with the seasons, so the Church has different blessings for such

foods as lambs, bread, eggs and wine at special seasons. On Easter Sunday there are special blessings for the paschal lamb, bread, meat, eggs, and eatables in general. On the feast of St. John the Evangelist the Church blesses wine.

The blessing of the lamb points to Christ: "O God, Who didst command Thy people Israel . . . to kill a lamb, as a type of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . vouchsafe . . . to bless and to sanctify this meat which we Thy servants are about to eat."

Although the Church has many different blessings for bread, varying with the feast and the season, the ordinary blessing is commemorative of the Holy Eucharist:

"O Lord, Jesus Christ, bread of angels, living bread unto life eternal, bless this bread as Thou didst bless the five loaves in the wilderness that all who eat it with reverence may through it attain the corporal and spiritual health they desire, Who livest and reignest eternally. Amen."

It is through God's love that plants come to the full fruit of harvest. It is through His plan that they become the material for the temples of the Holy Spirit which men's bodies are. It is only with the deepening of faith that the Christian sees the provident hand of the Divine Nourisher in all life and sings in his heart with the Psalmist:

"The river of God is filled with water: Thou givest them food, for Thou providest for its growth;

"Fill up the furrows, multiply the seeds; the gentle rainfalls gladden the crops;

"Thou crownest the year with Thy blessing, and Thy fields overflow with plenty.

"The barren meadows grow rich, and the hills gird themselves with joy.

"The pastures are clothed with sheep, and the valleys abound with corn; all rejoice, yea, sing a hymn of praise."

7. *The Farmer's Sacramentals*

A terrible divorce has taken place between altar and home, between man's worship of God at the altar and man's service in everyday life. The use of the Sacramentals can end this separation.

IF OUR HOLY MOTHER the Church seems to multiply her blessings over the farm home, and have few left for the city apartment, it is not because she is partial to her children in the country and forgetful of city children, but because she is a realist—like every woman. She knows that from the farm homes comes the world's food supply. That is why she has composed so many sacramental blessings for the farmer. That is why she has instituted the rogation days, the three days before the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord.

But these rogation prayers and the sacramental blessings for the farmer are not for the exclusive welfare of the country people; such blessings are for the welfare of all the members of Christ's Body on earth

—for those who live in little towns and big towns—
for the rosy cheeked country urchin who has the wide
open fields for a playground, and for the pale little
girls whose backyard is closed in by smokestacks and
ugly unpainted buildings—for the farmer plowing
his field in the bright sun, and for the subway guard
who seldom sees the light of day. For all members of
Our Lord's Body are dependent on one another.

If the farmer is blessed with a good harvest, the city
dweller has plenty of good food; if the city dweller
makes a living wage, he can buy the farmer's food. It
is this universal dependence of the members of
Christ's Body on one another that makes the blessing
of the farmer a blessing also for the dwellers in the
city apartments. It is faith that traces the origin of
good food beyond the corner grocery store to the
wholesale dealer to the shipper—beyond the shipper
to the farmers whose job it is to produce food, and
beyond the farmer to God the Creator Who gives the
increase to the harvest. So it is fitting for the man
or woman in the city cathedral as well as the farmer
in the little rural church to pray together on rogation
days: *"That Thou wouldst please to give and pre-
serve the fruits of the earth . . . we beseech Thee hear
us."*

The litany of the Saints and the psalms sung during
procession on rogation days are supplications—hence
the word, rogation (from the word *rogare* which
means to ask). During this season the faithful ask

God to protect them from danger and disaster, and to bless especially the harvest so that the whole of Christ's Body may be fed.

The rogation days are also called the days of the minor litanies, because according to the rubric of the ritual, it is customary for the pastor and his flock to go in procession through the fields of the parish chanting the litany of the Saints and other prayers. There is another solemn procession through the fields on the 25th of April which is called the major litanies. This also happens to be St. Mark's day, but there is no connection between the Evangelist's feast and the procession.

Because most of our modern parishes are in the city and small town, and have no fields through which to march, the rogation day procession usually takes place on the parish property, or even inside the parish church itself; here at St. Meinrad's the student-body together with the people of the parish march in solemn procession to the chapel of Our Lady of Monte Cassino a mile through the village and across the valley, chanting the litany of the Saints. There the Mass of rogation is offered by the priest in charge of the abbey farm.

