

Kempf, Placidus
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Reflections on the Offertory Chants of the
Sunday Masses and some of the greater
Feasts.

by Placidus Kempf, O. S. B.

Price twenty-five cents

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Imprimi Potest:

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Abbot of St. Meinrad's Abbey

Nihil Obstat:

Francis J. Reine, S.T.D.
Censor librorum

Imprimatur:

✠ *Paul C. Schulte, D.D.*
Archbishop of Indianapolis

November 28, 1950

*These Reflections are reprinted from THE MASS
YEAR for 1950.*

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TUNE YOUR HEART

What is in a word? By transposing a single letter — "s" — you can change "Offerings" into "Offer—sing." These two words remind you of your daily duty that, while you "offer" yourself with the Divine Victim on the altar, your heart should "sing", that is, should be filled with the proper dispositions. These are furnished to you by the Offertory Chant that is said by the priest before offering the sacrificial elements, and sung (or recited) by the choir whilst he is doing so. Since today the "Offertory Procession" consists in one or more ushers going up and down the aisles of the church at this part of the Mass to collect the money offerings of the attending faithful, it will be well briefly to recall the original purpose of the Offertory Procession and the Offertory Chants in order to use the latter to give you the "pitch" according to which you should "tune your heart."

From apostolic times until about the eleventh century there was always a procession at the Offertory during the celebration of the Holy Mysteries. All the faithful who were to be admitted to the table of the Lord, and only these, were authorized and at the same time bound to offer their gifts at the Offertory. Bread and wine were brought as offerings from which the materials of the sacrifice were selected. But besides these gifts placed in the service of Christ, the faithful brought other material gifts for the support of His Head, the priests, and also for His Feet, for the relief of the poor. The procession of the

priests and faithful at the Offertory was accompanied by singing in order to excite and foster a joyful disposition in the givers, since "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

The form of the Offertory song was an antiphon and several verses of a psalm, or even an entire psalm, if such was demanded by the length of the procession. At present the Offertory is a shorter or longer verse, usually taken from the Psalms, sometimes from the other books of Holy Scripture, and only a few are composed by the Church herself. The verse gives expression to the dominant thought of the feast or mystery celebrated that day, and thus strengthens our festal dispositions, awakens new thoughts and feelings with which we should offer, not merely our tithe of material gifts to the usher, but the gift of ourselves with the Offering on the altar. It is for this purpose that the thoughts in the Offertory chant of the Sundays and principal feasts are given here—to serve as a little dry stick for your fire of devotion. They presuppose the fire of love and devotion in your heart. This is made and kept alive by often recalling the significance of making your offering.

A gift represents the giver; it is the manifestation of his love and affection for another; it is, in a way, the offering of his heart and of himself. By your offering at Mass you surrender yourself to God. The Offertory gifts are bread and wine; bread, the symbol of man's labor, earned in the sweat of his brow; wine, the symbol of suffering, for the grapes are crushed in the wine press. You offer the bread of your labor and the wine of your sufferings—your whole self.

Feast of the Circumcision

EARTH JOINS HEAVEN

"Thine are the heavens and thine is the earth"
(Ps. 88:12).

Today, when the eight-day-old Divine Infant receives His Most Holy Name of Jesus, so consoling to us because it means "Savior," we are reminded that heaven really touches earth in His Person, for He is both God and man. Both were essential to fulfil His divine mission of Savior. As God He could not suffer for man's sins; as mere man His great and lifelong suffering would not have been able to atone for the infinite malice of sin. Because His human sufferings were endured by His Divine Person, the least of these, yes, the smallest human act that He performed, such as a mere sigh, would have sufficed for atoning for the guilt of all sins of all men. The fact that He chose suffering, and today begins His life of suffering by experiencing the pain of circumcision in His most tender Body, is but a proof of His infinite love of us, and an encouraging example for us to suffer as gladly as He did all the little pains the Heavenly Father inflicts on us out of love to wean us from the earth and to draw us up to heaven, "to live in this present world a life of order, of justice, and of holiness" (Epistle).

Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

IN THY NAME

"Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 85:5).

