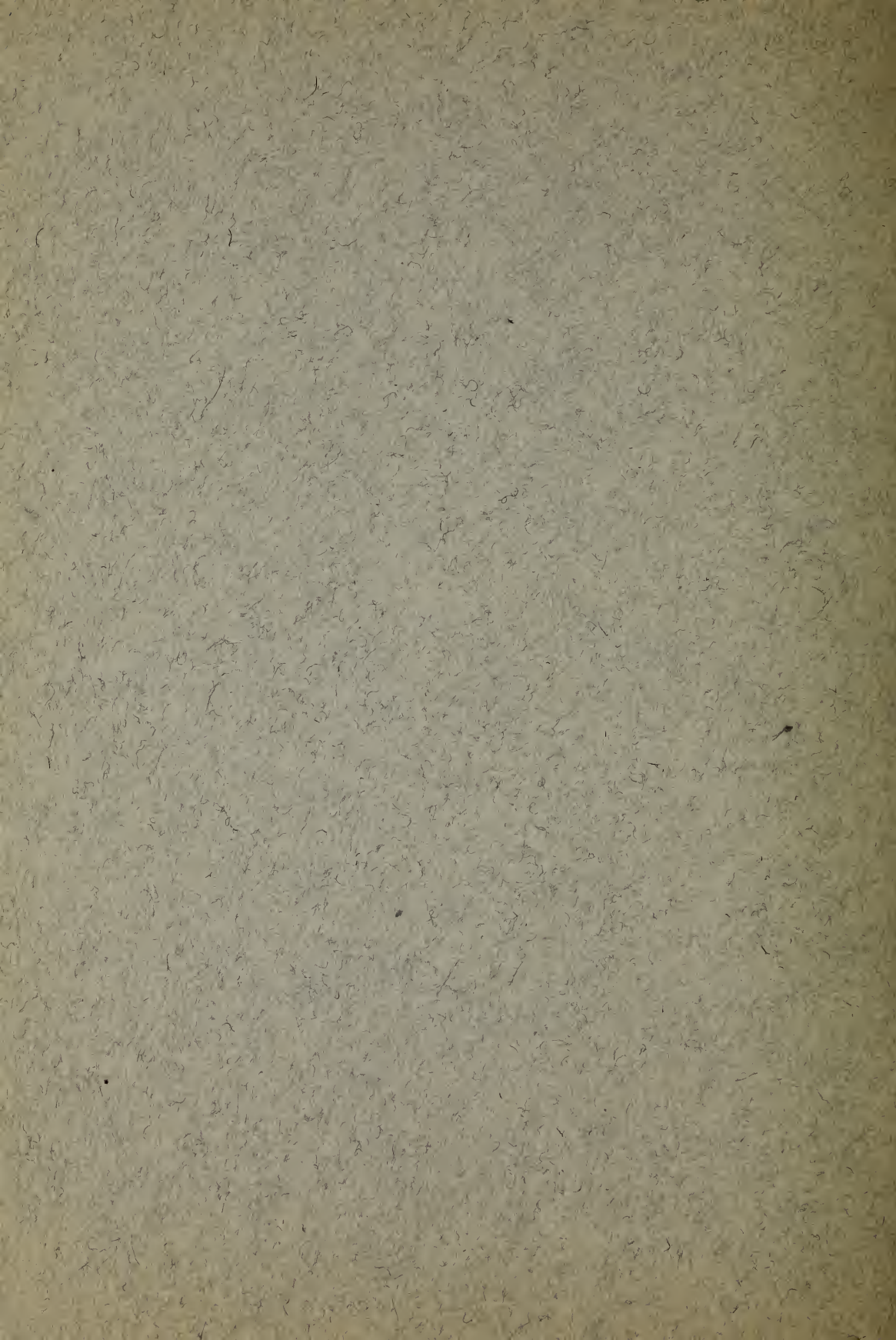


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Sunday and midweek
sermon sketches
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SUNDAY AND MIDWEEK
SERMON SKETCHES
for
LENT
on
The Supernatural
and
The Parish Church



Sermons
for
Lent

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SERMONS FOR LENT

(Priests will develop these and other related thoughts)

I.

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Parish Church

"I shall fill this house with glory."—Aggeus 11, 8.

In every Catholic church we have at all times the Bethlehem Christmas scene of 1934 years ago. Bethlehem means "House of Bread". The parish church is the house in which Jesus lives permanently in order to confer "peace on men of good will" and to give "glory to His Father in the highest". There He fulfills the Apostle's prophecy to be "Jesus Christ yesterday, today and the same forever". There He has the daily worship of the Shepherds in the persons of the poor; there Sunday after Sunday many people, like the Magi, come from afar to bring Him their gifts of devotion, prayer and sacrifice; there angels are ever present in adoration, and sing their Christmas song.

There is not now and never was on earth a place (1) so holy; (2) so profitable to you, as your parish church; (3) Protestant temples bear no comparison to it.

(1) The temple of Jerusalem, built of the choicest marble, with its inner walls overlaid with the purest silver, its altars and other furnishings made of virgin gold, with its "Holy of Holies", which even the High priest was allowed to enter but once a year, was truly "filled with glory" only when the Incarnate God deigned to visit it in person, to teach and pray therein. But even with the glory which the temple acquired by the visits of Jesus it could bear no comparison to the humblest Catholic parish church in which Jesus dwells personally and continuously in His glorified state, and where

He immolates Himself daily in sacrifice for the parishioners.

Have you ever contemplated in earnest this wonderful boon of our Catholic people, whether they live in city, town or hamlet? No, you have never fully grasped its significance, or there would be no place in all the world so dear to you as your pew in church; there would be no cause towards which you would be so willing to contribute some of your earnings as that calculated to embellish Jesus' house, or promote parish interests. You would frequently exclaim with David: "For what have I in Heaven and besides Thee, what do I desire upon earth?" (Ps. LXXII, 25). "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house and the place where Thy glory dwelleth" Your parish church is indeed "filled with glory".

(2) There is little difference between your privilege and that of the blessed in Heaven; they worship the glorified human nature of Jesus, united to His sacred divinity; and in your parish church, you may adore His divine Person inseparably united to our humanity. There is no difference in the actuality of God's presence, no difference in the honor of being near Him. The only real difference is that the blessed in Heaven see Jesus, while His divine beauty is hidden from you as it was hidden from the Apostles themselves with whom He walked on earth. Three of these were favored with a momentary glimpse of His divine beauty on Thabor, but they could not endure it; much less could we endure to see Christ as He now is in His glorified state. Jesus' Divinity was hidden even from Mary and Joseph, who dwelt with Him in Nazareth; from Magdalene, who bathed His feet in sorrow for her sins. Only when we are like Him in Heaven shall we be able to see Him "as He is."

(3) How different because of this personal pres-

ence of Jesus in the flesh, is the parish church of Catholics from the temples where our non-Catholic friends pray! Their churches may be the scene of public religious devotions where men and women gather to praise and thank God and pray to Him, but God seems no nearer to them than when they are in their own homes—and this explains why their temples are so empty.

But you, when you kneel in your parish church, feel as near to Christ as were the Magi and Shepherds in Bethlehem's stable, as were the Apostles at the Last Supper, and as were the Marys when their Lord hung above them on the cross. Although so many of our people fail to realize all this, the Church itself realizes the Savior's actual presence, and because of her perpetual sacrifice offered "from the rising to the setting of the sun" has worshippers before Him every moment of the day and night. In her fold are religious associations of men and women, who are consecrated body and soul to Him for life. It is for Him that the orders of Sisterhoods exist, whose members—numbering hundreds of thousands—have left all else to be brides of Jesus, "to serve Him in the temple night and day". How true are the words of Christ when applied to Catholics: "Behold I am with you"; "I shall not leave you orphans". If you are not with Him, it is your fault, and shame on you because of your neglect to visit Him oftener—to express your love, your sorrow, your gratitude; because of your neglect to answer His invitation to dine with Him oftener; because of your neglect to be present when He renews His offering of sacrifice for you in your parish church: "Is this the return thou makest to the Lord, O foolish and senseless people?" (Deut. XXXII, 6). "Behold He standeth behind our wall looking through the windows, looking through the lattices" (Cant. II, 6).—waiting for your visits, your worship.

CONCLUSION: While Almighty God can be worshipped publicly in the open spaces, His sacramental presence can be enshrined only within a building. That presence makes any edifice sacred and holy, but should that edifice not be as beautiful interiorly as money and art can make it? Christ made His first appearance in a stable, but His children should certainly not consign Him to a stable. On the site of Bethlehem's stable there stands and has stood for 1,600 years a beautiful church.

Regard it as a privilege and honor to contribute to the embellishment and maintenance of your parish church.

II.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

The Supernatural

"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of Eternal life"—John VI, 69.