The celebration of the minor and major litanies are only four days during the year when the Church solemnly asks blessings upon the harvest, but besides the rogation day blessings there are numerous sacramentals in the Roman ritual which may be used with

spiritual profit by the faithful especially by the folks who live on the farm. Here are some of the principal blessings which the Christian farmer may use.

Blessing of a farm

Blessing of a spring or well

Blessing of a stable

Blessing of draft animals

Blessing of domestic animals

Blessing of cattle and herds

Blessing of a granary

Blessing of young crops

Blessing of sick animals

Blessing of bees

Blessing of sheep

Blessing of new seed

Blessing of oats

Blessing of feed for animals

Blessing of fields

Blessing of swine

Blessing of goats

Blessing of orchards

Blessing of vineyards

Blessing of the stored harvest

The blessings of the Church are inexhaustible. Realizing that in our daily work we often forget that the milking of cows, the pruning of the fruit trees and the threshing of the grain is the indirect worship of God—the Church sacramentalizes even the humble pig and the tiny bee. Sometimes the most beautiful

poetry is contained in the simplest prayer or blessing. We have selected only a few of the farmer's sacramentals that our readers may see for themselves the riches of that precious book, *The Roman Ritual*.

Blessing Of A Farm

This prayer may be used to ask God's blessing on the entire farm together with its buildings and lands, or it may be used for the farmhouse only.

"Bless, O Lord, Almighty God, this house (or, this farm); may health and purity, goodness and meekness, and every virtue reign here. May all those who dwell here be filled with faithfulness to Thy laws and with thanksgiving to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. May this blessing remain on this house (or, this farm) and all who dwell here. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Blessing Of A Stable

In this as in all other blessings the reader will notice how the Church always relates these common things to the mysteries of our Faith, like the birth of the Savior in a stable; in all her prayers the Church never forgets the dominant or main purpose of Christian life—the use of these temporal creatures in such a way as to lead the user to everlasting life in heaven.

"O Lord God Almighty, Who didst will that Thy only-begotten Son our Lord, be born in a stable, and lie in a manger between two animals, bless this stable,

we pray, and guard it from the spite and deceit of the devil. Make it a safe shelter for horses, cattle, and other animals. And as the ox knows his master and the ass the manger of his lord, so grant that Thy servants, who are made to Thy image and closely resemble the angels, and to whom Thou hast subjected all the sheep, and the oxen and the cattle of the pastures, be not like unto senseless beasts in whom there is no understanding. But let them acknowledge Thee alone as God and the Author of all good. May they faithfully persevere in Thy service, show Thee gratitude for favors received, and thus merit greater benefits in the future. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Blessing Of Draft Animals

The animals indirectly praise God by helping men to reach their final goal, and for that reason the Church blesses horses and other draft animals. In her prayer the Church calls on Saint Anthony the hermit (not the finder of lost things) who from early times was called the patron saint of farmers and animal breeders.

"O God, our refuge and our strength, give ear to the entreaties of the Church, Thou source of mercy, and grant that what we ask with faith, we may receive in fact.

Almighty, everlasting God, Who didst assist St. Anthony to emerge unscathed from the many tempta-

tions of this world, grant thy servants to progress in virtue by his illustrious example; and by his merits and intercession, free us from the ever-present dangers of life.

Let these animals receive Thy blessing, O Lord, to the benefit of their being, and by the intercession of St. Anthony, deliver them from all harm. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

The Blessing Of Bees

In her blessing of the bees Holy Mother Church thinks not so much of the food of honey as she does of the precious wax out of which are made the candles for Mass. Reading this prayer we see with the eyes of the Church how the tiny bees also glorify God by their industry.

"O Lord God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth! Thou didst create all living things for man's use. Moreover, Thou didst order by the ministry of Thy Church that candles made from the industry of bees shall burn during the Sacred Mystery in which we consecrate and consume the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son. Send Thy holy blessing upon these bees and this beehive to make them numerous and productive, and to preserve them from harm, so that their yield of wax can be turned to Thy honor, and to the honor of Thy Son and Holy Spirit, and to the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Blessing Of Seed

"We fervently entreat Thee, O Lord, to bless these seeds, preserve and foster them with gentle breezes, fertilize them with heavenly dew, and deign to bring them to a full harvest for the use of body and soul. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Blessing Of Young Crops

"We appeal to Thy graciousness, O Almighty God, that Thou wouldst shower Thy blessings upon these first fruits of creation, which Thou has nurtured with favorable weather, and mayest bring them to a fine harvest. Grant also to Thy people a sense of constant gratitude for Thy gifts, so that the hungry may find rich nourishment in the fruits of the earth, and the needy and the poor may praise Thy wondrous name. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Blessing Of A Granary

So concerned is the Church for the farmer's welfare that even after he has his harvest of grain under roof the Church does not forget him. The harvested grain and the stored fruit need God's blessing.