A person's name may be called his second self. It not only distinguishes him from every other human being, but also calls to mind his personal characteristics. In the Name of the Lord the Psalmist finds "sweetness, mildness, and mercy." The Heavenly Father Himself chose the Most Holy Name of Jesus for His Son. Explaining the words of the Canticle of Canticles, "Thy name is as oil poured out" (1:2), St. Bernard says: "The Name of Jesus bears resemblance to oil in the threefold use to which the latter lends itself, namely, for lighting, for food, and for healing. It feeds the flame, it nourishes the flesh, it soothes pain. It is light, and food, and medicine. Consider now how the same properties belong to the Bridegroom's name. When preached, it gives light; when meditated, it nourishes; when invoked, it soothes and softens.... There is nothing so efficacious as the Name of Jesus for restraining the violence of anger, depressing the swellings of pride, healing the smarting wound of envy, curbing the passions of the flesh, extinguishing the fire of concupiscence, tempering the thirst of avarice, and banishing every unlawful desire. ... So salutary is it, that it shall never prove ineffectual against any spiritual ailment whatsoever."

Feast of the Epiphany

WHEN KINGS SERVE

"All kings of the earth shall adore him" (Ps. 71:11).

A ruler of a nation is the head of his people. He performs towards them the functions that the head performs to the members of the human body. A head without a body, or a body without a head cannot live and function properly. The head does not live for itself, but only to "serve" the bodily members by directing them and providing for their needs, in a word, by seeking always the common good. A good ruler will do just that. Need we wonder, then, if the best and greatest Ruler, the King of Kings, should do the same? He "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven" (Creed). Through their official representatives, the Three Kings, the nations of the East adored the newborn Savior, whilst these rulers in turn showed their subjection to Him by the royal gifts they offered Him. Through our official representative at God's court, the altar, we offer our gift, a little wheaten wafer, which the King will change into Himself and then give back to us, that He may serve us and our soul's needs. What a beautiful example of complete submission and service! Shall we still find it hard to serve our God by making the constant offering of our will to His?

Feast of the Holy Family

OUR FAMILY TREE

"The parents of Jesus carried Him to Jerusalem"
(St. Luke 2:22).

Family trees are interesting subjects of study, whether we consider the individual fruit (good and bad), the interlacing limbs, or the common root. But these show merely that we are children of Adam and his relatives in the nth degree. Each morning we are offered another simple study that shows us that we belong also, and especially to the holy family of God, that we are brothers and sisters of Christ, the Son of God, and our elder Brother. In His humanity Jesus united Himself to the whole human race. He became a child of Adam in order to redeem all the sons and daughters of Adam together with their first, common parents. Because of His death on the Cross they live a new life; they share in the very life of God by sanctifying grace. Not content with giving Himself *for* all men, our Elder Brother gives Himself *to* all men in the Holy Eucharist, to perfect the initial grace of baptism. It is humanly impossible to trace our human lineage back to Adam, our earthly father. It is a very simple task to trace our lineage to the Creator of our soul, our Heavenly Father. By a single step, through Jesus, we are at our goal, we are one with God.

FAITH AND REVERENCE

"For the Lord, He is God" (Ps. 99:3).

Psalm 99 is a thanksgiving hymn of those entering the temple. What a hymn of thanksgiving must have been chanted by Mary's throbbing heart when, after a fruitless search of three days she again heard the familiar voice and gazed upon the well-known face of her Boy in the temple! Yet, her maternal emotions were held in check by her reverence and her faith, for "He is God!" The same Christ is hidden in our temples, awaiting all who seek Him in faith. In a few moments our gift will be "The Lord," and we shall adore Him with reverence, for "He is God." Our faith should not merely make us reverent in our external bearing before our God, but above all in our dispositions of mind and heart. It should close the church door, so that our thoughts do not wander "among kinsfolk and acquaintances," drawing our heart and its affections away from Christ to earthly things. Should not gratitude chain our hearts to the altar before which we "sing joyfully to God," our Creator and Shepherd, for "He made us, and we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture... The Lord is good, his mercy is forever, and his faithfulness from generation to generation" (Ps. 99:3,5).

COME AND HEAR

"What great things the Lord hath done for my soul" (Ps. 65:16).