Despite the long course of religious instructions which most Catholic children receive, they seem never to become saturated with the idea that their religion is unique in relation to all others. They fully comprehend that the Catholic religion is the parent Christian religion, or the oldest Christian organization. They may even know that there are in the world 100,000,000 more Catholics than there are Protestants of all denominations taken together. They must be aware that there are radical differences in teaching and practice. For instance we have the Mass, the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, the Confessional, which Protestant organizations have not.

Other faiths cannot, therefore, be quite like the Catholic. But let it never be overlooked that to have the proper relation to the end to which it is expected to lead people the true religion must be supernatural. It must be supernatural (1) in its origin; (2) in its teaching; and (3) in its grace-producing ordinances.

(1) The majority of our countrymen regard religious practice as purely an affair between themselves personally and God. They may hold that it is *good* to belong to a religious organization, but are convinced that it is not necessary; they maintain that they *are* quite as good, or *could be* just as good as those who profess themselves Christians, affiliated to a Christian body. Their religious opinions may be as good as those of numerous people belonging to the churches, who are in woeful disagreement

and openly acknowledge that they are not sure of themselves.

But all this is actually beside the question. The opinions of people count for nothing, no matter how sincere, if Almighty God has actually made a very definite revelation. It should be easy even for the uncultured mind to comprehend that the Creator has a right to demand that He be known as far as He chose to reveal Himself; that He has a right to demand definite service for an eternal prize; that if He has destined His children on earth to supernatural beatitude in eternity, supernatural means for its attainment must be placed within everyone's reach.

Now the Son of God Incarnate did institute a religion, *one* religion, to be introduced throughout the world and to endure for all time. If God Himself did not institute a second or a third or a one-hundredth religion, then only that which he actually did institute is of any consequence for salvation; only it can be divine; only it can offer to its members helps which conduce to supernatural glory.

All this seems so simple that one must wonder why it is not patent to everybody. The answer is that during the past four hundred years there has been such a conspiracy against the original Church that the minds of the English and German people in Europe and their descendants in this country have become too beclouded by prejudice to see.

(2) We might arrive at many conclusions, mathematical, scientific, economic, by our own serious study, but we cannot learn what Almighty God actually wants of us unless He Himself tell us. We could not, for instance, know that there are three persons in one God, that it was the second Person of the Blessed Trinity Who became man, that the souls of our first parents were en-

dowed with supernatural as well as natural life, that a special ordinance in the Church is capable of conferring this supernatural life on every soul, that there are other ordinances calculated to promote this life—we could not know these and many other things apart from revelation. Moreover we could not reasonably expect that the revelation, as it was originally made, would be safeguarded through the centuries in its original accuracy without divine protection for the institution to which it was committed, and without divine guidance for its correct interpretation.

Every land is filled with numerous courts and hundreds of men versed in the law, yet how often within any man's lifetime is not the highest court of the land asked to give an official interpretation of a law or the constitutionality of some measure for which legal sanction is requested. The true Church of Christ must have received its teaching direct from Christ, and that is receiving it in a supernatural way; it must continue to be Christ's Church, and this means that, throughout the centuries, it must ever teach the same and be competent to give utterance to official decisions relating to matters revealed or presumably revealed, and to matters which deal with morals. In other words, the Church must know both what has been revealed by the Almighty, and what is necessary in the matter of conduct for our salvation.

Then if salvation itself be of the supernatural order, the Church must be in possession of divinely-instituted helps which make such a salvation attainable.

(3) I have already intimated that the means of salvation must be of the same order as salvation itself. Now evidently such means could not be invented by men. Only a God can give divine things, can give supernatural things. We are taught that God enlightens and strength-

ens the soul supernaturally by actual grace in order that it may be able to discern good from evil, and be enabled to do the good and to avoid the evil. With the help of this actual grace many a pagan, many a good non-Catholic, to whom the definite things of revelation have never been brought home, is enabled to elicit an act of perfect love and perfect contrition, through which sanctifying grace is introduced into his soul without the help of any special religious ordinance or sacrament. But this is not the ordinary way in which people are to be saved. They are expected to become citizens in Christ's Kingdom; are expected to be instructed in the teachings and laws of that Kingdom. They are expected to participate in the divinely instituted form of worship in that Kingdom; they are expected to promote their soul's sanctification through the reception of the ordinances known as Sacraments, committed to that Kingdom.

Isn't it clear that only by using the supernatural we can hope to grow supernaturally and to reach a supernatural destiny? But isn't it equally clear that only a Church of actual divine origin, divinely protected against the gates of hell, divinely commissioned to teach and to dispense the mysteries of God, of which it alone can be in possession, can be adequate for the purpose?

The good things of churches other than the Catholic have been taken from ours; many other good things, yes, even the best things we have, have been rejected by them, not because Protestant people would not like to have them, but because they cannot have them. In other words, a religious organization which cannot trace its origin back to Christ, which can claim no Apostolic succession for its clergymen, evidently cannot have the Mass, cannot have the Eucharist, cannot have the Sacrament of Penance. Protestant religions are consistent in disowning these

things, because they are dependent on a Sacrament instituted by Christ, namely, Holy Orders, which Protestant clergymen never received.

CONCLUSION; Try to be thoroughly convinced of the fundamentals which I have brought home to you; they are at the bottom of everything, and withal so clear, so appealing, so convincing. Being impressed with the idea of the supernatural character of your Church and of its means of salvation, you can readily perceive that the best possible human institution must fall infinitely short of the one divine institution. It should be equally clear to you and to everybody that only a divine institution could lead to the supernatural glory of Heaven, because no human being, no matter how good and perfect and holy, can provide supernatural things of his own invention. He may *claim* a commission to teach, but Christ finished His work when, after having taught the Apostles quite well, He commissioned them to teach all things whatsoever He had taught them. St. John, His Apostle, warns against adding to or subtracting from anything which Jesus taught; and the Apostle Paul pronounced an anathema even against an angel from Heaven, who would presume to teach anything which was not in harmony with the gospel preached by the Apostles.

III.

SECOND MIDWEEK SERMON

The Parish Church

"This is verily the house of God and gate of Heaven."

—*Gen. XXVIII, 17.*

It would never occur to any of us to question the historical fact that 1900 years ago the God-man, Jesus Christ, established in this world a religion which was to offer to the people of all nations until the end of time, what He Himself offered to the people of Judea in person. But how were the teachings, the powers, the divinely appointed helps of this institution, called "The Church" to be brought to each individual? Just as the General Government of the United States sells me stamps through a local post-office, and furnishes me money through a National Bank in my town, so the Church of Christ must have in nearly every town one or more places where she dispenses her heavenly goods. There she receives people into her membership, teaches them, forgives their sins, feeds their souls, buries their dead.

The parish church, in which all this takes place, is (1) the House of God; (2) the Gate of Heaven, and (3) the Forum of truth.

(1) Your parish church is more truly the "House of God" than your home is your house, since Jesus Christ never leaves it from the day on which it is dedicated and deeded over to Him. There He is present in a veiled way for your worship as truly as He is present unveiled for the worship of the angels in Heaven. There he repeats His unbloody sacrifice day after day. There He feeds your souls on His precious flesh and blood. To His altar throne He invites you to come for quiet prayer, for consolation in your afflictions and troubles.

We can say with far greater truth than God's people in the Old Law that our God is near us, localized, as it were, to dispense His precious gifts and graces. The little red light, which is extinguished only on Good Friday, reminds you of the all-time sacramental presence of Jesus in your church.

You have the pictures of your friends in your house. For a similar reason we have figures and images of the friends of Jesus in His house—of Mary, Joseph, the apostles, the church's patron. Only the clergy who serve Jesus directly, and the acolytes, who serve the priest, may enter the enclosed sanctuary of the house of God.

(Speak of the dignity of altar boy and of choir member.)

(2) If it will ever be your happy lot to see God face to face in Heaven, to partake of His own unbounded happiness for ever and ever, you will owe it principally to the helps and ministrations you receive in your parish church.

Let us examine some of these divine helps:

(a) Even as innocent babes Almighty God saw in you nothing attractive, until after you were brought to the parish church and were born to a new, a higher life, through baptism. Through this sacrament God adopted you as His children, stamped on your souls His own image, clothed them with His own beauty, and started you on the way that leads straight to Heaven.

(b) The supernatural life received in baptism can be lost, and with it the friendship of God and the right to Heaven. But is its loss irrevocable or can it be regained? Thanks to the goodness and mercy and love of God, there is a sacrament which can remove the blackest sin and restore the beauty of divine grace to souls. You would go thousands of miles, you would risk your life to secure the benefit of the same. Whither must you go?