"O Lord, Almighty God, Who dost not desist from pouring out upon men a superabundance of heavenly dew and the substance of the earth's richness, we render thanksgiving to Thy most loving Majesty for all Thy gifts. We continue to beseech Thy clemency, that

Thou wouldst deign to bless, preserve, and defend from every injury this harvest. Grant, likewise, that having had our desire for earthly needs filled, we may bask under Thy protection, praise Thy goodness and mercy without ceasing, and make use of temporal goods in such a way as not to lose eternal goods."

These are only a few of the blessings which the Church uses for the welfare of the farmer. Her ritual is filled with sacramental blessings for houses and fields, for barns and shops, for animals and tools and engines, and for almost everything that men use to make their living on earth. To every country pastor and farm family we recommend two books which contain in English the sacramental prayers and rites by which we beg God's blessing on the rural home and farm. The first booklet is called *With The Blessing of the Church* by Bishop Joseph Schlarman of Peoria. It is published by The National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 8301 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa. The larger book which we have quoted from is a fine translation of *The Roman Ritual—The Blessings*, published by Bruce Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The translation was made by Reverend Phillip Weller. This last book should be in the library of every rural pastor.

8. *The Sacramental of the Traveler*

A Saint Christopher medal is no rabbit's foot to be carried about for good luck—a newly blessed convertible can still be a death-trap for a careless driver.

**People who live to be ninety
seldom see it on the speedometer.**

OVER the wide world no people travel so much or as far as Americans. They are not gypsies, and they do love their homes, but the hum of motor-cars, the toot of Diesel-powered trains and the roar of airliners is in their blood. They love to go places in a hurry. It may be only to the corner drugstore, to church, or to the local super-market; or it may be to Quebec, Yellowstone Park, or even the eternal city of Rome.

It is not surprising that a nation of travelers should love the tourists' favorite saint, Christopher, patron of pilgrims. Nor is it surprising that they should carry on their persons, or attach to the dashboard of

their cars, that most popular of the traveler's sacramentals—a St. Christopher medal. How true is the fact pointed out by Courtenay Savage in his life of St. Christopher, *Wayfarer's Friend*: "There are countless men and women today whose sole contact with the spiritual world is a small medal cast in honor of the Christ-bearer."

If Saint Christopher were to receive fan mail in heaven his Hooper rating would probably be higher than any of the Saints, not because he is the greatest in the kingdom of God, but because he is the most popular; his story has fired the imagination of millions ever since his martyrdom under the cruel emperor Decius seventeen centuries ago.

But his admirers know little about their champion. Fact and legend have become hopelessly entangled in St. Christopher's life; it must never be forgotten, however, that he was a real man. About that, history has no doubt. The Church accepts the evidence that he lived and died. It is generally accepted that he was born in Canaan early in the third century and that he was the son of a small tribal king; that he bore the name Christopher and died a martyr to the Christian faith in Lycia. In the Roman martyrology or book of martyrs, St. Christopher has an honored place, his feast being July 25. In the Greek and Oriental churches he is feted on May 9.

It is true that the adventure of St. Christopher as the ferryman carrying the Christ Child across the

river, is better loved and remembered than the real events of his life, but the Church has accepted the incident as an allegory conveying a useful truth to Christians. The tempestous crossing of the stream, and Christopher's staggering under the crushing weight of a small Child, historians suggest, is intended to denote the trials and sufferings of any soul who accepts the yoke of Christ. Our saint's very name is forever linked with this episode, for the name Christopher means Christ-bearer.

Historians can furnish no accurate dates about St. Christopher's life and death; antiquarians have unearthed no quotations of his doctrine; there is only the fact that he lived. That and the *Golden Legend*. Yet, the cult of St. Christopher has grown with each century until today countless millions are asking the friend of tourists and travelers to help them safely on their way through a bewildering age that needs his spiritual and physical stamina.

St. Christopher is the patron of all travelers—of the humble pedestrian who artfully dodges death at street crossings, of the hiker who travels across hill and dale, of the passenger in the swank cabin of an ocean liner, or the pilot who steers his jet-propelled plane into the stratosphere; but perhaps he is more used to the humble automobile—for almost every American either owns one or rides in one.

