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Holy Eucharist

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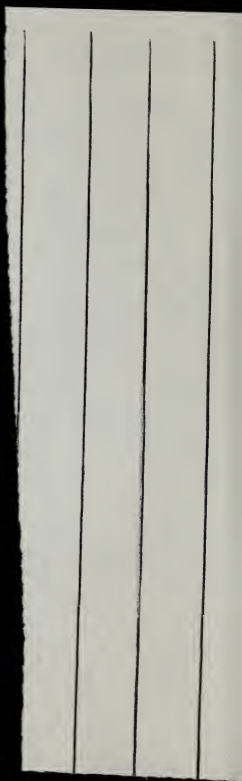
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HOLY EUCHARIST

AS A SACRAMENT

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AS A SACRIFICE

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THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRAMENT

“He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood remains united to Me and I to him.” When we read these words spoken by Christ in the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel (v. 56), most of us think immediately of the intimate personal union with Christ that is ours when we receive Holy Communion. If asked to sum up the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist, many of us would probably say, in the words of the Council of Trent, “In the Eucharist Christ is present truly and substantially, whole and entire, body and blood, soul and divinity.” And if asked to state why we consider the Holy Eucharist so great a blessing, we would likely answer, “Because it brings God made man down into our midst.”

Conviction of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist and desire for intimacy with the Person really present there — these are the dominant notes of modern Eucharistic piety. To assist at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is to receive the blessing of a Person. To take part in a procession of the Blessed Sacrament is to pay public honor to a Person. To visit the Blessed Sacrament is to visit a Person. In fact, Holy Communion itself we tend to

look upon as a sort of especially intimate visit with Christ present in the Eucharist.

More Than a Private Devotion

This way of thinking of the Eucharist can hardly be condemned. It is certainly correct. But it is incomplete. It may even lead to false Eucharistic devotion. It may lead, for example, to looking upon Holy Communion as a merely private devotion, something between oneself and God, and to wondering why the Church insists so much that Communion should be received at Mass rather than outside it.

The sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist are present as our food and drink. They are present, after all, under the appearances of bread and wine, that is, under the appearances of food. But as though to leave no possibility of doubt, Christ said as He handed the loaf and the cup to the Apostles, "Take this and eat it. . . . Take this cup and drink of it. . . ." Take My sacrificed Body and Blood as your food and drink.

Nourishment for Spiritual Growth

In the natural order nourishment sustains the life of our bodies. It restores the energy lost in the efforts of daily living.

Without it the body simply weakens and finally, exhausted, dies. Nourishment also provides a reserve of strength to serve for growth and development. It brings our life to a fullness or completeness—to a state of well-being—that it could not otherwise enjoy.

The Eucharist serves the same purpose as regards our spiritual or Christian life. Without it our spiritual life grows progressively weaker and finally dies through mortal sin. With it that life grows stronger and moves forward towards the full maturity it will have at the final resurrection. Our Lord Himself explained this in the discourse set down in the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not possess life within you. He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood possesses eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (6:53 ff.). But before we can appreciate just how the Eucharist nourishes our spiritual life, we must briefly examine the nature of that Christian life.

The Plan of Salvation

In the opening verses of his Gospel St. John explains the plan of salvation which

God realized by the Incarnation of His Son. "To as many as received Him He gave power to become children of God" — that is, "to those who believed in His name" (John 1:12).

In his Epistle to the Galatians (4:4 ff.) St. Paul gives a slightly more detailed explanation. "When the appointed time came," he says, "God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons. And the proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

We possess the Divine Son's Holy Spirit within us. This makes us sons of God like Him. It makes us share in His Sonship. It enables us to address God in the same way that He can: "Father!" In other words, we have entered into the life of the Blessed Trinity. Our possession of the Holy Spirit elevates us to a supernatural — that is, a superhuman — level. It raises us to share in the Divine Sonship of the Second Person of the Trinity. It makes pulsate within us a life which is none other than God's own. This share in the divine life we call sanctifying grace.

