



**“This
Is
My Body”**

**A Guide to the Drama
of the Mass**



By the
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DEDICATED
TO
SISTER THERESA
OF THE HOLY CHILD

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“This Is My Body”

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A platitude is a lifebuoy grabbed by a small mind when out of its depth. The conversation has been drifting deeper and deeper—one must save one's face by a sympathetic comment—a desperate sortie of all one's mental shock-troops is made and lo! the platitude! But there are some sayings of this genre which, despite their banality, are everlastingly true and sometimes bear reiterating. That “Life is a drama,” is one which cannot be denied. Yet, when the causes which give rise to this truth are investigated, we leave the realm of platitude far behind, and delve into the inner secrets of our human nature. Why is life a drama? Precisely because it embodies the four constituent elements of the drama: conflict, characters, dialogues and emotion. Conflict in life is seen in the daily fight with temptation, the incessant tug-of-war between our lower and higher natures. The characters are found in ourselves and our fellow-men in whatsoever walk of life we happen to be. Dialogue is simply a synonym for lan-

guages, and the emotions which finally motivate life's scenario are nothing else but the insistent nomads of our heart which we call love, hate, fear, joy, hope, etc., etc. Those four elements of the drama are all found in life, and it is our interest in the final unravelling of the plot which makes us love to be alive.

The Dramatic Appeal

Instances of this inherent love of drama in all stages of life could be specified galore. The fairy-tales of our children were really infantile plays, projections into the external world of the inchoate inner desires of our being. Who among us has not stood as tense spectators while the absorbing tragedy of Punch and Judy came to town? That was the theatre of our long ago. All our games, too, are dramas translated into terms of athletics, for a stadium is but the stage for an intensive conflict of character, dialogue and emotion in varying degrees. Thus the list could be extended "ad infinitum"; our examination at school, our fraternities, sororities, the competition of the business world, our daily intercourse with the world, the warfare of the soul to keep good, the signs, esoteric regalia, and theatrical ethos of secret societies—all these things express in

their own peculiar way the living fact that life itself is a drama and the most thrilling encounter in all the world.

Everyone, therefore, is irresistibly drawn to the dramatic. It is the spice of life, and in its enjoyment are satisfied the innate desires of man. But we are not only social and intellectual beings; we are fundamentally and incorrigibly religious, i. e., we must worship something whether it be ourselves, our latest hero, the sun, a Buddhist idol or the true God. And it follows from all this that if a certain religion claims to bear the hallmark of divinity, it must appeal to the dramatic side in order to satisfy the whole man. This is precisely what the Catholic Church does. It satisfies first of all the intellect: reason is its basis as all who investigate its claims soon discover, and its presentation of God's truths is the most complete mental discipline of the human mind; secondly, its sanctions for the will are the only permanent things in this impermanent world; in bodily worship it is no less satisfying, as the postures of kneeling, beating the breast, bowing the head, etc., etc., testify; and finally it gives full play to man's dramatic instinct because its pivotal act of worship, the Holy Mass, is the greatest drama in the world.

The Mass a Drama

Why do I call the Mass a drama? Recall for a moment the four elements already specified: conflict, characters, dialogue and emotion. The Holy Mass contains every one. Conflict is represented in the two things which brought it into being, i. e., God's goodness and man's wickedness. Dialogue is seen in the prayers of the priest. The characters are Christ in the Sacred Host, the priest and the people; and the emotions finally are all expressed in the sentiments of hope, mercy, contrition, jubilation, reverence, awe and love.

And why do I term it the greatest drama? The reason is not far to seek: the Mass is a re-enactment in an unbloody manner of the Sacrifice of the Cross. It had, therefore, its premiere on a hill outside Jerusalem. Its stage was the world, its characters Jesus Christ and man, its dialogue consisted in the seven last words, and its emotions found expression in the love of the sacrificial Savior accompanied by the envy and hatred of the heterogeneous mob. It is, of course, a real sacrifice as well, but for the purposes of this pamphlet, their aspect shall not be treated. These pages will be confined to a portrayal of the drama of the Mass in order to show that it is a riot

of pageantry, symbolism and pantomime, in which no word, action or posture is without meaning. Bearing all this in mind then, let us begin.