There is no magic in a St. Christopher medal. It is not a rabbit's foot or fetish to be carried about for

good luck. It will not help the reckless driver to beat a train to the crossing, or to pass a truck on a hill. It is true that many persons half-superstitiously regard the medal as a charm which frees them from responsibility behind the wheel of a car.

An excellent warning regarding the responsibility of St. Christopher was included in a note which a priest sent to the chauffeur of a Hollywood star. He wrote, "Here is the medal you requested. It is blessed, but you must remember that when you're going forty miles an hour, St. Christopher rides comfortably beside you. When the speedometer passes fifty he begins to get worried, but when you press the accelerator to the floor and the car is doing over seventy, he jumps out of the car and you're on your own."

One who expects the habitual protection of St. Christopher on the highways and airways should do more than fasten a medal on the dashboard or instrument panel; next to the use of caution and self-restraint, the traveler should practice some daily devotion to St. Christopher and hold him in deepest reverence. He is good to his friends.

Besides the St. Christopher medal, there are other sacramental blessings for the traveler. There is the rather well-known blessing of automobiles from the Roman Ritual. This adaptable rite may be used for anything on wheels, from a one-horse shay to an Oldsmobile Rocket, so long as it is a vehicle.

In fact, the prayer itself alludes to one of the oldest means of transportation for people of means—an ox-drawn chariot of an Ethiopian courtier. In this prayer there is an allusion to the charming episode related in the *Acts of the Apostles*, (8, 26-40), in which the apostle Philip hitches a ride from the Ethiopian eunuch, who was a courtier of Queen Candace, and gives his first instruction before baptism.

BLESSING OF AN AUTOMOBILE

Standing beside the car, the priest garbed with the white stole, and provided with holy water, says the following prayer:

"Graciously hearken to our prayers, O Lord God, and with Thy right hand bless this vehicle. Appoint as its custodians Thy holy angels, ever to guard and keep from all danger them that ride herein. And as by Thy Levite, Philip, Thou didst bestow faith and grace upon the Ethiopian, seated in his chariot and reading Holy Writ, so likewise show the way of salvation to Thy servants that strengthened by Thy grace and constantly intent upon good works, they may attain, after the trials and experiences of this life the happiness of heaven. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen."

The family car may be blessed at the same time the priest visits and blesses the home; in large parishes, however, some pastors have introduced the

blessing of many automobiles at the same time on the Saturday or Sunday closest to July 25, St. Christopher's feast day. After an instruction on the subject during the Sunday Mass, the parish priest proceeds to the parking lot and blesses all of the cars with one prayer, sprinkling as many machines as he can with the holy water.

The automobile, which is so often a lethal instrument in the hands of a careless driver or an occasion of sin for unscrupulous people, becomes by the priestly blessing a streamlined sacramental—a grace-conveying instrument of supernatural life for the devout Christian. A purely secular machine is transformed by the rite of the Church and the Sign of the Cross into something blessed and holy.

Holy Mother Church, always intent to touch and sanctify the secular things which form part of our environment on earth has included, in her Ritual, blessings for other means of transportation besides the automobile. There is the blessing of a railroad and train (including the roadbed and all the rolling stock), and the blessing of streetcars and subway trains. In fact, there is a solemn blessing of a railroad and its cars which is reserved to the bishop of the diocese or his delegate.

If we add to these the blessing for an airplane—anything from a tiny cub to a stratoliner—and include a blessing of tools used in scaling mountains, we begin to understand how modern our Holy

Mother the Church is—and how interested even in our recreations.

Pope Pius XI, who as Father Achille Ratti, broke a few records as a famous mountain climber, must have used the following prayer before scaling the mountains of the Alps. As a matter of fact, the Ritual has this legend alongside the blessing of mountain-scaling tools: "Approved by Pope Pius XI on October 14, 1931."

BLESSING OF MOUNTAIN TOOLS

"Bless, O Lord, we pray, these ropes, staves, mattocks, and these other tools, that all who use them in scaling the mountain heights and precipices, in ice and snow and tempest, may be preserved from all danger and catastrophe, safely reach the summits and return unscathed to their homes. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Not forgetting the men who go down to the sea in ships, the Church reaches into her inexhaustible treasury and brings forth the blessing of a ship. Mindful of God's care over Noe's ark in the flood, and Christ's protection of Peter when he walked on the sea, the devout sailor asks God to watch over the vessel and the crew and bring them safely home after a successful voyage.