But in what does this new life of ours consist? How does it manifest itself? We

can easily enough distinguish between plant life and animal life. The animal moves about and has sensation; a plant is without these abilities. We distinguish easily enough, too, between animal life and human life. A human being can think and reason; an animal cannot. But how can we distinguish between the man who possesses the divine life within him and a man who does not? Can this privileged human being do something which the merely natural man or sinner cannot? Our Lord Himself has given us the answer.

The New Life of Love

In the very first sermon of His which the Gospels record, the Sermon on the Mount, He says, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you . . . and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kindly to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:27 ff.). In other words, love even your enemies, and you will be sons.

The Sign of a Christian

Sincere and all-inclusive charity — a love that sincerely and actively seeks the good of all other men without exception — is an infallible manifestation of divine life

within. For this reason Our Lord could indicate it as the mark by which all men can identify His true followers: "By this will all men know you for disciples of Mine — by your love for one another" (John 13:35). For this reason He could indicate it as the mark by which He Himself will identify His own on the day of judgment: "The king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who have been blessed by My Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink; I was a stranger, and you offered Me hospitality' — in short, I was in need, and you showed Me love (Matt. 25:34 ff.).

St. John explains all this more clearly, perhaps, than any other New Testament writer. In his first Epistle (4:7 ff.) he exhorts, "Let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God [that is, enjoys His intimacy]. The man who does not love has not known God because God is love."

Love — the all-inclusive, self-sacrificing charity preached and lived by Christ — is God's own life. If a man exercises such love, he is doing something superhuman,

even divine. If such love has a place in his life he must have received it from God; he could have gotten it nowhere else. He has received a share of God's own life which is manifesting itself in his conduct.

Sharing the Life of God

Our Christian vocation is a call to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity. That divine life within us manifests itself in love. The more perfect our charity, then, the fuller is our share in the divine life. The more completely charity dominates our every thought, word and action, the more supernatural — the more divine — they become. When everything that we think, say and do is motivated by charity, then our supernatural life has reached its full development.

Of course, we shall never reach this full development in the present life; we shall attain it only in eternity. But until the moment of our death our spiritual life grows and progresses, approaching more and more closely its full development; or by the multiplication of venial sins charity loses its control, and our spiritual life diminishes. Our spiritual life grows or declines according as our Christian love does.

If we ask in the light of these considera-

tions what spiritual nourishment must do, we see the answer immediately: It must increase our love. And that is precisely what the Eucharist is intended to do. "The reality [that is, the sacramental grace] this sacrament produces," writes St. Thomas, prince of the Church's theologians, "is charity."

The Mind and Heart of Christ

The Eucharist is food. Every material food that we eat provides us with some particular element of nourishment — proteins, fats, etc. — that we need. We extract that element from the food we consume each day and make it part of ourselves. From our spiritual nourishment we absorb something, too — something which only that nourishment can give: the mind and the heart of Christ. Our outlook or mentality undergoes a change. His thoughts, His concerns, His desires, His aims become our own. "My flesh is true food and My blood is true drink," He says. "He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood remains united to Me and I to him. As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me shall live because of Me." In other words, just as I live in dependence on the Father — with His concerns, His goals, His will,

His life as My own—so the man who feeds on Me will assimilate and absorb My own concerns, goal, will, life.

Now if there is a single word which sums up the whole of Christ's life and especially its climax, His Passion and Death, that word is "love" — a boundless love for the Father and for men. Speaking of the Passion St. John says, "*This is how we have come to know love*" (1 John 3:16).

The Eucharist and the Cross

Our Lord Himself describes His Cross as the great proof of His love for God and for men. At the close of the first portion of His last discourse in the supper room, He exclaims, "That the world may know that I love the Father and do just as He has commanded Me, rise, let us go from here" out to begin the Passion (John 14: 31). And just a few verses later He explains, "No one has greater love than to lay down his life for those whom he loves. You are those whom I love" (John 15: 13 ff.) We feed on the sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ to make our own that boundless love which was His and which is our spiritual life.