Enters the Stage

The priest enters the stage at the foot of the altar clad in symbolic vestments of varying colors which change with the feast or the season. For instance, white is used for feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady and signifies joy and purity; red vestments represent the blood shed by the martyrs; violet is penance, used in Lent, Advent and vigils of feasts; Masses for the dead, of course, are all characterized by black; and green, the symbol of hope, eternally associated with Easter Sunday, is the ordinary color for Sunday.

But these colors are only liturgical accidents to the vestments; the one essential thing of the Mass, Christianity and indeed of man's history, is embroidered on the back—the Cross.

Standing thus at the foot of the altar, the celebrant blesses himself and begins the 42nd Psalm. "Introibo ad altare Dei"—"I will go unto the altar of God." This moving psalm was, it is believed, composed by an old exile constrained to be separated from God by the waters of Babylon. It is at once a

plea for merciful judgment, release from exile, and ends in a note of unquenchable hope:

"I will go unto the altar of God
To God Who giveth joy to my
youth."

When that is finished, the responses being given by the altar boys, the priest then makes a profound bow and recites the "Confiteor," i. e., confession of sins. As mere man, of course, he is peccable, and unworthy to ascend to the altar of God, without confessing his human failings. The whole sentiment of this action is one of contrition and the posture symbolizes Christ's prostrate agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then, to represent the all too-often-forgotten fact, that the congregation are co-actors in this drama with the priest, the altar-boy repeats the "Confiteor" on their behalf.

"I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever virgin, to blessed Michael the archangel—" so the daily accusation and plea goes on, and comes to a close with the absolution of the priest.

Procession up the altar steps is the next movement. But it is not done in silence. Another plea for forgiveness of sins is voiced "sotto voce" by the celebrant as he comes closer to God's altar. Then he bows

down and kisses the altar, calling once again for pardon "by the merits of the saints whose relics are here." Let us stop for a moment to explain the latter prayer and action. In the days of the Catacombs, the martyrs' coffins were used as altars, and fragments of these very victims of the Roman persecutions are now enshrined in a small stone receptacle on every altar on which Mass is said. Indeed, it is an essential part of the equipment. When therefore the priest bows down and kisses these relics he has annihilated nineteen centuries in one sweep, established fellowship with the early Christian, and portrayed the unbroken continuity of the Catholic Church.

Prelude to the Drama

Having done this, he moves to the right of the altar, or what is called the Epistle side, from the fact that the Epistle of the Mass is read there later on, and recites the "Introit"—the entering prayer. This is the prelude to the drama. In the old days this supplication was sung on entrance into the sanctuary and took the form of a grand processional march. Note how the priest prays now with arms outstretched. That posture is the immemorial one of orisons. It should be remarked here also that every Mass has a theme, i. e., an

individual motif of joy, praise, supplication or, in the case of a Requiem Mass, of eternal rest for the departed soul, and the "Introit" strikes the key-note for all that is to follow. It is the opening chord.

The priest then returns to the center of the altar and begs God to have mercy on us all. It is the Kyrie Eleison—"Lord have mercy on us, Lord have mercy on us." This cry has been in hallowed use for 1500 years. Observe that it is in Greek; that is to remind us that originally all Masses were said in that language. Nowadays, of course, with this exception and also the recurring "Amens" which are Hebrew, Latin is used.

"Kyrie Eleison

Christe Eleison"—nine times God's mercy is called down from Heaven.