It is a mark of special preference for fishermen on the part of Holy Mother Church that she approved on April 10, 1912, a solemn blessing of a fishing boat.

This rather long and elaborate blessing consists of Psalm 8, a portion of the Gospel according to St. John (21, 1-14), which relates the miraculous draught of fishes, and three prayers. We quote only one of these prayers, the one which asks for a big haul of fish:

BLESSING OF FISHING BOATS

"O Lord, our Savior, we implore Thee—bless the labors of Thy servants, as Thou didst bless thine apostles with the words: 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find.' So that gladdened with the opulence of Thy blessing, we may praise Thee, our Redeemer, for all eternity. Amen."

Of special interest is the blessing of pilgrims—composed by the Church for the faithful who are about to start out for the holy places.

This very ancient blessing goes back to the days when a pilgrimage to Rome or to the Holy Land took months or years. Pilgrims had to set in order their affairs, make their wills, and having prepared themselves with sacramental confession they would attend Mass—usually the Votive Mass for Pilgrims—and, having received Holy Communion, they presented themselves to their pastor to receive this blessing. If many pilgrims were to leave in a group the blessing was invoked upon all. In the prayer, God is asked to guide them safely to their goal as He directed the Magi of old by the light of a star, and to bring them all finally to the haven of eternal security.

9. Praise The Lord, Ye Blast Furnaces

Christ made labor holy by toiling with his hands—the Christian worker in a machine shop or a coal mine can worship God with a monkey wrench or a pick ax.

IT IS NOT necessarily true that every Christian who works at a blast furnace will praise God—but it should be true. For it is obvious that if the Church has arranged that man can attain his aim of union with God through any created thing then she has not excepted the blast furnace.

Our age is generally called "The Mechanical Age," or "The Industrial Age." It is considered an era of button-pushing and lever pulling, of iron horses and giant wheels, of airplanes and dynamos. And if it is such an age, then the Church of Christ must have

This chapter was written by Rev. Joseph Miller.

prepared for those who were to be saved by living in it. She must have sacramentals that are specifically aimed at making the smelter and the miner and the stenographer and the clerk more closely united to God. If she has blessings for the fisherman and his fleet, for the shepherd and his flock, for the gardener and his shrubs, for the farmer and his crops, then she would be less than fair as a mother if she neglected the laborer and his tools or the post-office clerk and his cancelling machine.

Not being an unjust mother, the Church has not neglected her children who sit at desks or who stoke furnaces. She has arranged certain sacramentals which will be to her laboring children what the Blessing of the Ring is to those who are giving themselves to one another in Matrimony. She has remembered that it is no less necessary for a sacramental ideal to touch those who labor in an office or over a riveting machine than it is for such a blessing to follow a mother with her new-born babe, a parent blessing his child, a farmer going out to the harvest, a sick man seeking health, or a young girl entering a new life with a new partner. And remembering this, she has seen fit to institute blessings whereby all those things by which the ordinary laboring man must earn his temporal welfare may become also instruments with which he can seek his eternal good.

Catholics in general are familiar with the Blessings by which the Church sacramentalizes the lives of her

children on the farm, on the sea, in all forms of life and work which are close to the soil or to nature; they know that there are blessings for bee-keepers and for vine-growers, for springs and wells, for herbs and flowers; they know that in the Middle Ages the Church took special care that the influence of God should be made to extend to all men as they plowed and harrowed. But most Catholics do not realize that as the civilization of men moved from rural to urban areas, the Church developed her sacramentals and blessings so that these might move with that civilization, that men of our time might be saved through typewriters and dynamos, through subways and skyscrapers as were the men of 950 saved through pruning knives and hand plows, through ox-carts and workshops.

It has always been the mind of the Church to unify the daily life of men and women with the daily life of Christ on earth, and so to enable men and women to realize more completely their place in the Communion of the Faithful with Christ. She has done this by moving with the ages, by making herself all things to all men at all times. She has recognized the natural integrity of Christian life, its singularity of purpose which is God, and she has endeavored successfully to adapt her ritual so that any life may be associated with that singularity of purpose more clearly through her sacramentals.

This is the reason, then, why the Roman Ritual

contains such evidently recent blessings as those for airplanes, automobiles, electric dynamos, printing-presses, and fire engines; because all these objects are daily placed before men and can be used by men for sanctification. Every Christian uses these auxiliary sacraments to bring himself more near to God. This we can never forget, that as matter is sanctified to God in the seven sacraments, so is it sanctified on a lesser scale in the myriad sacramentals that are found in the ritual. And this being the case, we are more than justified in speaking of the little sacraments.