Taking up our pen we add up, with Father Faber, the things that go to the saving of a single soul. It was absolutely necessary that God should become man, according to the dispensation of God. It was absolutely necessary that Jesus should be born, teach, act, pray, merit, satisfy, suffer, bleed, die; that there should be a Catholic Church, faith, sacraments, saints, the Pope, and the Sacrifice of the Mass; that there should be sanctifying grace, manifold actual graces; that martyrs must die, doctors must write, popes and councils must expose and condemn heresy, missionaries must travel, priests must be ordained. When, after these preparations, by an act of merciful omnipotence the soul is created out of nothing, a Guardian Angel must be appointed over it. All through its life Jesus must be occupied about it; all the angels and saints must pray and interest themselves about it. Unseen evil spirits have to be warded off from it. The Precious Blood has to be communicated to it through extraordinary sacraments. The Body, Soul, and Divinity of the Incarnate Word have to be communicated to it over and over again, till it becomes quite a common occurrence, though each time it is in reality a more stupendous action than the creation of the world.

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

I WILL

"The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength" (Ps. 117:16).

A strong man, beyond a doubt, was Atlas, the mythological giant who supported the universe on his shoulders, steadying it with his hands. Greater is the strength of the "right hand" of the Creator, for who, like Him, "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and weighed the heavens with his palm? who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth?" (Is. 40:12) Yet, God the Father, the Creator of the universe, never assumed a human body and hence has no hands. His "right hand," that created all things and that sustained them in their existence is His almighty Will. Over His creation He placed man, a microcosm, a little world, and in him a reminder of His right hand—man's free will. He made man's will free, not that he might do as he pleases, but as God commands. Only that is the right use of his gigantic power. God made man's will free that he might, by his filial obedience to his Creator's will, make a free offering or sacrifice of this great gift and thereby merit an eternal reward. Man can choose to obey or refuse to serve. His present and future bliss or misery depends on that free choice. What more agreeable offering could we place on the altar and ask that our will be most fully united to His—always?

4th Sunday after Epiphany

TOCK! TICK!

"The right hand of the Lord hath exalted me"
(Ps. 117:16).

Psalm 117 was a thanksgiving song used at the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. The heart of the psalmist overflows with joy in the Lord, Who has been his Savior so many times in answer to his pleading prayer. The history of the chosen people might be compared to the pendulum of a gigantic grandfather's clock with its mighty tock (won't) tick (will), sounding its turning away from and again back to God. Israel wilfully turned away from God and was rightly punished. Punishment gave time for reflection, followed by repentance and return to God. Psalm 77 lists God's benefits to His people, but they soon forgot His benefits and rebelled against Him. Yet, even when inflicting punishment upon the ingrates, the Psalmist says: "Many a time did He turn away His anger, and did not kindle all His wrath. And He remembered that they are flesh: a wind that goeth and returneth not" (Ps. 77:38,39). He was true to His promise: "I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: for I will utterly consume all the nations, among whom I have scattered thee: but I will not utterly consume thee: but I will chastise thee in judgment, that thou mayest not seem to thyself innocent" (Jer. 30:11). Despite your own past infidelities Jesus will soon be present again on the altar as your Redeemer.

5th Sunday after Epiphany

I SHALL LIVE

"I shall not die but live" (Ps. 117:17).

Periodically God had to reassure His chosen people with the comforting words: "God made not death, neither hath He pleasure in the destruction of the living" (Wisd. 1:13). "I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, *return* ye and live" (Ez. 18:32). "Say to them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked *turn* from his way, and live. *Turn* ye, *turn* ye from your evil ways: and why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:11) From the past they could predict the future. God, who does not change, will remain true to His word. Hence we know that we shall not succumb to our just punishment, but shall live because of the merits of the Savior, Who is to be born of our race. But that word "shall" can mean more than a mere future event. It can and must mean the "firm determination of each man's will" to turn from the way of sin and consequent, self-inflicted spiritual death, and the return to God, the Author and Restorer of the life of the soul by sanctifying grace. Just as sin is self-willed, so must also the return to spiritual life begin with our repentant will, moved and aided by grace.

TELEVISION

"I shall declare the works of the Lord" (Ps. 117:17).

For a fourth time the same verses of Ps. 117 are used for the Offertory Chant. The "wonderful works of the Lord" which have been brought before our eyes during this Christmas season, and which we should declare or broadcast to the whole world, are those which He alone could and did perform. God's Incarnation and birth "is wonderful in our eyes" (v. 23). That the Creator should become a creature, and conceal His divine majesty beneath the form of a lowly Infant, that Infinite Riches should become poor, Almighty Power, helpless, Eternal Glory, unattractive, Boundless Freedom, wrapped in swaddling clothes, Divine Immensity, cramped into a little crib, this is, indeed, the "Lord's doing," and the greatest of all His wonderful works, the source of all His wonders of grace and glory. In a few moments that Power will repeat these marvels for us in the mystery of transubstantiation to which we shall be witnesses. The Holy Eucharist is the memorial of all God's wonderful works, indeed, the greatest of His works, for, as Father Faber reminds us, God performs twelve miraculous actions in this single mystery. And we make it possible for the Almighty to do so by our offering of the host.