Peace and Unity in Christ

But what of love for our neighbor? Many of the Fathers and Doctors of the

Church speak of the Eucharist almost more as the sacrament of fraternal charity than as the sacrament of our love for God. Just as countless grains of wheat unite to form a single loaf, many of the Fathers wrote, and as many grapes unite to form a single cup of wine, so the many individuals who feed on the Eucharist are united to form the one Mystical Body of Christ.

The Mass for the feast of the Eucharist, Corpus Christi, composed in the Middle Ages by St. Thomas Aquinas, expresses the same idea, declaring, for example, in the Secret prayer, that the gifts we offer signify and effect the peace and unity of the Church.

The Mass liturgy of today agrees. From the very start of the Communion part of the Mass the prayers are full of pleas for peace. Just before he receives the consecrated Host, the celebrant recites three prayers, the first of which is an explicit petition for the peace and unity of the Church, which are expected to come, of course, from the Eucharist.

Immediately after this prayer at Solemn Mass the kiss of peace is given — that brotherly embrace exchanged now only among the clergy in the sanctuary but formerly by all members of the congregation as an expression of their mutual union

before their reception of the Body of Christ.

Right after exchanging this embrace the faithful kneel at the common table of their common Father to be fed on the Flesh and Blood of His Son. After an embrace can we find a more effective way of expressing friendliness towards another than inviting him into our own home for a meal? Especially in ancient times, inviting someone to your home to eat at your table was definitely a manifestation of friendship. But even today a desire to show friendship still naturally expresses itself in this way. At Mass we all gather about our Father's table to share the same spiritual food. Even more we all receive the Eucharist from the same sacred vessels. If simply eating at the same table expresses union, what shall we say of eating from the same dish and drinking from the same cup?

This notion of the Eucharist as forging the members of Christ into a single unit, the Mystical Body, does not owe its origin to the Church Fathers and Doctors. It goes back to St. Paul himself, who wrote to the Corinthians, "Because the Bread (on which we feed) is one, we — many though we are — are one body" (I Cor. 10:17). The Eucharist is then, quite evidently the sacrament of fraternal union. But how? In what way does Communion (and not

merely the ceremonies that surround it) tighten the bonds that hold us together? How does it increase not only our love for God but also our love for our neighbor?

The Eucharist and the Mystical Body

The answer lies in a correct understanding of the Incarnation. Many today quite readily conceive of the Incarnation without any reference to the Mystical Body. The early Church did not. The Son of God became man not merely to elevate an individual human nature into personal union with the Divinity. He became man to forge all human beings into one mystical unit with Himself and so bring them back into union with God. To conceive of the Incarnation apart from the Church is like thinking of a head without a body. The Son of God made man is inseparable from His members.

Our neighbor, then, is a member of Christ or, at the very least, is meant to be one. What we do to him we do to Christ Himself. He told Saul, persecutor of the early Church, as much (Acts 9:4) when after throwing him from his horse He demanded, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *Me?*" He will tell us as much on Judgment Day: "As long as you did it to one of these least brothers of Mine you did it to *Me*" (Matt. 25:40).

“There is no doubt,” writes Pope St. Leo the Great in one of his sermons, “that human nature has been taken into such intimate union with Himself by the Son of God that not only in that Man Who is the first-born of all creation but also in all His saints there is one same Christ.” To honor Him in the Eucharist while neglecting or persecuting His members is, in the graphic simile of St. Augustine, like embracing a person while trampling on his foot.

Our neighbor is Christ made visible and in need of us. Before His Death and Resurrection Our Lord could receive the attentions of others. In fact, He needed them. Now that He is glorified, He cannot benefit by our services. But it is possible for us still to do Him good, still to show Him an active love, not in His own person but in His members.