Only to the confessional in your parish church, where souls are raised from spiritual death, cleansed, and strengthened for new conflicts:

(c) Think of the benefits of Holy Communion received here; think of the strength and the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation; think of the marriage you contracted before the altar, when the priest prayed for God's special graces in your behalf in the very presence of His divine Son, the Author of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Think of the consolations brought to your sick from the parish church, the inestimable help to the dying, and their remembrance at the altar long after you will have forgotten them.

(3) Having become children of God, you must be taught about God. And though this is pre-eminently an age of boasted culture, though there were never so many schools, colleges, universities, libraries, magazines and books, there is only one forum in your locality where knowledge of God and of His will can be had, and guaranteed as reliable, as definite, as accurate as that imparted by Jesus Christ to His Apostles with His own lips. And that forum is the pulpit in your parish church.

From that rostrum you are served not opinions, but unadulterated truth; not politics, but genuine religious facts. The preaching is not done to please the ears, but to touch the hearts. The priest preaches not himself, but Christ crucified, risen, glorified; Christ divine, Christ the Mediator, Christ with us all days, Christ dispensing Himself to souls for their supernatural nourishment.

From that rostrum Christ's moral law, immutable and ever binding is expounded; sin is denounced and virtue inculcated. Death, Judgment, Hell are given as fair treatment as Heaven.

CONCLUSION:

Think of your parish church as God's local service station purely for your benefit, where no limitation is placed on the good things needed by the soul; where spiritual riches are dealt out to you from the Church's inexhaustible treasury.

The oftener you come for these goods, the better Christ's agent likes it; the greater your capacity for receiving the more pleasure you afford the dispenser.

IV.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

The Supernatural

There are some fundamental truths of faith, of which we should never lose sight. They are these: (a) we are destined to supernatural bliss in another world; (b) our souls must therefore be endowed with supernatural life here below, and must be supernaturally assisted for the realization of our sublime end; (c) we are not born into this world possessed of supernatural life, and must, therefore, have it imparted through some divine ordinance; (d) once placed in the supernatural order all our good works have a supernatural value, and, therefore, earn merit for the life to come.

That special gift of God, which confers supernatural life and aids us in acquiring heavenly merit, is called *Grace*. Let us briefly contemplate grace (1) as embellishing the soul; (2) as aiding us in the performance of works having eternal value; and (3) let us consider the sad state of those unpossessed of grace.

(1) You might be enabled to form some concept of the beauty of the soul clothed with divine grace by the feeble comparison between a new incandescent bulb into which the electric current has not been turned, and the same bulb all aglow with brilliancy after it is touched by electric power.

The newly born, but unbaptized babe, might be likened to this newly made incandescent bulb, disposed for, but not yet the recipient of illumination. This soul, perfect in the natural order, is disposed for and has an inalienable right to receive the higher stage of grace. The incandescent bulb was made to be lighted, and unless it

be so used it serves no purpose. Similarly the soul of everyone was made for God, and, therefore, to be united to God by the contact of grace. Without such illumination it does not serve the end for which it was made.

Our Divine Savior Himself furnishes even a more apt illustration when He says: "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

The illumination of the soul by grace, or the union of the soul with God through the possession of sanctifying grace elevates the soul to a divine degree, to a status "a little less than the angels". The soul is therefore made not only beautiful beyond all description, but dear to God in the extreme. It lives a life, which leads to Heaven; and its every prayer and good work and pious sentiment are recorded in Heaven for merit eternal.

Since the soul is a spirit the spiritual life should be normal to it. Since its destiny is supernatural it should never, for a moment, be without the supernatural life. The grace, which confers supernatural life and thus elevates the soul to this higher plane is called *Sanctifying Grace*, because it naturally tends to make the soul holy. It is often called *habitual* grace, because its possession should be permanent.

(2) The soul in sanctifying grace still needs what is known as *Actual* grace, or that divine assistance which Almighty God offers to everyone as an aid in the performance of good acts or in the avoidance of evil acts. Every soul in Heaven is an example of fidelity to actual grace; every soul in hell is an example of failure to cooperate with *actual* grace, often called the grace of *assistance*.

Just as the conferring of our natural life does not in-

sure its permanency without the help of air and water and food, so also the conferring of supernatural life does not guarantee its permanency. Even the soul so constituted needs food and nourishment, needs daily light and strength.

The spiritual life of the soul must be sustained supernaturally, just as much as the life of the body must be sustained by natural helps. So true is this that our Divine Savior reminded us that without Him, i.e., without His grace, we can do nothing towards eternal merit. We are told by the Apostle that we cannot even pronounce the name of Jesus with merit without God's grace.

Of course, actual grace is denied to no one whether he be Catholic or Protestant, Jew or pagan. According to the teaching of faith everyone receives at least sufficient actual grace from God for conversion and for salvation. But just as today the vast majority of the people will not even hearken to the claims of the Church of Christ, so they reject the grace of God, calculated to move them to perfect sorrow for their sins and to acquire the state of sanctifying grace independently of Baptism. Nothing is more lamentable than the fruitlessness of the efforts of the majority of the people of the world because they pass their whole lives outside the supernatural order.

(3) "Master, we have labored all the night and have taken nothing" expresses what is the actual truth about the efforts of the larger portion of mankind. They not only consume a great deal of valuable time without gain like the patient fishermen, but even if they, to use words of St. Paul, "distributed all their goods to the poor, and delivered up their bodies to be burned" they would fail to achieve that reward for which they are destined, simply because, lacking charity, or that true love of God

which presupposes the state of grace, they are not in position to merit supernaturally.

While the contemplation of such a situation might stun us, it must be clear to you that one who is not in the state of grace is dead in the supernatural sense, and, therefore, can no more act supernaturally than one who is physically dead can act naturally. This situation would appear to be cruel in the extreme if Almighty God did not make it possible for the souls of all men to receive supernatural life through participation in the plentiful redemption of His Divine Son.

Understand that the Son of God made the acquisition of the supernatural life possible, but not actual. He left the means for imparting it to His Church, and to that Church people must apply for those means of grace.

We experience pity for the farmer who plows his soil, sows his grain, uses every human effort to produce a crop, without the crop materializing. Those not in the state of grace have no better success from year to year in growing a crop to be harvested in Heaven. But the possession of the state of grace, together with the intention of serving God in everything, guarantees an immense harvest. This intention should always accompany our good works according to St. Paul, who says: "Whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ", and again "whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God".

CONCLUSION: We Catholics should never cease thanking Almighty God for selecting us, without any merit on our part, for union with Himself through sanctifying grace, with all which that union implies. We should thank Him also for the opportunity we have had to know Him better than other people, and to know more

about the spiritual and supernatural life than they, and, therefore, to be in position to cultivate it for our everlasting benefit.

Since, as we have already learned, most people have shut their eyes to the supernatural life, we should implore God to give them not only sufficient grace to enable them to see and to follow, but such powerful graces as will actually arouse them, first to conversion, and then "to taste how sweet the Lord is", how comforting it is to feel that every day one may progress supernaturally and, in the same proportion, acquire glory supernatural and everlasting.

V.

THIRD MIDWEEK SERMON

The Parish Church

“Behold I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world.” (Matt. XXVIII, 20.)

In this discourse, not the real presence of Jesus in our churches, but the plausibility and, therefore, the easy credibility of an arrangement by which Almighty God would be personally near us, will be considered. If we can believe in the Incarnation, as all Catholics do, and as most Protestants do; if we can believe in the crucifixion of a God as practically all Christians claim they do, then certainly it should not be difficult to believe in the Holy Eucharist, the Mass or any other truth of faith whatsoever. The value of the human soul and, therefore, the infinite love which God must entertain for it, and the anxiety of God that it be made safe for all eternity at any cost, are the keys to the solution of practically every momentous truth of faith.

Now let us consider (1) that the Eucharist is in perfect harmony with the infinite love of God; (2) that the New Law must certainly boast of more than the Old; and (3) the natural longing of the soul for union with God.

(1) God is infinite in His every perfection; therefore His love is infinite; therefore we could not even conceive of His love going too far; therefore it did not go too far when He instituted the Eucharist. Of His love God Himself says: “I have loved thee with an everlasting love” (Jer. XXXI, 3). “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John III, 16). And this Son of God expresses the infinity of His love in these strong words: “As the Father hath loved Me, so I have

loved you" (John XV, 9). God the Father certainly loved the Son with an infinite love, and Christ says that His love for us is just as limitless. And St. John, speaking of Christ's love, says: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end", i. e., to the last limit love could go.

Not only is God's love infinite; it is also a personal love. "I have loved 'thee' with an everlasting love; I have redeemed 'thee' and called 'thee' by name; 'thou' art mine." "Christ loved 'me' and delivered Himself up for 'me'". So many of Christ's parables, notably those of the "Good Shepherd", "Good Samaritan" and "Prodigal Son", lay stress on the personal nature of God's love for us. Human love is personal, and Christ compares His love to human love: "Can a mother forget her child? . . . Even so I shall not forget thee". The soul of every Christian who is free from grievous sin is most attractive to God; it becomes His "delight to be with the children of men." Now perfect and personal love must tend to union with the object loved.