Septuagesima Sunday

PRAISE HIM

"It is good to give praise to the Lord" (Ps. 91:2).

The violet color of the priest's vestments and of the tabernacle veil reminds us that we are entering upon a season of penance, are beginning our remote preparation for the sabbath of Easter. Psalm 91, a "canticle for the sabbath," reminds us that the Holy Sacrifice should be a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the grace of true conversion. The soul can celebrate its "sabbath" or "rest" only if it is free from sin and united to God. The repentant soul sings: "O Lord, Thou hast given me a great delight in Thy merciful doings in my soul when Thy all-powerful Hand wrought my conversion. How great are the wonders that Thou performest in a soul's return to Thee; how deep are Thy thoughts, the designs of Thy boundless mercy, which the senseless man in his stupidity and folly does not recognize. I was a miserable sinner, a blade of grass, useless, spared only for the sickle and the fire. Then Thy eye looked upon me in pity, and from a weed I became a royal palm tree and a majestic cedar tree, deeply rooted in Thee, and striving upwards towards heaven, green with the foliage of grace and laden with its blossoms and ripening fruits. Truly it is fitting and just to give praise to the Lord, Whose grace has wrought this change in me."

HELP IN NEED

"Show forth Thy wonderful mercies" (Ps. 16:7).

In Psalm 16 David, who by God's help has kept his heart and lips guileless, cries to the Lord, "his justice" in his dire need. After freeing the inhabitants of Ceila from the Philistines, David and his 600 men fled from before the face of Saul to a mountain of the desert of Ziph. The Ziphites told Saul of David's whereabouts and the king pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. When David saw himself surrounded by his enemies and "despaired of being able to escape from the face of Saul" (I Kings 23:26), he poured out his heart to the Lord in the verses of Psalm 16, and not in vain. At the moment of greatest danger a messenger came to tell Saul that the Philistines had "poured in themselves upon the land. Wherefore Saul returned, leaving the pursuit of David, and went to meet the Philistines. For this cause they called that place, the Rock of division" (v.27,28). Our "Rock of Help" is the altar stone, our new Mount Calvary, where our soul's enemy was and is vanquished. It is this confidence that gives strength to our petitions. We have but to see that we, also, by God's over-abundant help, keep our heart and lips guileless as David did.

Quinquagesima Sunday

LIVE OR DIE

"Teach me Thy justifications" (Ps. 118:12).

Psalm 118 is not only the longest Psalm in the Psalter, but its 176 verses are divided into twenty-two sections according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (that we may learn it from our infancy), and each of the eight verses that form the individual sections begin with the same letter. Furthermore, as the whole Psalm contains the praises of the Lord and His holy "Law," each verse, except the 122nd, contains the word "law" or a synonym. The term used in the verse of today's chant is "justifications" or "statutes." The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass reminds us of God's first statute or law that He promulgated in the Garden of Eden, when He told Adam: "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death" (Gen. 2:17). By eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve committed spiritual suicide, and it was only by Christ's death on the Cross that that life in God through sanctifying grace was again made possible to their soul-dead children. At Holy Mass we should learn to die to self, the cause of our sins and consequent spiritual death, and to live for Christ.

SAFE!

“Under His wings thou shalt trust” (Ps. 90:4).

Jesus uses a well-known comparison to show His touching solicitude for His people when He says: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often I would have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but thou wouldst not” (St. Luke 13:34). The Psalmist in Psalm 90 uses the same image, and the Offertory Chant today would put his trust into our hearts. The “shoulders” that overshadow us are those of Christ upon the Cross, Who took our sins upon Himself. Under His outstretched “wings” or arms we can safely hide from the just anger of our Heavenly Father. Holy Mass is the continuation of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. His shoulders and arms still give us protection. It has been said that when the Heavenly Father’s just anger has been aroused by the crimes that rise up to Him from every portion of the inhabited globe, and He raises His Hand to strike the criminals, He sees there the outstretched arms of His well-beloved Son in Holy Mass or in the Real Presence in that portion of the globe pleading for pardon, and He is appeased. Under this “shield” we shall be safe, whether we are actually assisting at Holy Mass, or uniting in spirit with all the Holy Masses being offered each moment of the day and night on the globe.