The One Mark of Love for Christ

Even more, the most unmistakable manifestation of our love for Christ is love for His members. We can make a show of long prayers and perform many acts of self-denial to attract the attention of others without any real love for God. We can “accept the will of God” in a stoic, unfeeling way — not with gratitude to the God

Whose will it is but simply because it is inevitable. We can even practice the virtues — meekness, patience, obedience and the rest — because of the self-satisfaction it gives us. But we cannot continually manifest a sincere, self-sacrificing love for every one of our neighbors no matter how unlikeable he may be unless we have selfless motives, unless we have true Christian charity.

In receiving Holy Communion we kneel with our fellow members in Christ at the same table. By it we are intimately united with the Christ with Whom they are one: we receive the Incarnate Son of God Who is inseparable from His members. But, above all, we receive Him in His great act of love for men: His Passion, the laying down of His life for those whom He loves.

Self-surrender and Love

After self-surrender to the Father, there is no more fitting disposition with which to approach Holy Communion than love for all the members, actual or intended, of the Mystical Christ, the love which motivated Him on the Cross, which He made the second great commandment for the Christian, and which He called the commandment peculiarly His own: "This is My com-

mandment: that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

Perhaps we can now more easily understand the statement of St. Thomas we quoted above on the effect of the Eucharist, "The reality which this sacrament produces is charity." We feed on the sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ; we feed on Christ in His great act of love for the Father and for men. This Eucharistic food nourishes our spiritual life, which is nothing other than a share in God's life of love, by communicating to us the mind and heart of Christ, the mentality and outlook of Christ—in short, the all-consuming love that was the whole meaning of Christ's life.

There are no better dispositions with which to approach this sacrament and which to entertain during our thanksgiving than the sentiment of self-surrender to God that should motivate us throughout the entire Mass from the Offertory on and the sentiment of sincere love of our neighbor, with whom we kneel at a common table and who is one with the Christ we are receiving.

Transformation in Christ

It is precisely these dispositions that the sacrament will deepen and make more per-

fect by bringing them into contact with Christ's and making them more like His. Successive Communion, by giving us a progressively fuller share in Christ's divine life of love, will bring us closer and closer to that fullness of charity which will be ours forever in heaven.

One day St. Catherine of Siena, who sometimes for days took no other food than Holy Communion, was describing to her spiritual director, Blessed Raymond of Capua, the wonderful changes grace was working in her soul — how completely she was being transformed into Christ. Almost as if to reassure himself, Raymond raised his eyes towards her. What surprise he experienced when he saw in Catherine's face no longer the features of the humble Sienese virgin but the adorable features of Christ! Our complete transformation into Christ is the purpose of the Eucharist. If only we use this sacrament as we should, it will little by little work the total change.

THE EUCHARIST AS A SACRIFICE

On the knobby hill called Golgotha, three crosses stood silhouetted against the sky on a spring day 2,000 years ago. And on these crosses hung the dead bodies of three men: Dismas, Jesus Christ and a third whose name we do not know. Three executions — and yet, ever since that day men have spoken of the one sacrifice of Calvary, not three. What was different about the death of Christ that made it sacrificial?

The Meaning of Sacrifice

Sacrifice sometimes can be a somber word. When we hear it we think of the movies we have given up, the television programs we haven't seen, the candy or beer we've left untouched as our Lenten sacrifices. It calls to mind the proverbial mother who forgets herself for her children, the soldier who gives his life that his buddies might live, the set-jaw determination to do one's duty, fulfill one's obligation, no matter how distasteful it might be. There's truth in all of these examples, but if our idea of sacrifice stops there, we'll never understand the Sacrifice of Calvary or the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Sacrifice and Sin

Sacrifice is not a negative idea, not basically anyway. It's nothing more or less than adoration in practice. And even if Adam and Eve had never sinned, it would have still been necessary for man to offer sacrifice to the God Who had created him, but it wouldn't have involved death, suffering or self-denial.