An example of the intention of the Church is given in the Blessing of a Blast Furnace, as found in the Ritual. Here, surrounding an ordinary object are found brief ceremonies and a prayer which will so affect the otherwise unattractive furnace that it becomes actually an agent whereby God's glory and man's welfare are more effectively sought. The priest draws near to the furnace, blesses it, and sprinkles it with holy water, in the form of a cross, praying this beautiful prayer:

BLESSING OF A BLAST FURNACE

LET US PRAY

"O almighty and everlasting God! From thee all creatures have their origin, and by thy goodness thou hast wonderfully disposed them for the service of mankind. In olden times thou didst mitigate the heat of the flames to preserve the three youths in the fiery

furnace, and then didst again enkindle them to destroy the men who had cast the saintly youths therein. Wherefore we humbly beseech thee to bless this furnace. Preserve it from diabolical treachery, and render it productive and true to its purpose, so that by its fires exerting the force of their strength, the workmen may by thy bounty receive a good quality of metal. And give them, moreover, an increase of thy saving grace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

This prayer, in a few short lines, epitomizes the aim of the Church in all her sacramental blessings. She wishes first of all to point out that God has a direct and real relationship with the object; it is for this reason that she points out His power both as Creator, and as having directly used such a furnace to further His plans before. Next she wishes to ask that He grant the temporal results intended; here she prays for a good quality of metal. And finally, in the most important position, she places her primary aim: to gain for those who will use it an increase of grace through it.

It must be noted that in her blessings, the Church avoids any reference to the idea that no harm can befall the blessed object. Almost a superstition among many pious persons, the idea is, of course, completely false. Thus, there is no reason to maintain that because the blast furnace has been blessed, therefore no one can be injured by any accident in

connection with it. The purpose of the blessing is to gain for those who use the furnace properly the grace of God; it is not to protect the careless from the inevitable result of their negligence. Indeed, we cannot even say that it is to preserve the furnace from completely unexpected harm—it is merely to ask God that all possible blessings result from it. It says, in effect, "Let this furnace carry out Thy will perfectly, even though we cannot see how Thy will is carried out."

One of the most beautiful of the sacramentals of the mechanical age is the Solemn Blessing of an airplane, so designed that its references and implications are unforgettable. In this blessing, the priest draws near to the airplane, reciting certain verses and responses which especially refer to the great glory of God, His power over the winds, and His rule of the Heavens. These verses are followed by three prayers so beautiful that we must quote them in their entirety here:

LET US PRAY

"O God, who didst create all things for thyself, and hast destined every element in the world for man's service, bless, we beseech thee, this airplane. Let it serve in spreading thy praise and glory, and in carrying out the affairs of men, unhindered by danger or peril. And may it foster in the souls of all who ride in it a longing for heavenly things. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

LET US PRAY

"O God, who did consecrate by the mystery of the Incarnation the dwelling of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and has miraculously transferred it to the bosom of thy Church, pour forth, we beseech thee, thy blessing upon this airplane. May all who fly in this airplane under the protection of the Blessed Virgin happily reach their destination. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen."

LET US PRAY

"O God, the Saviour of all who trust in thee, appoint a good angel as a guardian to all thy servants making an airplane voyage and calling for thy help. Let him protect them along the journey and safely conduct them to their goal. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

Here, again, we see that the Church neglects nothing that may lead her children to think more seriously of God and to endeavor to draw closer to Him. It is her primary and unchanging theme that whatever is made for man's use toward his natural purpose can be turned, through her intercession, to his supernatural purpose. Thus she seeks to remind him that even while he is using this machine to carry out his temporal purpose, he should be reminded of his eternal goal.

And so the Church goes on with her blessings, trying to convince those of us who will listen that there is no disgrace connected with laboring amid

dirt and metal, no shame connected with a shovel. In blessing a mill, indeed, she reminds us that it was God Himself who said, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou earn thy bread," and she wishes us always to remember the dignity of work. She tries to convince us, by the very freedom with which she distributes her smiles upon the instruments we use, that she does not intend to disown us as her children, because we have followed the civilization of our age into the cities. And she pleads with us that we will accept what she gives us, the chance to see our daily lives elevated to a supernatural level, even at those moments when they might seem most natural.