Standing in the same position, the celebrant next sounds a note of joy in the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo." This is another old Greek hymn translated into Latin, and when its opening words are intoned we are once again under the starlit dome of that first Christmas sky. The stable is there with the Babe, Mary, Joseph and the Travellers, while down at the foot of the hill, Bethlehem sleeps. Angel voices from Heaven lift the first "Gloria" to the skies. All is well with the world; for there in a manger lies

He Who made it and has now come down to share it with us, and to conquer its sorrows for our sakes. "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will"; that doxology and benediction first came from Heaven, and it goes back again from Christ's earthly home.

"Dominus vobiscum" follows. How many of us realize the full purport of those words and action? Here is again the dialogue and the pantomime fraught with meaning. The priest has just been speaking to God and imbibing His spirit, so now he turns to the congregation and imparts it to them. "Dominus vobiscum" he cries; "The Lord be with you," and suiting the action to the words, he opens and closes his hands in a diffusive gesture.

Proceeding once more to the Epistle side of the altar, he then reads the Collects. These are prayers of supplication in harmony with the theme of the Mass. Opening with the exhortation "Oremus" (Let us pray) they ask God for whatever is desired, and close with the citation of the Avenue of all blessings, i. e., "Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

The Dialogue Continues

At the same position on the altar, the Epistle is then read. This

is still part of the dialogue; and as we listen, we hear the potent rhetoric of St. Paul, the fearless, resounding perhaps from a Roman dungeon. For style and profundity of thought read these epistles. The tent-maker of Tarsus was a master of antithesis, an artist in paradox, a human sledge-hammer in force. Scorning not the subtle aids of oratory to express the faith that was in him, he has remained the Olympian in the field of sacred eloquence. Gamaliel taught him; but in the end the pupil outstripped the professor.

When the Epistle is finished, the Gradual is read. An appendix to the preceding lesson, this little anthem still continues the motif, and takes its name from the fact that it used to be said on the "gradus," i. e., the step.

Then begins one of the dramatic moments of the Mass. Up to this time, the Chief Actor has been silent; now we clear the stage as it were, for His voice to be heard from the pages of the Gospel. First of all, the celebrant goes to the center of the altar, and bowing low, asks that his lips may be cleansed with "a burning coal" in order that he worthily read God's Word. In the meantime, the Missal is changed to the Gospel side of the altar. Note the significance of this act; it represents the end

of the Old Dispensation and the transfer of allegiance to the New. Christ is coming! A momentary hush accompanies the passage across the sanctuary; then the people rise, as the priest goes over to enunciate the eternal message of the First Great Priest. More symbolism; he makes the sign of the Cross on the open page, his forehead, lips and heart. These gestures portray the fact that the reader's mind believes the Gospel, that his lips will proclaim it till they are cold in death, and that finally, his heart will love it, till it loves no more. Then we hear Christ speaking through the lips of his emissary on earth. See the utmost respect and solemnity that has preceded and accompanies the reading of the Gospel. Is it true then that the Bible is neglected by the Catholic Church? To an unbiased observer, this daily performance in Mass would nail that lie to the counter. The Church, indeed, gave the Bible to the world, succored it in times of intellectual darkness, championed it when Rationalists would have cast it aside, and today stands with it pressed close to her bosom while the embroglio between the Modernists and Fundamentalists would tear it away. The Gospels are hers. "Caveat mundus!"

In the early centuries the end

of the Gospel reading was the time for the catechumens to depart. Their unbaptized state forbade that they should witness the esoteric mystery which was to follow, and therefore, the priest would now turn to the congregation and announce "Ite missa est," i. e., "Go it is the Mass." That is why the ceremonies up to this moment are included under the one title of: "The Mass of the Catechumens."