THINK AND DO

"I will lift up my hands to Thy commandments"
(Ps. 118:48).

The words of today's Offertory may be called "true to nature." If you hold an object before a child, its bodily eyes will see the beauty of the object and send a secret message of appreciation to the mind, the eye of its soul, which will appraise the object as good, and hence desirable. Flashing this message of desire to the blind faculty, the human will, this in turn sends a flash to the organ for seizing objects, the human hand, which is immediately extended to grasp and clutch the desired object. God's commandments are "good" because they are manifestations of His Will for our good. Hence we should "love" them and "lift up our hands to them," that is, make them our own by a faithful observance of them. Because of our weakness to observe God's laws faithfully, we "lift up our hands" to Him in suppliant prayer for the necessary help to keep them faithfully. And to give strength to our weak hands and weaker hearts, we join both to our Divine Intercessor on the altar, Who "was heard because of His reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7). Thinking, meditating on the commandments of God will cause us to love them, and true love will cause us to observe them.

GOD'S LAWS

"Thy servant keepeth them" (Ps. 18:12).

The theme of Psalm 18 is—"God's praise in nature, and God's praise in the Law." God's law is the "sun" for the invisible world of the soul. Like the straight, unbroken, cheering rays of the sun the "justices of the Lord shine down," rejoicing hearts. "The commandment of the Lord is lightsome, enlightening the eyes." Just as the light of day permits man to see and act rightly, and avoid dangers, so the light of God's commandments, by commanding and forbidding, becomes the "sun" of man's moral world, making him by this light to see and serve God. Furthermore, the "judgments of the Lord are more to be desired than gold and many precious stones and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." God's law surpasses in worth the most precious and prized treasures of earth. If gold is king in the mineral kingdom, beautiful to the eye because of its pure sun-like gleam, compared with the brightness and beauty of God's law, with its undefiled, heavenly purity, it is as worthless as the dust of the earth. And in the realm of taste, if honey holds the first place, far more "tasty" and soul-satisfying and nourishing is God's law. Realizing all this, God's servant must show his appreciation of these treasures by "keeping them." Only in this way do they become the soul's possession.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

REST A BIT

"Sing ye to His Name" (Ps. 134:3).

Holy Mother Church has led her children half way through the desert of Lent and permits them to rest a bit at the oasis of Mid-Lent or Laetare Sunday. In anticipation of Easter's joys the choir praises the "Lord's goodness" and the "sweetness of His Name." "Whatsoever the Lord pleased He hath done, in heaven, on earth, in the sea, and in the deeps. He bringeth up clouds from the end of the earth: He hath made lightnings for the rain. He bringeth forth winds out of His stores" (v.6,7). Just as God rescued the Children of Israel "by signs and wonders," so He also works great wonders of grace and conversion in eager, docile souls. Lenten sermons, instruction, and reading are the grace-laden clouds that He brings from the end of the earth. Their "lightning" produces soul-refreshing rain, torrents of penitential tears, and rejuvenating comfort. God's word is like the 'winds' from His storehouse of truth and life. Hence the Prophet Ezechiel prayed: "Come, spirit, from the four winds, and blow upon these slain, and let them live again" (37:9). "God punishes sin, threatens with divine judgment, instructs in matters of faith and morals, and encourages to progress in holiness," says Cardinal Hugo.

EAT AND LIVE

"Enliven me according to Thy word" (Ps. 118:107).

Life, or the vital energy in our body, is continually being used up by a chemical process that may be likened to the fire that consumes the fuel in the home furnace. This is speeded up by hard, strength-consuming work, or by conflicting causes from without. In a similar way our supernatural life, or its energy and power of activity, is consumed by the heat of the passions, by strenuous exertion, and by resisting temptations from without and within. Hence it must constantly be renewed and increased, like our bodily life, by proper nourishment. Just as our bodily life is fed by the matter that the body assimilates from the proper food, so also our supernatural life is fed by spiritual food. The highest type of soul-nourishment are the Body and Blood of Christ. The soul, however, does not assimilate, that is, change Christ, received in Holy Communion, into herself, but rather it is He Who changes the soul into Himself, into being like Him. That this Food is destined for the soul, as well as Its effects, we learn from Christ's "word." "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (St. John 6:52).