(2) Though the Jewish religion was very imperfect as compared to the perfect religion of Christ; yet members of the former had closer union with God than adherents of the latter, if Christ is not personally present among Christians. See the constant nearness of God's presence with the Jews in the "cloud" and in the "pillar of fire", which were always with them on their journey to the Promised Land. In their communion service they had a living reality, whose flesh they ate, viz.: the spotless lamb. And their daily prayer was that the Emmanuel—God with us—might come in person.

God came, but God (Jesus) gone from us again would not satisfy the heart of man. Why should the Christians of all times not have "God with them" on their way to the real Promised Land—Heaven? Jesus looked back-

ward to by Christians would mean no more than Jesus looked forward to by the Jews. As far as faith is concerned it would not mean as much, for it would be easier for us to believe that God had come to earth after having palpable proof of it, than for people who lived before His coming to believe that He would thus condescend to unite Himself to human nature.

Jesus was for all—for all time; “Jesus Christ yesterday, today and the same forever.” “Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world” (Matt. XXII, 20.)

(3) And on man’s part there is an irresistible longing for union with God. Pious people would rather die a thousand times than be separated from God by grievous sin; and should such separation occur they are unhappy until peace and union with God are established again. Even the errors of paganism testify to the naturalness of man’s longing for union with God. What else did their temples to the “unknown” God, their sacrifices to appease the deity, mean?

God, having constituted Himself man’s last end, placed within man’s breast a craving for union with Himself, and hence He must needs grant man what He made it natural for him to crave for.

To believe this is so natural that at Protestant revivals, “union with Jesus” is the cry; “come to Jesus”, “put on Jesus” is the invitation. The “Salvation Army” preacher on the street corner has the same message.

Ardent love cannot bear separation, and it wants the conscious presence of the object loved.

The natural relationship of Christ to the Church (the Church is called His spouse) demands his real presence where the Church is. Christ is the “Head of the Body,—the Church”. Therefore He should be actually present with the Church.

CONCLUSION—

Should non-Catholics tell you that you believe too much when you believe in the actual presence of the Glorified Christ in the Holy Eucharist, remind them that this Teaching is quite easy to believe in the light of the many other truths which they very readily accept, such as the Incarnation and Redemption by a God-man. If God thought enough of us to die for us, His love does not become more infinite by inventing a means of remaining with us and of uniting Himself to us for our more certain salvation.

VI.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

The Supernatural

Every city has a water-works and an electric lighting system for all the people. But the building of the huge reservoir and the filling of it with water will be of no special benefit to the individual unless the water be brought into his house by pipes connected with the great supply. The generation of ever so much electric power and light at a central plant will be of little benefit to the individual unless the current be actually carried to his home by connecting wires.

In a similar manner the merits of Christ's plentiful Redemption, sufficient to serve the whole human race, must be brought to individual souls by what theologians term the "channels of grace" or the Sacraments. We often speak of the Sacramental *system*, just as we speak of a lighting system, because the Sacraments are conveyors of supernatural light, power and help to souls.

Although all the Sacraments (1) confer sanctifying grace, they (2) are intended each for a different purpose, and (3) they have a value too little understood and appreciated.

(1) In our last instruction we saw what grace is—the most precious gift that God could bestow on a creature—because it is a participation of His own divine nature, beautifying the soul beyond all description, making it deserving of a place among the angels in Heaven.

Now all Sacraments, and there are seven of them, are conveyors of sanctifying grace. Two of them, namely Baptism and Penance, convey grace to a soul that has

been without it, the other five amplify and increase the grace already adorning the soul.

You have been told that if the Catholic religion excelled all other religions only because it had the great official sacrifice of the New Law instituted by Christ on the night before He died, it would be incomparably more attractive than any other. It may be said with equal truth that if the Catholic Church alone had the seven grace-producing Sacraments it would be vastly superior to any other religion. Because Protestantism lacks that particular Sacrament which empowers the priest to confer others, Protestants cannot have the Sacraments of Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction and Holy Orders. Most of them do not recognize marriage as a Sacrament and claim only two, namely, Baptism and what they denominate the Lord's Supper. The latter does not and, of course, cannot mean what we call the Holy Eucharist, which presupposes the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Mass.

Baptism, conferring Christian citizenship on the individual, can be conferred only once. Even an American citizen cannot get rid of his citizenship, and cannot be enrolled as a citizen more than once; only the benefits of American citizenship can be restored when lost. Similarly, Confirmation registers forever in Heaven as a soldier of Christ the one who receives it. In the same manner he who receives Holy Orders is a priest forever. The other four Sacraments may be administered more than once, and the two Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist may, and should be, received frequently.

(2) From what I have already said it is clear that each of the seven Sacraments is designed to accomplish a certain very definite spiritual and supernatural effect. Baptism, bringing grace to the soul the first time, ele-

vates it to the supernatural order, and makes it an heir of Heaven. Hence the Catholic Church teaches that the newly baptized infant or adult would, if death intervened immediately, take flight to God and become a sharer of His indescribable glory. Placed on the road which leads to Heaven every good work performed with the assistance of actual grace advances the person along the road and is credited to his account in the book of life.

But the supernatural state of soul, conferred by Baptism in the first instance, can unfortunately be lost by grievous sin. But it need not be permanently lost, because the Sacrament of Penance was instituted to restore the grace, and to retrieve the merit earned previously to the loss of grace.

Confirmation, bringing the Holy Ghost into the soul, must needs augment grace wonderfully. The Holy Eucharist, bringing the soul's Savior and Redeemer, must evidently further nourish it with supernatural or divine life. This Sacrament is intended to be for the soul what food is for the body, namely, a source of nourishment and strength.

Extreme Unction is a Sacrament which is administered to the follower of Christ who is in danger of death, and is designed, while it increases grace, to remove the remains of sin and prepare it for the favorable judgment prior to its admission into the Heavenly country.

The Sacrament of Matrimony gives a supernatural character to the marriage contract, and supplies special graces calculated to promote the sanctification of the married couple and to assist them in fulfilling the duties of the married state.

Holy Orders, as has already been stated, is basic for the production and administration of other Sacraments,

and is conferred only on those who are chosen by God to guide and direct His people and to dispense His supernatural ordinances to them.

(3) Nothing is more deplorable than the little appreciation Catholics manifest for the divine things which we call the Sacraments. Their lack of appreciation is evidently due to the lack of realization of the value of grace, and this must be due principally to their thoughtlessness, to their worldly-mindedness, which diverts their attention altogether from their soul and its salvation. Surely no one, who knows what it means to live in God's favor and to live actually united to Him, would ever remain separated from Him for a single day. He would be extremely cautious not only to avoid sin, but to struggle hard for the acquisition of virtue. He would be more intent upon promoting his spiritual interests than the most miserly man would be intent on promoting his worldly business. After knowing that he had a bank account with God through the reception of sanctifying grace, he would be alert to every opportunity to earn more, and would be happy in the satisfaction that from day to day his fortune, as recorded in the books of Heaven, is continuously growing for his perpetual enjoyment.

One who realized his intimacy with his God through the possession of grace, would be in frequent silent communication with Him, and many times during the day whisper to Him words of sorrow and regret for unfaithfulness, and words of love and loyalty. He would be a daily attendant at Mass, if it were at all possible, and a daily recipient of Holy Communion. He would seldom need the Sacrament of Penance, but would still receive it often for its grace-increasing benefits.

Let it ever be remembered that if grace be the most precious thing in all creation the Sacraments which con-

vey it must be invaluable, and that since they are the principal source of our sanctification, we should need no urging to receive those which we may receive often.

CONCLUSION: Since Baptism makes even of the little infant a child of God and embellishes its soul with the beauty of an angel, you can readily understand why the Church would have parents apply for Baptism for the newly born babe as soon as it would be safe to take it to the church. Since we can increase the grace of Baptism by the reception of other Sacraments more than by any good works of our own, they should have a great appeal to us even for that benefit. Since numerous people in our country have never been baptized and, therefore, live on a plane purely natural, we should pray that they may be enlightened from Heaven to enroll themselves through Baptism as citizens in Christ's Kingdom on earth where all the other great helps towards salvation would be within their reach.

VII.

FOURTH MIDWEEK SERMON

The Parish Church

"We have an altar"—Hebrews

Since man is expected to live first for the greater glory of God, it seems plain that next in importance to divine revelation (by which we receive accurate and definite knowledge of God and of His will) is the need of a divinely instituted form of worship, whereby the Creator may be truly and even infinitely honored. It is equally important that there should be one grand sacrifice, by means of which all could worship Him alike.