The "Credo" now follows. Once more the priest stands at the center of the altar, and with hands joined, declares the Faith of himself and the Congregation: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty Creator of heaven and earth . . . and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. . . ." This Creed was formulated at the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D. to refute dogmatically the Arian heretics who denied that Christ was true God and true Man. Is it not humiliating to think that in the dissolving moods of contemporary thought, men deny His very existence? The march of progress has been uphill—and downhill. And a caucus of empiricists are trying desperately to out-do the Arians. But the one unchanging institution in the world, the Catholic Church, bows her head every morning and humbly reiterates: "I believe in one God the Father Almighty . . .

true God of true God. . . ." "She is ready to lie on the rack for that today, as ten million of her martyrs in the first three centuries, for the same belief, went singing to the lions. Aye; and as every one of her Popes up until the year 300 A. D. suffered martyrdom. "You may kill me," cried a Mexican martyr of modern times, "but you can't kill God."

End of the Prelude

At this point the first part of the Mass comes to an end. It has all been a kind of a prelude. A hint of the solemn climax has been revealed in the step-by-step increase in dramatic intensity. First it was the prayers of preparation, then the Epistle leading up to the Gospel and finally the sturdy and unequivocal recital of that epitome of Christian belief—the Creed. One feels the atmosphere has become more solemn and more tense, as if the audience are straining forward to miss nothing. Now there comes a brief interlude. The congregation resume their seats while the second part, the Offertory, begins.

"Dominus vobiscum" again heralds in this section. In ancient times it was the custom for the laity to ascend to the altar here, and present their gifts of bread and wine; hence the term "Offer-tory." Now, of course, that prac-

tice is in desuetude. The priest first uncovers the chalice, and presents the unconsecrated host to God for his own sins, and the sins of the congregation. That being finished, he goes to the Epistle side and pours in wine and water. It is just a tiny drop of water but it is "multum in parvo"; it represents the petitions of all those present in the church, and as it is mixed with the wine, it will be later consecrated with the wine into the Precious Blood of Our Lord to be sacrificed to God. See how even this insignificant act is rich in symbolism: all that we pray for, hope for, and desire will be part of the Divine Offering in the real blood of Christ. That is the meaning of the prayer which accompanies this infusion: "grant us to have part in the Godhead of Him Who hath vouchsafed to share our manhood, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. . . ."

The chalice is now held up in sight of the congregation while the priest at the center of the altar again offers it for our salvation. Then follows two prayers: one for gracious reception of the sacrifice and the other invoking the Holy Ghost upon the oblation. Again the celebrant moves back to the Epistle side to wash the tips of his fingers. This is the "Lavabo," termed so from the opening words

of Psalm 25 which is recited concurrently. "I will wash my hands among the innocent and will compass thy altar, O Lord."

Once more a dramatic moment occurs. To the center of the altar the priest retraces his steps, no more to leave it until the sacrifice is consummated; and from hence forward until the Communion a silence descends upon the sanctuary which will be broken only seven times. This silence corresponds to Christ's on the Cross; the seven interruptions to His seven last words. And it was the custom of old to draw a curtain across the sanctuary at this time to keep the silence inviolate and hide the mystery now rapidly coming on from the vulgar gaze.

The imperative "Orate Fratres" is now enjoined on the people. "Pray brethren," the priest says, "that my sacrifice and yours may be well-pleasing to God the Father Almighty." It cannot be too often insisted upon that the Mass is not only the action of the priest, but of the people as well. The celebrant is their representative; they are co-actors with him. Moreover, this is the last time he will face the congregation until the sacrifice is completed. It is the sacerdotal privilege to enter into the Holy of Holies alone—alone with God, standing there in the awful stark

simplicity of his human nature, involving and handling the Sacred Host which is God Himself.

The Climax Nears

Another prayer is said and then comes the majestic "Preface." Here we are on the verge of the arcana of the Mass—the Consecration. The air is instinct with great things to come. It is as if we are waiting breathlessly for some procession to come in sight. We hear the distant cheering, breaking like waves on the shore, and already the outriders have turned the corner, clearing the way. Then the priest's voice breaks in: "it is truly meet and just, right and salutary for us, at all times, and in all places to give thanks to Thee, O Lord, the Holy One, the Father Almighty, the Everlasting God, through Christ our Lord." Slowly the majestic cadences roll along; syllable by syllable the sonorous warning and welcome preface the coming of Emmanuel. It is Palm Sunday again in retrospect with its "Hosanna in the highest, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the name of the Lord." There is an abrupt stop; then suddenly the drama is upon us.