DRINK!

"In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"
(Ps. 68:22).

During His bitter Passion, whilst exteriorly He remained mute as a lamb, it is thought that Jesus silently and constantly prayed those passages of the Psalms that referred to His sufferings, as they now found their fulfilment in Him. Concerning the drink mentioned in Psalm 68, St. Matthew tells us: "They gave him wine to drink mixed with gall; but when he had tasted it, he would not drink" (27:34). Because Jesus wanted to feel the full torture of His painful crucifixion and cruel death, He would not drink this mixture that was destined to deaden his sense of feeling pain. He merely tasted it to thank the sympathetic hand that had mixed it for Him. The night before the Heavenly Father offered Him through the cupbearer Death a cup into which had been poured all the gall, vinegar, and bitterness of Good Friday. Yet, His excruciating bodily pains are nothing compared to the moral filth and bitterness that this cup contained—all the thoughtlessness, infidelity, sensuality, forgetfulness of duty, dishonesty, indifference—things which people of the world drink down like flies, but which cause indescribable horror to the most tender conscience of the God-man. "Can you drink of the cup I am about to drink?" (St. Matth. 20:22)

Easter Sunday

SILENCE!

"The earth trembled and was still" (Ps. 75:9).

The short Offertory today is very dramatic. It reminds us of a large hall crowded with eager listeners. The chairman raps for silence, and, in the deathlike stillness that follows, makes his introductory remarks and introduces the speaker. Today all eyes are riveted on the stage—the empty tomb. Now the glorious figure of the risen Savior appears, and He gives His Easter greeting: "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid" (St. Matth. 11:27). "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (St. Matth. 28:20). The small, white Host is His new tomb. In a few moments the appearance of bread will be the stone that envelops and seals His glorified Body. No angel will remove this stone. His Body will not pass through this sacramental seal, but with it will enter into our souls, His glorified resting place for all the days of our earthly life. We need not go far to seek and find Him, merely to the nearest church with its communion rail. He comes. Our glad soul trembles with Easter joy. It is still—its varied emotions are merged into one—the blissful rest of heavenly peace brought by the risen Savior.

LIVE WIRES

"He has risen" (St. Matth. 28:5).

At dawn of the first Easter Sunday "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the sepulchre" (St. Matth. 28:1). The empty tomb was to be the microphone with which an angel from heaven was to deliver his message. "Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen even as he said . . . Go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen" (St. Matth. 28:5-7). Here is the broadcasting station. The fearing, doubting Apostles, scattered throughout the city are the audience. What is needed are "live wires" to carry the glad message to the eager audience. The two Marys, fired by faith and love, are the living wires that carry the glad tidings back to Jerusalem. "They departed *quickly* from the tomb in fear and great joy, and *ran* to tell his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Hail!" And they came up and embraced his feet and worshipped him" (St. Matth. 28:8-9). What a reward for living faith and love! A "live wire" must carry the message of meeting Jesus at Holy Mass to all His brethren who were not there this morning.

GOOD MORNING!

"To Thee do I watch at break of day" (Ps. 62:2).

Psalm 62 is one of the most intimate and deeply emotional songs of the Psalter. Tenderness, truth, and warmth characterize it. It is an expression of pure, confident love of God. In the desert, night has spread her black cloak over the earth. Thousands of stars glitter in the sky, symbols of God's watchful eye. David, worried and wearied, had not slept. Now a streak of light over the earth heralds the approaching day. The purple fingers of dawn play on the harp of his heart and entice from it this beautiful song. "O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day." The growing, golden light penetrates into his soul and fills it with hope and trust. However dark the night of pain, trouble, and doubt in the human soul may be, there is always the certainty of a coming day of light and hope. The dawn of each day gilds the altar, where our peace and truth, our Savior, offers Himself for His needy children. To Him we "watch at break of day." In person, or at least in intention, we begin our day at the foot of the altar, and, whatever the new day may have in store for us, we go to meet it with childlike trust and confidence in God's almighty help.

PERPETUAL PRAISE

"I will sing to my God as long as I shall be"
(Ps. 145:2).