If the Old Law had only shadows, types and figures of great realities which the New Dispensation would have, it must be clear that the Christian religion would have (1) a perfect form of worship; (2) a divinely instituted priesthood; and (3) an altar of sacrifice in every church.

(1) When we read in the Old Testament of the careful and detailed directions which Jehovah Himself gave concerning the mode of worship, we cannot think otherwise than that His divine Son upon earth, Who sought only His Father's glory, would institute a perfect form of worship for the perfect religion He founded—even a form of worship worthy of that Heavenly Father. In the Old Law, the divinely appointed form of public worship had the character of sacrifice. Therefore, in the New Dispensation, it would certainly be sacrifice, but possessing a value infinitely superior.

Only that is true worship of God which of itself expresses man's complete dependence on God and God's absolute rulership over him. Of such character were

the bloody and unbloody sacrifices recorded in the Old Testament, from Abel down to Christ. Such was the character of Christ's bloody sacrifice on Calvary, and of His unbloody sacrifice at the Last Supper, when He began His priesthood "according to the order of Melchisedech" (Ps. 109), and which He would perpetuate through His representatives (I Cor. XI, 26).

(2) The prophet Malachy (I., 10, 11) distinctly states that the Gentiles (the rest of the world as distinguished from the Jews) would one day have a great sacrifice, a clean oblation. And when David, peering through ten centuries of the future, saw Christ in the act of offering Himself to the Heavenly Father under the form of bread and wine, he called Him "a priest": "Thou art a priest" (Ps. 109); called Him a priest "forever" (Ibid), because He was instituting the grand, solemn infinite form of sacrifice for the Church, with which He would be "all days" (Matt. XXVII, 20).

As Jesus would teach, baptize, forgive sins through His Apostles and their successors, so through their agency would He continue His priesthood "according to the order of Melchisedech". "Do ye this in commemoration of Me" (Luke XXII, 19), well conveys the delegation, since to honor, worship and glorify God must be the first consideration of the Church, so must it be the principal function of those who are to carry on Christ's work. St. Paul makes this plain, when he says: "Every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things which appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Hebr. V, 1); he refers to it as a sign of the divine character of the Church, of which he was a minister, both in Hebr. XIII, 10, and in I Cor. X, 16-22.

Priest, altar, sacrifice, are inseparable from true religion; they are essential for the proper worship of God,

hence "they ordained priests in every city" (Tit. I, 5). By such ordination we have priests today who "do in commemoration of Him" what Christ Himself did at the Last Supper, who like the Apostles are "dispensers of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. IV, 1).

(3) The repetition of the sacrifice of the Last Supper is called the "Holy Sacrifice of the Mass", for which "we have an altar" like St. Paul did, and on which every day Jesus, through the priest, exercises His own eternal priesthood. In this act especially does the priest represent Jesus Christ. The very garments with which he is robed indicate how his personality is lost for the moment, and Jesus represented.

Oh, how can people fail to see that it was necessary for the religion of Christ to have a form of worship of God, alike perfect and divinely instituted! And how can they fail to see that the Mass must be this, since it is the historical form of Christianity's worship! The catacombs, in which the first Christians worshipped, bear every trace of the early Christian altar and Mass. Carlyle (cf. Thomas Carlyle, Froude) says: "The Mass is the most genuine relic of religious belief now left to us." And Marius, another Protestant, writes: "The Mass would seem to have been said continuously from the time of the Apostles. Its details, as one by one they become visible in later history, have already the character of what is ancient and venerable. 'We are very old and ye are young', they seem to protest to those who fail to understand them." The non-Catholic, present at Mass in a Catholic church, sees only the ceremonies, or the dress in which the form of worship is clothed. You are acquainted with the reality behind those accidents; but is your conduct in keeping with your belief?

CONCLUSION—

Singing of hymns, and listening to a preacher do not constitute worship in its true sense. Such a service does not differ from many a public hall celebration in honor of a man. True worship implies an acknowledgment of dependence on the part of the worshippers. Worship worthy of God requires a God as both priest and victim.

Infinite, and therefore wholly adequate, worship of God takes place daily in your parish church; and what accusation does your conscience make against you who never attend the same unless you must?

VIII.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

The Supernatural

"I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me"—Gal. II-20

These words are true not only after Holy Communion, but during whatever long period we live in the state of sanctifying grace. St. Paul identifies grace with charity or the love of God, which consists of union between the soul and God.

As the highest form of created love unites husband and wife so that they "become two in one flesh", so the mutual love between the soul and God unites them intimately: "If any man will love Me, My Father will love him and We shall come to him and take up our abode with him."

To preserve this union and to augment it, I must (1) love God above all things; (2) cultivate personal devotion to Jesus "Who liveth in me", and (3) love my neighbor as myself.

(1) We love God above all things when we prefer Him to any person or thing in the material or natural order, such as parents, friends, wealth, health, comfort, position, pleasure. We love God above all things when we are obedient to His laws and to the law of His Church, through which He speaks. We love God above all things when we are willing to endure any privation and to suffer death for His sake; when we surrender our wills; when we go out of our way to please Him, as people are wont to do who ardently love one another.

Evidently we do not love God above all things, and we can hardly be said to love Him at all, if we are not concerned about union with Him through sanctifying

grace, because the alternative of sanctifying grace in an adult is mortal sin, which means union with the devil. One who, after falling into grievous sin, delays repentance, has no love for God. Therefore the Catholic who goes to Confession and Holy Communion only at stated intervals, without any special reference to the need of approaching the Sacraments in order to recover sanctifying grace, does not truly love God.

Union with God is the greatest possible dignity to which the creature can be raised, and since it is within the power of everyone to enjoy such union and, by such union, to merit for Heaven every hour of the day, every Catholic should strive for it and retain it. If we live in the state of grace we are veritable temples of the Holy Ghost, the Sanctifier, and will become steadily more sanctified.

(2) If nature has implanted in the human breast love and respect for parents, who are the authors of our being, the protectors of our helpless infancy, the providers during our youth, how much more weighty must be our obligation to love our God, Who bears towards us in an infinite degree practically all the relations which our parents bear towards us. But to win our love God stooped from Heaven to unite Himself to our nature, who became our Brother. He demonstrated His love for us by the greatest possible proof: "greater love than this no man hath that He lay down His life for His friend."

When He instituted the Holy Eucharist whereby He might be united to us in the most intimate personal manner, God the Son did it entirely for our sake, and not for His own. Towards us He has filled all the roles of Lover, of Good Shepherd, of Good Samaritan. He has done for us what He did for the Prodigal, for Magdalen, for Peter, for the repentant thief. Although we have betrayed

Him and scourged Him, and crowned Him with thorns and spat in His face and crucified Him, He has pardoned us repeatedly.

Christ loves us with a tender human heart, and asks that we so love Him in return. From youth we have been taught of the love of His Sacred Heart for us and for all mankind, of the reparation which He would like to have us offer to Him for the coldness and indifference of millions of ungrateful ones.

St. Paul says: "All things are yours and you are Christ's" By this he means to say that everything in the natural order was created by Almighty God for us, but that we were created for Christ, to Whom we owe everything in the supernatural order, including the personal union which we may enjoy with God.

(3) Every human creature is a member of the great human family, of which God is the author. Every baptized Catholic is a member of the great spiritual kingdom, of which Christ is the head. As the members of our body are all united, one to the other, so the members of the great mystical body of Christ are united one to the other, and should be united by mutual love.

All those who live in the state of grace are equally "adopted sons of God," equally objects of His love, equally destined to spend a happy eternity with Him in Heaven. Evidently there should be mutual love as between one member of the great human family and the other, and more mutual love as between one member of God's Church and another. St. Paul bids us do good to all, but "especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

Seven among the ten Commandments are based on the Commandment of the love of neighbor, and any serious violation of these Commandments not only affects

the one who violates them, but many others. You know how anger, hatred, revenge, murder, may affect a multitude of others; how stealing and cheating may violate the rights of many; how lying and detraction may injure another before numerous persons. These violations of God's Commandments affecting our neighbors, are certainly not consistent with love of God; and the violation of a Commandment, which implies scandal and spiritual murder, often affects a large part of the body of Christ—and must incur the very enmity of God Himself.

We have been reading much about the kidnaping and murder of the Lindbergh baby, but one who weans an innocent youth from God, his Father and from Mary, his Mother, is a far worse kidnaper and murderer. One who leads another into mortal sin is worse than the gangster murderer. Did not Christ Himself declare: "Fear not him who killeth the body, but rather fear him who destroys both body and soul in hell?"

As the violation of God's Commandments brings injury to or inflicts injustice on others, and equally robs us of His grace, so the observance of His Commandments helps others, edifies others, brings others closer to God and strengthens the union of the individual with his God.