But Adam and Eve sinned, and with their sin introduced into sacrifice and into our lives a negative aspect. When Adam and Eve acted toward God in this way, they asserted that they had no need of Him, had not the slightest intention of letting Him tell them how to run their lives, and would find their own happiness apart from Him. They declared their independence of God and denied His rights over them as their Creator.

But the sin of Adam and Eve was only the first sin, not the last. All of us have added our own cry of rebellion to theirs through our personal sins. But what does sin mean? What is it?

In effect, sin is the rejection of God's claims upon us. Every time we sin we refuse to acknowledge in practice our relationship with Him. Instead of admitting our dependence, we choose to ignore God and His rights completely and, in fact,

deny them. That's what Adam and Eve's sin did and that's just what ours do.

And now we get back to Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. We could offend God, but we couldn't make reparation to Him. It took Someone greater than us to approach God and placate His anger. It took the very Son of God Himself, Christ.

Christ's Sentiments of Sacrifice

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Holy Spirit revealed to us the sentiments, the attitude of Christ, as He came into the world to redeem us and to make reparation to His Father for our sins. "Therefore, in coming into the world, He says: 'Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me: in holocausts and sin-offerings Thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, Behold I come . . . to do Thy will, O God.'"

The "sacrifices and oblations" which God rejected, the "holocausts and sin-offerings" in which He found no pleasure, were those of the Old Testament. These were men's offerings and sacrifices and it took those of the God-Man to win us His favor once more. But notice the phrase in which Christ describes the work He is entering the world to accomplish: "I

come to do Thy will, O God." Not specifically to institute seven sacraments, to found a Church, to be born of a Virgin, not even to die on a cross, but "to do Thy will, O God" no matter what that will demanded of Him or entailed.

Christ, on Calvary, assumed responsibility for the attitude of Adam and Eve in their original sin and for our attitude every time we offend God. In effect, we denied God's claims on us. And so Christ's reparation consisted in reasserting those claims no matter what the cost. And the cost was death.

Self-denial Sparked by Love

The strongest instinct man has is for self-preservation. He will eagerly embrace loneliness, sickness and suffering, anything and everything in preference to death. Life is the thing hardest for us to surrender. But once we really recognize that we are creatures, that we were made by God and for God, that our only real "right" is to do His will and that it is only in doing this that we can ever be happy, then we can lovingly and trustingly accept anything — including death — from His hands.

In sin, we denied God; in reparation, we have to deny ourselves even to death if such is necessary to fulfill God's will. Such

was the meaning of Christ's death on the Cross on Calvary and such is the attitude we must try to share with Him in each Mass in which we participate. But it is just because we are sinners that our recognition of God's rights over us involves such a denial of ourselves. But it is always a denial sparked by an intense love of God, gratitude for everything that He has done for us, and a heart-bursting worship of Him.

Only One Christian Sacrifice

When we describe the Mass, we say that it is Christ's sacrifice made present on our altars. And it is only right and most important that we do say this, for it is true. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read over and over again that there is but one Christian sacrifice. That Christ suffered once and for all, that He would not have to repeat that sacrifice as the sacrifices of the Old Law were repeated over and over again, and that by that one offering of His sacrifice He has perfected forever those who are sanctified.

When we are at Mass we are not performing a new sacrifice, for there can be only one Christian sacrifice — that of Christ. But we say that Christ's sacrifice is made present on the altar when the priest says the words of consecration over

the bread and the wine. But what do we mean when we say that it is *present*?

Beyond Laws of Time and Space

Christ's sacrifice was a completely unique act in human history in that it is not bound by the laws of either time or space. As I sit here at my typewriter writing this, I am in a particular office on the Notre Dame campus. I am not present in your front parlor or kitchen as you read this article. And it is a hot August day, not the blustery autumn day or the cold winter day on which you, perhaps, are reading these words. In other words, my action here is bound by limits of both time and space. And so is every other human action in history except that of Christ on Calvary. Our actions most certainly do have eternal consequences, but they happen only at one particular time and in one particular place in history. But Christ's sacrificial act on Calvary is not subject to these limitations.