Thus, the "Canon" of the Mass begins. The "Canon," i. e., the unchangeable part, which is unaffected by day or feast. It is the

solemnity of solemnities. A hush descends. See the priest first of all slowly bend over the altar as he asks God to bless and receive this precious oblation which will soon draw down sufferance on mankind. Note, too, how he makes the sign of the cross over the species. Then comes the prayer for the particular recipients of the graces won by the sacrifice, as well as "omnium circumstantium"—all those present. Now is the time, too, to call upon the Church Triumphant to add their prayers to ours; beginning with Mary the Queen of Saints, down to the last entry into Heaven, the saints are pled with in hopeful terms to lend their aid. Help us dear friends of God! We are still in the bondage of the flesh and time and space, but you who have now been granted the vision Beautiful—help us, we pray!

One more symbolic action before the climax. Over the oblation the priest spreads his hands, thus transferring to the substance of the victim the sins of poor mankind. Christ took them once in Gethsemane; here on the altar of Gethsemane He burdens Himself again. All is ready now. The victim is prepared, the Sacrifice is set. Let us hurry on.

The Consecration! Here is the central point of the drama. Without this it would all be mere empty

pantomime and show. But with this—oh! To this moment, every syllable of dialogue and every gesture has been leading, like innumerable needles pointing to the True North. On this one action they all depend and live and have their being. For this is the Consecration—the daily Mystical Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Any words of mine, far from adding to the sacred character of this moment, would only detract. It is sufficient to say that the entire action is simply a replica of the Last Supper with the priest taking the place of Christ. Thus the winged seconds speed on. We see the priest taking up the Host in his hands, bending low over the altar: then—

"This is My Body."

A genuflection—the tinkle of the bell; the elevation, another warning bell; a final genuflection—a final cadenza of the bell.—Then the Chalice. Raising it a little off the altar, and again inclining reverently over it, the priest says:

"This is the Chalice of My Blood—"

Christ On the Altar

The Consecration is over. Christ has been called down from high Heaven and has taken up His Sacramental Presence again under the form of Bread and Wine. He is

with us; our daily Guest, our God, our Friend; submitting to the call of a human voice far down on this world of ours. But not an arbitrary voice. Did He not commission His disciples: "Do ye this in commemoration of Me?" And not only is it the Supper Room again; Calvary is here as represented in the mystical death shown by the separation of His Body and Blood.

The Consecration of the Mass is the heart of the Mystical Body. Round this the Church, her sacraments, her altar, her faith, her doctrine and her salving commission revolves. Every religion, by its very essence, must have a sacrifice. This is hers. This is the diploma of the True Church of God beyond the limits of any argument—the Sacrifice of Christ in the Mass. Take this away, and the Catholic Church would be a mere empty philanthropic organization, nothing but another sect. But with it, she stands alone as the one, unique, divinely-appointed authority to lead men back to God.

With Christ now on the altar, notice how every prayer and gesture testifies to that living fact. First of all, the priest in the prayer: "Unde et memores Domino—" offers up to the Father this sacrifice of His Son. As these words are said, he makes the sign of the cross three times over the

Oblation. But this is not a blessing, for how could we invoke a benediction on the Fontal Blessing Himself? It is simply a commemoration of the Cross. Immediately following this, the celebrant asks God to accept the sacrifice, and bowing low over the altar, concludes by beseeching Him to command His angels to escort It on high to the altar of altars in Heaven.

Can we forget our dead at this propitious time? Surely not. The Purgatorial fields need the cool grace of the Mass just as much, if not more so, than we. For the Church Suffering there having tasted the sweetness of God, are starving for His Presence to be accorded them for ever. So now, we remember our dead. Joining his hands in prayer, the priest pleads that the Lord will grant them "a place of solace, of light, and of peace."