CONCLUSION: No other law than the law of Christ should be our guide; and for our own sakes, for the sake of bringing His law to the notice of others and of winning new recruits for Him we Catholics should strictly observe that law. With St. Paul we should ever be prompted to declare, and to prove our actions that, "nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

IX.

FIFTH MIDWEEK SERMON

The Parish Church

“Do ye this in commemoration of Me”—Luke XXII, 19

If the Catholic religion enjoyed no other advantage over other religions than the possession of the Mass, it would be infinitely above all of them. If the Catholic people enjoyed no other privilege than to assist at Mass and to benefit by its power, they would be infinitely better off than all other people.

This truth cannot be too much emphasized and it should occupy more of the thought and attention of Catholics in order that they may the better realize the extent to which they are blessed.

Let us by a brief religious survey of the past and present convince ourselves (1) that for fifteen centuries the Mass was the official form of Christian worship; (2) that it has been taken away from Protestants; and (3) that it goes on uninterruptedly for God's glory and mankind's benefit.

(1) The Church still preserves the wooden altar at which St. Peter and his successors during the era of martyrs said Mass. The Catacombs, in which the early Christians worshipped, are filled with reminders of the Eucharistic sacrifice of which they were the scene.

The Mass was so widely offered at the beginning of the second century that St. Irenaeus, writing in the year 202, says: “The oblation of the New Covenant is the Lord's Supper; Christ instituted it as both a sacrifice and a Sacrament, and throughout all the world the Church offers this Sacrifice.”

The altar of the New Testament sacrifice was given the place of honor in the churches which Constantine

built in Rome immediately after his conversion in the year 325, and in the many churches built by his mother, Helena, in the Holy Land, at Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem.

The Mass has continued down to this day through the Greek Church as through our own. The Eutychian and Nestorian sects, which date back fifteen centuries, still have the Mass.

There is no doubt about its continual use in the Church from the day Christ immolated Himself mystically at the Last Supper and then commissioned the Apostles to do the identical thing which He had done. He had just exercised the priesthood according to the order of Melchisedech, and directed that His priesthood should be continued through the Apostles and their successors "until I come", namely, at the end of the world. It was through these human agents that He would be "a priest forever" according to that order.

Paul was not one of the Apostles who received this commission directly from Christ, but he refers to his own exercise of that priesthood, calling the bread which he broke the "partaking of the Body of the Lord", and the Chalice which he blessed "the communion of the Blood of Christ."

(2) It is only during the last four hundred years that any who call themselves Christians have been deprived of the Mass, which was lost to Protestant Christians of this era when Apostolic succession was lost by abolition of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, through which candidates for the ministry are empowered and commissioned to "do in commemoration of Him" what Christ at the Last Supper deputed the Apostles and their successors to do in His memory and in His name. They lost the Holy Eucharist both as a Sacrifice and as a Sacrament, and at whatsoever form of worship of God they

assist, their worship not only does not exceed their own powers, but falls below that of the people of the Old Law, who had at least divinely-instituted sacrifices, even if they were only shadows of the great realities which were to be enjoyed by those holding membership in the Kingdom of God in the New Law.

Not comprehending the Mass they do not understand that Catholics have more than mere symbols, empty ceremonies, and exterior pomp. They entertain the notion that you are attracted to Mass on Sunday during all sorts of weather by the ceremonial of the Church, which they believe to consist in vestments and candles and incense and orderly movements with whose meaning you are none too familiar.

You, on the other hand, know that these things would not attract you to divine services at all. You know that the average Catholic comes out to the Mass which has the least display of ceremony.

Of course, every vestment has its meaning; every movement of the priest is significant; every prayer, every word of the Mass was judiciously chosen. You know that all essential parts of the first Mass offered by Jesus Himself are incorporated in one Mass, associated with official ecclesiastical prayers as replete with unction as with meaning and power.

The Mass is a sacrificial action rather than a combination of prayers, and this explains why it is of little importance whether the Mass be said in the old language, or whether it be said for the most part in a low tone of voice inaudible to the people. The priest acts as an official ecclesiastical person, and therefore he doffs his secular garb and robes himself in vestments by which Christ is impersonated. The amice represents the cloth by which Christ was blindfolded; the alb, the white garment with which Herod clothed Him; the cincture, the

cord by which He was tied to the pillar; the altar itself points to His sacrifice. Its candles of beeswax represent His virginal body, and their burning during the daytime recalls the trying days of the first century when the Mass was offered in the otherwise dark, underground Catacombs, when the Mass was said over the tombs of martyrs. This explains why the relics of martyrs must be enclosed in the altarstone on which the host and chalice rest.

(3) The words of the Prophet Malachy are literally fulfilled in our day. The "clean Oblation" is "offered in every place from the rising to the setting of the sun." There is not a minute of the day, not a minute of the night, when the Holy Sacrifice is not being offered to Almighty God somewhere.

While the people of our country are sound asleep, the Holy Sacrifice is being offered in tens of thousands of churches throughout Europe; and while Europe is sleeping in the dead of night, thousands of priests in other parts of the world are at the altar. Large congregations are going home from Mass in New York when the first congregations of Chicago convene; in the mountain states the priest is at the altar two hours after all the services are over in New York; and in California three hours longer. As we travel round the world Mass-time is an hour later every thousand miles, and since the earth is 24,000 miles in circumference and the Catholic Church is everywhere, it is always Mass time somewhere.

This is an astounding thing to contemplate, and realizing that there is no interruption to the mystical immolation of Christ, no interruption to His prayer: "Father forgive them", we can readily grasp why God should tolerate mankind, so indifferent, so sinful, so criminal.

CONCLUSION—

If the Mass is what you have been taught it is, then it is easy to understand that in this world, of all things, "it is the Mass that matters". Accumulate the merits of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, of the Apostles, of all the martyrs, of the seraphic saints through the centuries, and their value falls short of that of a single Mass. They were the offerings of creatures; the Mass is the offering of the Incarnate Son of God.

If the Mass is what you believe it to be, then it is clear why the Catholic Church obligates all her children to attend Mass every Sunday and on feasts which honor the great mysteries of faith, and which we call Holydays of Obligation.

If the Mass is what Catholics believe it to be, isn't it surprising that all do not attend the Holy Sacrifice every day?

X.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

The Supernatural

“All whatsoever you do in word or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”—Col. III, 17.

We are accustomed to offer all our prayers to God “through Jesus Christ His Son, Our Lord.” We should also form the habit of offering all our work, our recreation, our sufferings to God through Jesus.

The Church dedicates the whole year, divided into ecclesiastical seasons, to Jesus. Advent is her preparation for His coming, and ends with the feast of His Nativity. The pre-Lenten season is dedicated to His childhood; Lent to His sufferings and death; the Easter season to His Resurrection; the long season between Pentecost and Advent to His teachings and exhortations. The days of the week are dedicated to Jesus and to His saints. Every Sunday is the Lord’s day.

In a similar manner we should live for Jesus always and be united to Him (1) in our work; (2) in our recreation; and (3) in our trials and sufferings.

(1) There is a universal tendency to divorce religion from the daily affairs of life, and this tendency results in giving to the world and to the devil most of man’s time, most of his thoughts, nearly all his energy—while every moment should be related to the eternity which is so near for every one of us.

Catholics, influenced by the spirit of the world, act as though religion has place only in the churches; that it has no place in business, in politics, in work, or in recreation. Religious practice, outside a few minutes at prayer morning and night, is relegated to Sundays. In

fact, Catholics are often accused by Protestants of going to Mass on Sunday morning and of spending the balance even of that day in the most worldly manner.

Christ teaches the very opposite, namely, that we cannot serve both God and Mammon. God will surely not be satisfied if Mammon be worshipped six days and He only one. We should consecrate our daily work to God, perform it in the spirit of prayer in union with Jesus, Who made the glory of God the object of all He did. We should renew our good intention when the Angelus Bell reminds of the great mystery of the Incarnation at noon and in the evening.

(2) In the Middle Ages everywhere (and the custom still persists in some Catholic countries) people even greeted one another on the street with some Christian salutation. In monasteries and convents the Religious rise at an early hour every morning after having kept unbroken silence from the time of night prayer the previous evening. They betake themselves often before dawn to the chapel to pass a whole hour in prayer and meditation; they assist at Holy Mass and receive Holy Communion daily; their labor and recreation are consecrated to God; they listen to spiritual reading while they eat; they make several visits to the Blessed Sacrament between work and study, between work and recreation.

Now, while the laity in the world cannot so apportion their time, they can follow the religious in principle.

They can sign themselves with the sign of the cross on awakening, fall down on their knees for a minute to adore their God and to offer the new day to Him with all that it brings. They will then at least avoid such recreation, after work, as would be unworthy of one who would honor God in all things. They can aim at being an inspiration, a good example to others in speech and man-

ner, in avoiding sinful and scandalizing conversation or pleasure or amusement.