To show the number of things for which the Church has specific blessings in the Ritual, we may take a sample selection. There are, among others, blessings for airplanes, ambulances, and automobiles; blast-furnaces and brick-kilns; trains and typewriters. When paging through, we come across the blessing of a fire-engine, the blessing of mills, and the blessing of telegraph instruments. And these are but a few from the many. None have been omitted by the Church—for all those which do not have specific blessings attached to themselves, can be blessed with the single "Blessing for other irrational creatures"—surely a broad enough term to include whatever might be needed.

The final estimation of the value of these sacramental blessings to us can best be shown by quoting

the closing paragraph of Father Philip Weller's introduction to *THE ROMAN RITUAL IN LATIN AND ENGLISH, volume III (Bruce)*.

"Above all in the Eucharist does matter become sacramentalized. Just as the sacraments are radiations of being from the Eucharist as their center, so also the sacramentals can be said to form an outer circle around the sacraments, all of them converging toward the Eucharist as their center. Eucharistic worship is the consecration of all time and all matter. A Christian's every and entire day is sanctified by it. "Go into the world and be light bearers," is the meaning of the dismissal at the end of the Sacrifice. "Strengthen, O God, that which thou hast wrought in us in the midst of thy holy temple which is in Jerusalem" (Ps. 67:29). What is begun in the morning sacrifice and banquet must be developed by the day's routine of sanctified acts. The Eucharist is the sacramental sanctification of a Christian's every day in this valley of tears, in fact of his entire life span. As he leaves the Eucharistic altar and banquet-table of the new Jerusalem, the Christian goes out, oftentimes into the atmosphere of a veritable Babylon. Fortified with Christ's kiss of peace, he launches the attack against Satan, using the auxiliary weapons which the Church, the worthy Spouse of Christ and our holy Mother, dispenses with lavish hand to her children. May the little sacraments treated of in this volume become powerful allies to the Holy Seven, to hasten

our sacramental sanctification into the full stature of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!"

Realizing, then what the Church has done for us in elevating our daily work to the level of His Life, we would be less than wise were we to neglect the opportunity to carry our participation from the altar table to the workshop bench, to the iron-foundry, to the post-office, to the factory, to the desk, to the typewriter.

10. *Saints Around Our Deathbed*

There is nothing morbid about the death of a good Christian for he hears the roll-call of the Saints who wait to welcome him into Eternal Life.

THE RITUAL of the Church, never a random thing, is especially pointed as it resounds in the ears of those who stand around a death-bed. The Litany of the Saints, like some tremendous roll-call of those especially blessed by God, salutes those already gone to Him in behalf of the sufferer as well as those who watch him suffer. The man who has heard this Litany never forgets its power. Always the memory will be with him that one before him saluted these Saints, and that he can do no better than to salute them in his turn.

This chapter was written by Rev. Joseph Miller.

Yet who are the Saints invoked here? Most of us would be hard put indeed if we were called upon to identify the Patrons of the Dying, yet each of us will some day need the help of each of those Patrons. Naturally we know that Mary, Our Mother, who was preserved from corruption after death, is going to be at our side when the moment arrives. After all, we reason, she who watched our Brother, her First Born, as He died in agony, will not hesitate to shelter her other children when they need her. Remembering her great love for us, we automatically call upon her first. To her, the first salute.

Amazingly enough, to those unfamiliar with the thought of the Church, the name which immediately follows that of our Mother is not that of St. Joseph. Saint Abel, pray for him! This is the next plea to meet our ears. Abel is invoked as a Saint though he lived before the time of Christ, because we know that all the Just of the Old Law are in Heaven, the elect of God. The Book of Genesis tells us that "the Lord had regard to Abel and his offerings," which is to say that Abel lived as God wished him to live, offering himself with every sacrifice. Besides this, we know that Abel was the first of this human family to undergo death, the leader among the children who received the punishment destined for all. Therefore do we salute the first among us by crying out to him, "St. Abel, pray for our dying brother."

All we know about the death of Abraham, the next

to come before us as the panorama passes, is that "Abraham's life span was one hundred and seventy-five years when he expired. He died at a good old age, an old man, after a full life, and was gathered to his kinsmen. His sons Isaac and Ismael buried him in the cave of Machphela, facing Mamre, in the field of Ephron the Hethite, the son of Sohar. Abraham was buried with his wife Sara in the field which he had bought from the Hethites" (Genesis 25, 7-10). Knowing this, we know that his death was as exemplary as his life, and that he, the Father of the Chosen people, will not neglect their descendants who must follow him. And for this reason we, who are about to die, salute him.