When we say that it is present on our altars as Mass is being celebrated, we mean that it is present *now* as opposed to happening only in the past. We mean that it is present *here* as opposed to somewhere else. Because it is not bound by ties of either time or space Christ's sacrificial act didn't just happen on a hillside in Judea

2,000 years ago. It is *present here* on the altar *now*.

But why did Christ put His action above and beyond these limitations restricting every other human act so that every time the Holy Mass is offered His sacrifice on the Cross becomes present? Was it for His sake or for ours?

Why the Mass Is Multiplied

The multiplication of Masses is not done for the sake of God. Through Christ's one act God was infinitely adored, glorified and propitiated. The sacrifice of Calvary is rendered present countless times down through the centuries and in every part of the world for our sakes, so that by joining ourselves with Christ in offering it we can become more holy ourselves.

Man is a changeable and changing animal. We make up our minds one minute and change them the next. Today we tell God how much we love Him and tomorrow by our sin we tell Him that we're through with Him for all eternity. Human psychology just doesn't let us perform an act and remain fixed in it. We're forever changing, or repeating the things we did before. And it's the same way in our relationship with God.

We give ourselves a little today, then take back tonight a bit of what we gave

God in the morning. Tomorrow we will approach Him once more and give back what we took away and add a little more of ourselves to our gift. At each Mass it becomes possible for us to give ourselves more fully to God and to open ourselves a little more to the grace of Christ. Thus, by constantly growing in sanctifying grace, we become holier ourselves and in so doing give more glory to God. As often as we participate in the Mass, we become more united to Him.

But to do this we have to unite ourselves with the sentiments Christ had at the moment of His sacrifice on Calvary.

And if we do this, uniting ourselves with Christ in His sacrifice, we will be attending Mass as perfectly as possible, really making it our sacrifice, too. And if we don't have this attitude, it won't help us to sing with the choir, recite the prayers aloud during a dialogue Mass, or follow our missals. These things are all helpful, but they are meaningless unless based on a union of our mind and will with Christ's in the offering of the sacrifice.

How It Becomes Our Sacrifice

But how is it that we can offer the sacrifice of Calvary along with Christ? The Church teaches us that when we join in the offering of the Mass, His sacrifice becomes

ours just as truly as if we ourselves had been able to offer it to God and had done so. What makes this possible?

First of all, perhaps it's necessary to remember that not everyone can offer this sacrifice with Christ. Only a baptized person can.

A sincere pagan or unbaptized person can come to Mass, be there physically while it is being celebrated, and offer his own private prayers to God during the Mass; yet he is not part of the congregation and simply cannot share in the offering of the sacrifice of Christ directly. Why is this so?

In St. Peter's first Epistle, he tells us: "You, however, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may proclaim the perfections of Him Who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (I Peter, 2:9). What does this phrase mean, "a royal priesthood . . . that you may proclaim the perfections of Him Who has called you out of darkness . . ."?

At Baptism, we receive the grace which transforms us into members of Christ because it gives us a participation in His own life. Now the sacrifice that Christ offered on Calvary was His sacrifice. But since at Baptism we become members of Christ, His sacrifice becomes our sacrifice also.

Through Baptism we share in Christ's life as the Eternal High Priest. Not to offer that sacrifice in His Name, as instruments through which He works to offer it, for there is another sacrament which He instituted for this purpose: Holy Orders. But Baptism does give us some part in His priesthood. And what is that role? In just what way are we participators in the priesthood of Christ, "a royal priesthood," as St. Peter calls us?