They can read from a good book ten or fifteen minutes before or after saying their night prayers, and go to sleep saying the Rosary or communing with their Guardian Angel, who will be asked to keep vigil over them in the presence of their God throughout the night.

(3) Why should one not convert sickness, suffering and trials into profit? If these must be borne, why make them harder by impatience, discouragement, and complaint? Why not accept them in the same spirit God sends them, in the spirit of love? That is the way of converting sorrow into joy, of making of an otherwise unhappy life a real delight, as many saints did. While many Catholics of little faith, who lost their all following the recent industrial and bank collapse, were driven to despair and even suicide, others of stronger faith, who were led to God with great ardor and increased piety, have found wonderful consolation.

Probably the happiest person in all America is a woman in Washington, D. C., the founder of the Christ Child Society, now functioning in many large cities in the interest of the poor, the afflicted and the suffering. She herself has been bedfast and in pain for more than forty years, yet convinced that God has been particularly good to her, inasmuch as she is privileged to work her way to glory as Christ Himself did—by suffering.

God, Who is goodness and love itself, would not afflict His children with pain and sorrow in this world if these could not be turned into gladness and joy eternal, by being accepted cheerfully and borne patiently in imitation of His beloved Son, Who deliberately chose poverty in place of riches, suffering in place of joy in this world, as calculated to better win riches and joy everlasting.

CONCLUSION: Never forget the very important lesson that our soul, which is the principal part of our being, being a spirit, should possess spiritual life; that, because our soul was made not for this world, but for Heaven, which can be reached only by supernatural means, it should never be without the supernatural life. It, therefore, should always be free from mortal sin after Baptism, and the supernatural life should be nourished by prayer, by the Sacraments, by the performance of good works.

We should try to form the habit of realizing the presence of the Holy Ghost in our soul, our close relationship to Jesus, and our greater obligation to be loyal to Him, and to perform in His name whatever we do and to endure, but of love for Him, whatever trials and afflictions are sent to us.

XI.

SIXTH MIDWEEK SERMON

The Parish Church

We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee.—From the Gloria.

If we are bound as creatures and sinners to **ADORE**, **ATONE**, **THANK**, **INTERCEDE**, then the more thoroughly we acquit ourselves of these obligations, the more we become approved of God.

If our feeble efforts to meet these demands of the Creator be united to the infinite intercessory power of Christ, Who is actually the priest and the victim of the Mass, then our prayers of **ADORATION**, **ATONEMENT**, **THANKSGIVING** and **PETITION** have infinite value.

In assisting at Mass it is recommended that the Holy Sacrifice be divided into four parts, the first to cover that portion which precedes the Offertory; the second that portion which runs from the Offertory to the Consecration; the third that solemn portion which begins with the Consecration and ends with the Communion; the fourth that portion embraced between the Communion and the end of Mass.

(1) **ADORE**. In adoration we contrast our sinfulness with the holiness of God; our nothingness with His majesty.

When the priest begins the prayers at the foot of the altar he acknowledges his unworthiness to offer the Holy Sacrifice; and the acolytes, in the name of the people, make the same acknowledgment and ask for pardon and absolution from all sins. This is done the while, in the background, we see Jesus, prostrate in the Garden of Gethsemane, adoring the Heavenly Father in our behalf.

As the priest mounts the steps he again asks pardon through the merits of the martyrs, whose relics he bends over to kiss. At the *Kryie Eleison* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are petitioned for mercy and pardon. Then note the expressions of adoration in the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Borrowing the words of the host of angels who came down from Heaven to worship Jesus at Bethlehem, the priest repeats: "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee."

Humility and adoration are implied in the petitions contained in the *Collects*, in which our prayers are offered through the saint whose feast is commemorated. In the spirit of humility, which is itself adoration, we seek to draw lessons from the *Epistle* and *Gospel*.

The whole profession of faith, contained in the *Nicene Creed*, is a surrender of the mind to the revelation of God—which means adoration; and at the words "*He became Incarnate*" we all bend the knee in actual adoration.

All the while we follow this portion of the Mass we strive to feel keenly the fact that the Almighty, being worthy of infinite worship and adoration, must receive homage greater than we are competent to bestow. But if we are able to offer Him His own beloved Son, our gift has infinite value and pays in full whatever debt of worship we owe Him.

Therefore, during the five minutes consumed between the beginning of a low Mass and the Offertory strive to fill your minds with thoughts of your complete dependence on God for everything, with thoughts of His rightful claim to your service and love. Ask Jesus, Who offers the Holy Sacrifice, to supply, by His adoration and obedience, what your past life has lacked. You will still be absorbed in these reflections when it will be time to
(2) ATONE—The principal purpose of Calvary's sacri-

fice, of which the Mass is the renewal, was to make infinite atonement for mankind's sins. The great High Priest of that day was promised as our "priest forever" from the rising to the setting of the sun, fulfilling the prophet's promise that "everywhere is offered a clean oblation" to the Blessed Trinity.

Since your sins are offences against God, Whose dignity is infinite, their malice is infinite. That being true, you could never adequately atone for them of your own power. But through the Mass you are able to make adequate satisfaction because Jesus places Calvary's merits in your hands that they may be offered in atonement for your personal transgressions.

It is not his own gift or yours which the priest offers in atonement, for note the words of the first *Offertory* prayer:

"Accept O Holy Father, Almighty, eternal God, this Immaculate Host" (Victim)—*Calvary's Victim*—for the innumerable sins, offences and negligences of those present at Mass, and for all the living and the dead.

The Holy Trinity is besought to accept the oblation in memory of the passion of Jesus, of His resurrection and ascension, and in honor of His Blessed Mother, of His precursor, John the Baptist, of His chief apostles, Peter and Paul, and of all the saints, whose powerful prayers are besought in your behalf.

While some other sentiments enter into the prayers immediately preceding the Consecration, their dominant note is *atonement*, sorrow for sins, for which only an infinite Victim can compensate.

At the *Memento of the Living* you and your friends are specially presented to the eternal Father, through Jesus Christ His Son, our Lord "for the redemption of their souls, for the hope of their salvation" and for their welfare generally.

With his hands extended over the bread and wine about to be consecrated the priest beseeches the Almighty "to save us from eternal damnation and to number us among the elect, through Christ our Lord", into Whose hands and feet we fancy we hear the driving of the crucifying nails, and "Who the night before He died, took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and lifting His eyes to Heaven to Thee His Omnipotent Father God, giving Thee thanks, blessed, broke and gave to His disciples saying, receive and eat ye all of this for THIS IS MY BODY."

You know the words spoken by Jesus over the wine: "This is the chalice of my blood, of the new and eternal Testament, which shall be shed for *you* and for many *unto the remission of sins.*"

The essence of Calvary's sacrifice has been renewed according to Christ's mandate "As often as *you* shall do *this*, you shall do it in memory of Me."

Therefore from the Offertory until after the Consecration occupy yourselves with sentiments of reparation, with acts of sorrow, with resolutions of amendment, and, with the priest, offer Jesus, the altar's Victim, to the Holy Trinity in atonement of all. Then begin to express your heartfelt gratitude.

(3) THANK. While Thanksgiving is not the predominant sentiment in the third part of the Holy Sacrifice—that which ends with the Communion of the priest—you need not be told that it is the most suitable time to express your gratitude to your Creator and constant Benefactor, your Father, Who is in Heaven. How could you thank Him better than to offer Him, in the words of the first post-Elevation prayer, "the pure Victim, the holy Victim, the immaculate Victim, the holy bread of life eternal, and the chalice of perpetual salvation"?

How grateful you should be that the priest remem-

bers your beloved departed ones, and prays Jesus to “grant them a place of refreshment, light and peace” while you actually offer Him to His heavenly Father for that purpose, reminding Him, at the same time, that you too crave for “fellowship with His holy apostles and martyrs and all His saints”! “Through Him and with Him and in Him alone” does the Father and Holy Ghost receive true “honor and glory” upon this earth.

How grateful the congregation should be for the priest’s sweet petition to Jesus, “May the peace of the Lord be always with you”!

Now the priest’s thoughts are centered on the Holy Communion he is soon to receive, and so should yours be—in a spirit of gratitude that you enjoy the wonderful privilege not accorded even to His Mother or Magdalene or John, who attended so devoutly the bloody sacrifice He offered on Calvary. How touching are the words addressed to Jesus about to complete His unbloody immolation on the altar: “Deliver me by this, Thy most sacred body and blood from all my iniquities, and from every evil; make me always cleave to Thy Commandments, and never suffer me to be separated from Thee”!

Over and over you should tell the Heavenly Father, in your own way, that you wish to thank Him adequately and therefore infinitely, for all His goodness to you and yours, especially for the gift of the true faith, and that, therefore, you offer Him His own divine Son in gratitude.