"Pray for my soul—

For what are men better than
sheep or goats

If, knowing God, they lift not
hands in prayer

Both for themselves and for those
who call them friend?"

For 1900 years the Church has obeyed the injunction, "Pray for my soul."

But not only for the dead. "No-bis quoque peccatoribus"—"for us who are sinners too," the priest goes on. "And grant us fellowship with the saints and martyrs—not weighing our merits, but freely pardoning us our sins."

The Canon now draws solemnly to a close. But before it ends another relic of past custom projects itself to our notice. In olden days, the faithful at this point brought the fruits of the earth to the altar to be blessed by the priest, but now that ceremony being discontinued, only the words of benediction remain. Now notice carefully the priest's actions, for he is about to perform a rite superabundantly rich in meaning. You will see him, first of all, take up the Body of Christ, make three crosses over the Chalice, and say: "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him—" This is an acknowledgment that every grace comes through Christ. Then making two crosses outside the Chalice he goes on: "is to Thee, God the Father Almighty in the Unity of the Holy Ghost—" Here we denote the Receiver of the Sacrifice. Finally, the celebrant places the Sacred Host above the Chalice, and lifting both a few inches off the altar, concludes: "all honor and glory." Christ, Body and Blood is thus lifted up to the Father and offered to Him for the sins of the

world. This action is called the "little elevation" and it is interesting to note, was the only elevation at Mass up until the twelfth century. At that time, it was so high that all could see, and the curtains of the sanctuary were drawn aside to make this possible for the congregation.

The Canon thus ends. Christ has been made alive in His Sacramental Body, sacrificed and offered up. Once more God's love and mercy has drenched the world through a mystical Calvary and mankind can breathe freely again.

Preface to Happy Ending

Now follows the preface to the happy ending of the drama, the "Pater Noster." Is it not meet that this, the greatest prayer in the world, should usher in the greatest act that man can aspire to, Holy Communion? Would that we could realize how no antechamber of Heaven equals the reception of Our Lord in His Body and Blood! Men talk about ambition and aspiring to the heights, but this is the highest height we can ever reach on earth. Even in Heaven we will only see God, but in Holy Communion we receive Him into our bodies. It is the tryst with the lover of our souls—"Our Father, Who art in Heaven." The priest gazes steadily at the

Host, just as the disciples must have bent their eyes on Christ when He, on that hill of Galilee first spoke the great prayer. "Give us this day our daily bread." Common bread? No—nothing but the Bread of Angels, Holy Communion. So it goes on, this prayer, a kind of an interlude allowing us to compose ourselves for the rendezvous at the altar rails.

At the end of the "Pater Noster" another prayer for deliverance from evil is said, and with its concluding words, the priest breaks the Host into three parts over the Chalice as Christ "broke bread" at the Last Supper. A triple sign of the cross is then made over the Chalice with the smallest fraction of the Host thus broken, and to the accompaniment of a prayer for peace, is dropped into the Blood of Our Lord.

The next part of the dialogue takes us back to the time of John the Baptist. You will recall that when the Precursor saw Jesus for the first time, he called out: "Behold the Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world." By divine intuition he recognized the One Who was to be sacrificed for men. The priest at this point, striking his breast in recognition of sin, repeats thrice John's exclamation: "Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, have

mercy on us!" It is at once a recognition and a cry for mercy. "Have mercy on us" O Lord, we who are so unworthy to receive your Precious Body and Blood; "grant us peace."

After this, there follows three prayers of immediate preparation for Holy Communion. The first invokes peace on the Church, the second is for personal purification, and the third asks Christ to heal us body and soul in the coming participation of Himself.