After Abraham, we move to John the Baptist. Because he was the last martyr of the Old Testament, first martyr of the New Testament, we may not pass his name without the bowed head of respectful honor. Unlike Abraham, his death was not one of peace, in the company of those who loved him; and because many of us will be forced to die in like circumstances, unafraid, alone, defending the law of God, we beg his help also. Because his words brought death to him, we, who may find ourselves in his position some day, salute him.

Only now do we come to the name with which all are familiar. St. Joseph takes his place in the procession that passes, and the deepest homage of all is paid to him who was so privileged as to die in the

arms of his Foster-Child, blessed by the presence of Him who gives life as well as takes it from us. As first Patron of a happy death, St. Joseph is especially willing to help those of us who are about to die.

After begging notice from Joseph we next fly to the care of the Apostles. By name we call upon Peter, Paul, Andrew, and John, seeking assistance. First Peter, of whose impetuous nature, bluntness, strength, weakness, and bravado we have heard so much. Strangely enough, despite all that we have heard about him, we know little of why he should be invoked as a patron of the dying. Yet the most intriguing thing about Peter is really the courage with which he begged to be crucified head downward, since he felt unworthy to die in the same position as his Divine Master. And Paul—conquering death again and again—survived the bite of poisonous snakes, saved a boat from capsizing with all on board, fled death until his time should come, then willingly sought it as his due. Like his brother, Simon Peter, Andrew was crucified. And, like Peter, Andrew is invoked that we may learn to imitate his heroism.

But why, it may be asked, call on John. He is, after all, the only Apostle who died a natural death. In itself, this is the explanation. Since so few of us will die as martyrs, we must have an ideal to follow in our natural death—and who is more suited to be our helper than John, the Beloved?

So the list goes on. We remember that "*A voice*

was heard in Rama, weeping and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be comforted because they are no more." And remembering this, we ask the Holy Innocents who were so quickly snatched from this life if they will not aid us who are about to die. St. Stephen, too, comes to our mind. It was he who, at the moment of death, saw the "glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God," as we are told in the Acts of the Apostles; our prayer to him, then, is that when our time comes to go forth we may forgive as he forgave and may be "full of the Holy Spirit" so that we can cry out with our last breath, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit!"

Chronological exactitude brings Lawrence, the Deacon, before us next. Remembering the joyful "Turn me over, I'm done on this side" with which Lawrence met the horrible death of being roasted over a slow fire, we cannot help praying that our strength will be somewhat equal to his. Although the humor may not be forthcoming, we may at least pray that complaints will be absent. To this extent, we who are about to die salute Lawrence, gloriously living.

With Popes like Sylvester I and Gregory the Great, as well as all who died gloriously in Christ; with the Penitent-Bishop Augustine, whom we see shedding such bitter tears over the tomb of his mother, Monica; with Benedict, dying in the chapel and ascending to heaven by a path garlanded and ornamented for the

occasion; with Francis, adding to his Cantic of the Sun a magnificent strophe in honor of his Sister Death; with Camillus, spending his life in a labor of love for the dying, and founding an order whose very name, Fathers of a Good Death, betokens its care for the suffering; with John of God, founding the Brothers Hospitallers and spending his life in nursing at the Grand Hospital of Granada; with Mary Magdalen, privileged to witness the actual death of Him Who died for all, and first witness of the fact that He conquered death for all; with Lucy, privileged to shed blood which was to become the seed to bring forth new fruit; with all the holy men and women of God surrounding a deathbed, we know that one who is about to die can suffer no harm. The result of this knowledge is the heartfelt invocation of each of them to come now and strengthen all who are about to die.

And so we have come through the ages, summoning a representative from every class of the Just of all times. All who have gone before us receive our prayers as we stand around the bed of one who is dying. And knowing that they have heard our prayer and have joined us here, we dare to command him:

"Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the Name of God the Father who created you; in the Name of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who suffered for you; in the Name of the Holy Ghost

who is poured out upon you; in the name of the glorious and holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary; in the name of St. Joseph, the loudly praised spouse of that same Virgin; in the name of the Angels and Archangels, of the Thrones and Dominations, of the Principalities and Powers, of the Virtues, Cherubim, and Seraphim; in the name of the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists, Martyrs and Confessors, Monks and Hermits, Virgins and Widows, and of all the holy men and women of God."

Under such guardianship as this no one need be afraid to go forth. Therefore we, who are about to die, salute them all that they may be with us when we follow after them.