Thanksgiving, from the bottom of one’s heart, should, of course, be offered immediately following the reception of Holy Communion. It should be associated with humility, adoration and love. But could there be a more opportune and profitable occasion to approach the Creator for blessings and assistance?

(4) INTERCEDE. “I shall take the chalice of salva-

tion and call upon the name of the Lord"—what power behind such an offering presented to Heaven for assistance!

Even if you should not receive Holy Communion at the Holy Sacrifice, the Mass offers the best opportunity and the most powerful means of paying your *debt of petition* and of obtaining unmerited assistance, spiritual and temporal. But the post-Communion prayers usually appeal to the Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus reposing within the bosoms of the celebrant of the Mass and of the attendants.

"If you ask the Father anything in My name", declared Jesus, "He will give it to you." In the Mass we not only ask in Jesus' name, but we present Him to the Heavenly Father as His well-beloved Son, and no matter what we ask it is infinitely less than we offer to Him.

But in our petitions we must not disgust the Father by subordinating spiritual to material interests. We must not estimate the needs of our sick body above the needs of our sick soul. We should pray for strength to support our weak wills, for grace to overcome the temptations to which we have so often succumbed, for the return of a friend to the practice of his religion, for the conversion of a particular non-Catholic.

This done, we should recommend our temporal interests to God, praying that, if it should please Him, we might receive a favorable response in the name of Jesus.

If, at the Mass, nothing more were offered you than the blessing, which the priest, impersonating Jesus, confers, you should be eager to receive that. Think of the daily attendant at Mass being solemnly blessed every morning in the divinely instituted official sacrifice of the Church!

As the Mass draws to a close, you are reminded, in the words of St. John that the "Word has once more been

made flesh", and that you "have seen His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father."

Suffrages or petitions, in the order we have indicated, are contained in the prayers which the priest recites at the foot of the altar, by which the Holy Sacrifice is terminated.

XII.

Suggestion for Palm Sunday

[Owing to the length of the ceremony on this day, there will be no time for a sermon. But immediately after your announcements call attention to the following:]

Every Catholic child knows that our new relationship towards Almighty God, our new opportunity for the attainment of Heaven, is due to the Atonement which the Son of God made for mankind in person on Calvary.

During this week, known as Holy Week, the Church occupies herself with the passion and death of Jesus, and with what immediately preceded it—His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the institution of the Mass and of the Holy Eucharist, which were to be the principal means of applying the fruits of His redemption to us individually.

Throughout Lent we have striven to acquaint ourselves with the supernatural means of salvation procured for us during the first Holy Week, and let us, therefore, rededicate ourselves to Jesus and make frequent and earnest use of these means. Let us, never for a day, be separated from Jesus, so that we can truly say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

XIII.

SERMON FOR GOOD FRIDAY

The Parish Church

“We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee; because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.”

In our previous meditations or reflections we have considered the parish church as the House of God, Who dwells personally within it; as the Gate of Heaven, because of the grace-producing ordinances dispensed within it; as the scene of the reenactment of the Sacrifice of Calvary for the application of the merits of that sacrifice to human souls; as the Forum of truth; as the Healing Place of wounded souls; as a spiritual Service Station generally.

On this anniversary of the passion and death of Jesus, to Whose merits we owe so much, it would seem fitting to say a word about the significance of the Stations of the Cross, which constitute a part of the interior furnishings of practically every Catholic church and chapel.

We shall consider (1) the origin and significance of the way of the Cross; (2) its immediate benefits to our souls or the souls in Purgatory; and (3) the lesson of our costly Redemption, of which the Stations remind us.

(1) Practically from the time of our Savior's death and the spread of His religion through Palestine and Greece, saintly people were wont to visit the scenes of His passion and death, and to pray fervently at the places where He underwent His agony, where He instituted the Holy Eucharist, where He was tried before Pilate. They trod the dolorous Way of the Cross marked by His bloody footprints, and so on unto the place where He was nailed to the cross, was crucified and where He was buried.

A pious tradition informs us that the Blessed Virgin herself made this Way of the Cross many a time, and that even though she lived for a number of years with St. John at Ephesus, she returned to Jerusalem before her death to be near the sacred places. She died in Jerusalem and from her place of burial her Assumption into Heaven took place.

St. Jerome, who lived early in the fifth century, and who spent the last years of his life in a room adjacent to the place of Christ's nativity at Bethlehem, tells us that during this time pilgrims came to Jerusalem in large numbers to visit the places made sacred by the sufferings of Jesus. However, in that age, there was no such official devotion in the Church as the Way of the Cross. This was established after the Turks took possession of the Holy Land, and it became dangerous for pilgrims to visit that country. Even today many of the places consecrated by the presence and activities of Christ are in the hands of the Turks.

But think of the solicitude of the Church in officially sanctioning the erection of the Stations of the Cross on the walls of churches in practically every community, and granting to Catholics at home the same rich indulgences as were formerly gained by those who could reap these indulgences only at the great sacrifice of traveling by foot from distant places to the Holy Land.

(2) Pope after Pope throughout many centuries added to the indulgences previously granted to those who practiced the devotion of the Way of the Cross until, because of the loss of many of the documents, it was no longer known for a certainty just how extensive these indulgences were. Today we know what spiritual benefits are attached to the devotion because the present Pope Pius XI, in the year 1932, revoked all previous indulgences and substituted the following:

(a) A Plenary Indulgence may be gained as often as the Way of the Cross is made;

(b) Another Plenary Indulgence may be gained by those who make the Way of the Cross on a day on which they receive Holy Communion, or by those who will have made the Way of the Cross ten times and receive Holy Communion within the month. This is interpreted to mean that those who make the Way of the Cross and receive Holy Communion many times during the month may gain two Plenary Indulgences each time, and for the second Plenary Indulgence no prayers for the Holy Father's intentions are required.

(c) One who begins the Way of the Cross, but does not complete it gains a partial indulgence of ten years and ten quarantines for every Station made. One may continue the Stations where they were interrupted and gain the full Plenary Indulgence.

Catholics, therefore, should not confine the practice of "saying the Stations" to public devotions. They should follow the devotion privately and as often as possible even outside of Lent.

It is not necessary for the person to first stand and then kneel during private devotions; it is not necessary to say the Our Father, and Hail Mary at each Station. It is only necessary that they stop before each Station and meditate briefly either on the scene before them, or on the passion of Our Lord generally. At the end they recite six times the Our Father and Hail Mary, one of these being for the special intentions of the Holy Father.

The indulgence may be gained for the souls in Purgatory, as well as ourselves, and, therefore, outside the Mass and Holy Communion no greater benefit could be offered to the Poor Souls than the pious and devotional offering of the Way of the Cross.

(3) The story of our redemption has become so familiar to us, even the unprecedented agony and sufferings of our Divine Savior, both physical and mental, have been repeated to us so often, that they do not make the impression on us which they should; and nothing saddens the Sacred Heart more than this coldness and indifference towards all that He did for us.

It must always be remembered that Jesus could have escaped all suffering. His descent from Heaven to earth and His "taking the form of man" even for one moment, would have been ample to satisfy for the sins of all people—because the infinite humiliation contained even in that act would have had infinite value. His sufferings were not confined to the strokes of the lash, or to the thorns pressed into His head, or to the nails driven through His hands and feet. The suffering occasioned by those wounds themselves must have been excruciating. But He suffered even more from the ingratitude of the people among whom He did only good, from the insults and curses which they hurled at Him when He was praying for them on the cross, from the treason of Judas, the denial of Peter, from the sorrow He caused to His Blessed Mother, from His abandonment by His Heavenly Father.

Incidentally, we should not lose sight of the fact that a Mother is never known to attend the execution of her son. Mary might have been spared this, but she wished to suffer much for me and for you. That is why she was brave enough to follow her dear son to Calvary and to stand all alone with St. John amid the brutal crowd while He, wholly innocent, died by inches before her eyes.

Devotion to the passion of our Lord should be natural to everyone who truly loves Him; and the extent of our love can well be gauged by the frequency with which we meditate on His sorrows and sufferings, no matter

how much we may delude ourselves into believing that we are quite good apart from such meditation.

CONCLUSION—

Let this Lent, which is coming to a close, not be the end of your meditations on the sufferings of Jesus until next Lent, nor end the practice of the Way of the Cross until the devotion is held publicly in your church again. There are numerous books dealing with the life and passion and death of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and you should have at least one of them in your homes and read from it a page every day.

Let us hope also that the series of instructions you have had on the incalculable benefits derived from your parish church, of the sacredness of the place, and the importance of the mysteries enacted therein, will lead you to appreciate your parish church more, to take a live interest in every phase of its life, and to show your appreciation by making even greater sacrifices for its maintenance than you have been wont to do in the past—and to make them cheerfully because they are made for your soul and for God.