All is ready now for the solemn union of God and man. It is true that words may describe the actions relating to Holy Communion, but no words can ever probe the profundity of it. The awful solemnity of the event can only be felt in each individual soul. In a sense, the very drama of the Mass seems to hang fire here, because we leave all gesture and dialogue behind, to enter into the transcendent reality of union with God. But it cannot be insisted on too much that, in another sense, Holy Communion is the logical complement to attendance at Mass. This was the belief and practice of the early Christians. The Holy Sacrifice was not considered to be complete unless they consumed the Victim. Why are we dilatory now? Has Holy Communion lost Its savor? God forbid! Until we all

get back to frequent Communion, we shall miss the very life and essence of Catholicism. It is the Food of the Mystical Body. To the degree that we neglect it, to that degree shall we be devitalized of spiritual life.

"Domine non sum dignus—."

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof; say only the word and my soul shall be healed." It is the evocation of the centurion in the Gospel, spoken now by the lips of the priest. Then, taking up the Body, he makes a sign of the cross, and breathing reverently the plea, "May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, keep my soul into life everlasting. Amen.", he consumes his Lord. A brief pause of grateful silence—Now the Blood. "May the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep my soul unto life everlasting. Amen."—once more the sacred prelude is said; and once more, making the sign of the cross with the Chalice, he consumes the Blood—Thanksgiving.

A slight rustle is heard in the congregation. It is the time of the people's communion. See them file slowly up to the altar rails to keep tryst with their Lord; as hundreds of millions of their co-religionists have done since He "broke bread" at the Last Supper. Here time stands still. The age-old solidarity

of the Catholic Church binds us to these Apostles, to Mary, to the pioneer Christians in the Catacombs, to the martyrs in the Roman arena, dying with Christ in their bodies, to a native Mass in some African jungle, to a fugitive band of worshippers on a hillside in penal times, to every Catholic living or dead, black, white, yellow or red, of whatever nationality, in whatever land, differing from us in the every other circumstance but this—the common fellowship of the Communion rails. This is the real stance of true democracy. The only password is love, the only condition, worthiness—The communicants kneel at the altar rails in silence. Turning to them, the priest holds up a Host above the ciborium and calls: "Behold the Lamb of God. Domine non sum dignus—." It is repeated acknowledgment of the creature's debasement before his Creator. Then, coming down to the kneeling band, he gives them their Heart's Desire—And as we leave the altar rails, there comes to mind that Galilean shore 1900 years ago, when the Master gave His own guarantee: "He that eateth My Body and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him."

At this point, the Sacrifice proper is at an end. Events happen swiftly now. In the relaxed atmos-

phere that follows Holy Communion, one senses that the Mass is conscious of its accomplishment, and in order to avoid any dragging with consequent loss of solemnity, it rallies its forces for a speedy conclusion. Hence, the priest now takes the ablutions with prompt deliberation, the Missal is moved back to the Epistle side, and after two or more prayers read there in thanksgiving, the time for dismissal comes. You will notice now that the altar is as it was at the beginning of Mass: the Chalice covered, Missal closed, and the celebrant standing in the center. "Dominus vobiscum" then sounds for the last time, and "Ite missa est," the dispersal follows immediately.

The Grand Epilogue

Yet, all is not over. Our pious forefathers were accustomed to linger on after this in prayer, and in course of time, their devotions were incorporated into the liturgy of the Mass. Accordingly we see the priest turn once again to the altar, breathe a humble prayer of homage to God, and finally turn with hands making the sign of the cross to bless the congregation. The last gesture of the drama—the sign of the cross! We began the Mass with it, we now ring down the curtain with it. The cross, the prologue,

the climax and end of all human activity.

As a grand epilogue to it all, the opening chapter of St. John's Gospel is now read. Who among us can peruse that and not be thrilled! Beginning with what is perhaps the most reverberating sentence in all literature, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," it goes on to fringe eternity itself, outline the creation of the world, uncover the identity of its Light and name the Precursor. Rising in dramatic volume, man's rejection of Christ is arraigned in words livid in their simplicity, while to those who received Him, "to them He gave power to be made the Son's of God." Then comes in increasing majesty of cadence, the awe-inspiring climax to the theme. "And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us." The Incarnation! What a sublime conclusion to the greatest drama in the world!