By Baptism we are commissioned to offer worship and adoration to God. But it is only through the Sacrifice of the Mass that God is perfectly adored and glorified—and it was through this sacrifice that Christ, our Head, adored God. Therefore, Baptism gives us the right to join in that sacrifice wherever and whenever it is offered. That is the reason that we say that the priest on the altar is not offering "his" Mass. First of all, it is Christ offering His sacrifice through the priest. It is Christ making present here in St. Julia's Church at this 8 o'clock Sunday morning Mass the sacrifice He offered on Calvary. But more than that, it is the sacrifice of the whole Christ.

The Sacrifice of the Whole Christ

The priest, representing Christ, offers the Mass but not alone. With him the

whole Mystical Body offers the Holy Sacrifice, especially those members of the Mystical Body present in the church or chapel where he is saying the Mass. And it is their Mass every bit as much as it is his Mass, because the Mass belongs to every baptized person. The sacrifice is the sacrifice of the whole Christ, both Head and members.

In the early days of the Church, when Christians got together to celebrate the Mass, each one brought along something to give. A candlemaker would bring along a candle or two. The wine merchant offered the wine to be used in the Mass, and the baker's gift was the bread which would be transformed at the Consecration into the Lord's Body. The point is: Each one would bring along something which represented his life and his labor. During the Mass, just as Christ's offering of Himself entirely to God was made present, so, too, each one there renewed his own complete giving of himself into God's hands. The gift he brought was just the symbol of his whole life, his personality, talents, strivings and longings, even the humiliation brought him by his sins and his faults, which he was dedicating once more to his God and his Father.

Now, when we drop our dollar or five

dollars into the collection box we should have the same sentiments. The money in itself isn't really important. God already owns everything in this world, including our money. All we can give to God is the loving and gracious recognition that we were created by Him, redeemed by Christ and given a share in His life through grace, and are destined to live in union with the Holy Trinity for all eternity. But this recognition implies something else.

The Burden of God's Gifts

Someone once spoke of "the burden of God's gifts," and there's a lot of truth in this phrase. Or as Christ Himself put it, "From him to whom much has been given much shall be expected." God never bestows a gift on us without also making it a responsibility. And when we recognize that God has given us life, grace, a supernatural destiny, the love of our friends, our health, our job, our parents and our children — everything that we have — we also have to recognize the responsibilities that He has given us.

Christ Himself told us, "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." And "I have given you an example. . . ." God not only expects us *to be* like Him (He

gave us this at Baptism), but He expects us *to live and act* like Him. Such is the responsibility — the “burden” of His gifts to us.

Now in the Mass, when we recognize gratefully all the gifts we have received from Him, we must also recognize our responsibility to make use of these gifts. When we offer Him the sacrifice of our lives, it is with the determination to live out that offering in the sacrifice of leading our lives according to God’s eternal designs for us. And that means that we recognize His will for us to become saints and fully embrace it. We can very truly say that one Mass, heard perfectly, is enough to make us saints because such is God’s will for us, and in the Mass we graciously accept every detail of His will for us. Furthermore, the graces we receive from one Mass would certainly make us saints if we opened our hearts completely to them.

Manifesting God in Our Lives

And this leads us to the last point about the Mass. Earlier we said that the Mass was for our sake — that the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary completely and infinitely adored, placated, thanked and petition-

ed God forever, that there was no reason for it to be made present countless times throughout the ages in every part of the world except for our sake. But let us not forget, we ourselves were made for God — for His honor and glory.

So it is true that the Mass is for us, to make saints of us. But it is also for God. For we have been commissioned in Baptism to render worship and adoration to Him, and it is only in and through the Mass that we can adequately do this. Furthermore, it is through the Mass that we approach sanctity. And it is for the glory of God that we should want to become saints. For the holier that we become, the more we can manifest the holiness, the goodness and the wisdom of God. And the more manifest God becomes through us, the more He is glorified externally. That in the long run is why we are here on earth, to bring glory to God.

As Christians, we approach the altar to offer along with Christ, Head of the Mystical Body, the sacrifice of our perfect adoration. And with the same spirit that animated Him we should have on our lips these words from Psalm 113, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory!"

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