This brings to a close our thoughts on the dramatic action of the Mass. As I said at the beginning, love for the drama is a legitimate instinct of every human being, and if a religion lays claim to be divine, it must satisfy the whole man, that is, his intellect, will, emotions and body, his ascetic and

aesthetic, and finally his dramatic instinct. The Catholic Church has never by one iota swerved from that claim. Her doctrines, by their very reasonableness and proof, content the intellect, her moral sanctions satisfy the will; the body of man finds a fitting co-ordination with the soul in the various postures prescribed by her liturgy, the ascetic instinct is untrammelled in its flight to self-purification by her laws of mortification, the aesthetic instinct finds release and sublimation in the beauty of her ceremonies, and finally, the dramatic instinct of man needs seek no higher height of satisfaction than that afforded in the divine drama of the Holy Mass.

Just Suppose

In conclusion. Suppose Christ in Heaven took alarm at the widespread disobedience to a certain command of His made while on earth, and petitioned His Father in these words: "Father, I must go back to earth. I must descend into the world again, for I hear that men are not doing as I commissioned them to do at the Last Supper. You will recall, Father, on that occasion, when I took bread into my hands and said: 'This is My Body' and then taking up the Chalice of wine likewise said, 'This

is My Blood, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins,' I did not end there; I specifically ordered my disciples to perpetuate my action through their successors, to 'Do ye this in commemoration of Me.' But Father, it has come to my notice that my command is ignored by many, so let Me go down once more to see if the charge is true." The request is granted. Christ once more comes to earth and begins His quest. Entering a large city on a certain Sunday morning, He makes His way to the nearest Church to look for an altar, a priest, and a voice saying: "This is My Body—This is My Blood." But He looks in vain. In place of an altar, He sees a pulpit or an organ, in place of a priest He beholds a minister clad in a Geneva gown, and in lieu of His own doctrine, He hears the interpretation of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley or Mary Baker Eddy. It is all very puzzling. Christ is sad. So leaving that edifice He steps out into the sunshine of that Sunday morning burdened by the thought of man's perfidy. Is it true then? They have forgotten My command . . . Other churches which He enters seem to bear this fear out. Some, it is true, have altars, but denominational signs, betray a local and

human origin; others, too, have even a form of sacrifice, but no commission to perform it. They are individualists and their Low Church brethren round the corner scorn their pseudo-Popish rites. But the majority have no semblance of the things sought by the Pilgrim; it is the same old emptiness—the absence of the background of the Last Supper—Christ journeys on. The sun is warm now and fatigue is heightened by discouragement. Should He give up the search? Something urges Him on; and then—His eyes light up! Rounding a corner, a golden cross glinting in the sunlight surmounts a low, rather poor-looking Catholic church. This is at least encouraging; these people, whoever they are, are not afraid to display the emblem which was My bier. Perhaps, who knows, my search is ended? I shall enter and see.

Inside, taking up a shadowy place by the door, Christ scans the interior of this last possibility. There is nothing much of ornateness to hold Him long, yet the very bareness seems to whip into being an old remembrance of the Supper Room. People all around Him are kneeling—all kinds of people from every strata of society. The multitude in Palestine were not all on the social calendar. It is all faint-

ly encouraging. Then, casting His eyes towards the sanctuary, Christ sees an altar, a priest clad in hieratic vestments, and listening to this man, He recognizes the message He gave to the world. It is still the same. One thing, however, is still wanting to confirm His hopes—the Sacrifice. He awaits that—tense. The sermon is over. A few minutes pass—A hush descends upon the congregation. A bell rings—

The priest bends low, takes up the bread into his hands, and says: "This is My Body"—

Christ watches—

The Chalice is taken up, and consecrated: "This is My Blood of the New and Eternal Testament—As often as ye shall do these things, ye shall do them in commemoration of Me."

The End.