When the human soul is created by God and infused into the material furnished by the parents to form a body, it contracts original sin and becomes a child of death. In this state, in the prison of the body, the soul can praise only the justice of God. But when, by the merits of the death of Christ, the soul of the new-born child descends, as it were, into the baptismal font, it rises therefrom new-born, joined as a child of God to its Creator, Savior, and Sanctifier by sanctifying grace. Now it sings, in the temple of the body, the praises of God's goodness and mercy. In God's plan, its stay on earth should be but a single, uninterrupted hymn of praise, a practice lesson for singing the praises of God eternally in the vast cathedral of heaven. In order to learn how to praise, to tune itself to the proper pitch, it must attend daily in body, or at least in spirit, the school of the Lord's chant service—the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is there that the soul learns to become self-less and God-like. Self is the cause of the discordant notes, the sharps and flats in the soul's life—its sins, great and small. At Mass the soul learns how to sustain the one note of love in ever-increasing clearness and volume.

GREAT THINGS

"I will tell you what great things he hath done for my soul" (Ps. 65:16).

All these "great things" may be told in one word—**EVERYTHING**. According to St. Paul, Christ "emptied Himself" (Philip. 2:7). Jesus on the Cross exclaimed: "It is consummated" (St. John 19:30). His omnipotence, as it were, is exhausted. He has not only done all that was necessary to redeem and sanctify each individual human soul, but He has done all that was possible to Him, the Almighty. He paid the price of salvation for each human soul, but He does not force salvation upon the soul. He does not push souls into heaven by force. The soul must freely accept His extended Hand by her cooperation with the merited and offered graces or helps. Holy Mass is, therefore, not merely the memorial of His act of redemption, it is also the means of accepting and applying it individually. Can you count up the number of times that you have assisted at the Holy Sacrifice during your past life? You cannot count up the graces offered to you in the past; their enormous number is known only to the Divine Author and Giver. Neither can you know or count the number you have rejected or not used for this end. It is time today to show your gratitude for **ALL** that Jesus has done for you by using well the manifold graces He gives you today and every day.

5th Sunday after Easter

ARISE!

"Who hath set my soul to live" (Ps. 65:9).

Again today three verses of the "Resurrection Psalm" are taken to thank God for the sinner's resurrection from the death of grave sin to the supernatural life of sanctifying grace. The "risen" soul is filled with true Easter joy, and all in her sings: "Alleluia!" It is not a self-centered joy, but a joy that finds its highest transport in God, the Savior, and which expresses itself in gratitude to Him: "I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken when I was in trouble" (v. 13,14). To the Victim on the altar the glad soul offers herself and her slain victims. These latter are the evil tendencies, the inordinate desires of her heart, the roots of her sins, of her spiritual death. To rise in God there must be a complete death to self-will, the cause of sin. This is the "holocaust" that is so pleasing to God. With the help of God the soul has made that offering. Therefore "God has not turned away her prayer nor His mercy from her." Now that God has raised the soul to life, the will, with His help, preserves and perfects it by fearing, hating, and fleeing the death of sin.

LOOK UP!

"God is ascended with jubilee" (Ps. 46:6).

The thirty-three years' crusade, which the Divine Ark led, has ended victoriously on Golgotha, the leagued enemy, the world and hell, has been conquered, and during the three day's rest in the grave the spoil has been gathered. Not on the fourth, but on the fortieth day did the glorious Conqueror return to the heavenly Jerusalem by His triumphant ascension. God's victory has changed our earth into a valley of blessings. The freed souls from Limbo and Purgatory, the first trophies of redemption, intone, with the heavenly choirs, the triumphant song of praise in honor of their ascending King. Gradually since then, nation after nation has ascended and taken its place around the Divine Victor. But His kingdom was founded then, then He took lawful possession of His throne. Then above Jerusalem, on the top of Mt. Olivet, at whose base He had begun the vital conflict, the glorious Ark rises to heaven. "O clap your hands, all ye nations: shout unto God with the voice of joy. . . . He has chosen for us his inheritance. God is ascended with jubilee, and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet . . . God sitteth on his holy throne" (Ps. 46:2,5,6,9). Today, and every day, we must imitate the "men of Galilee" and keep "looking up to heaven" (Ep.) with the eyes of faith and a heart of love.

Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension

FANFARE

"With the sound of the trumpet" (Ps. 46:6).

To the Apostles, who were "gazing up to heaven as He went," two men in white garments said that Jesus "will come in the same way as you have seen Him going up to heaven" (Acts 1:10-11). Christ will come again at the end of the world as a strict Judge. He tells us that then we shall "see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty. And he will send forth his angels with a trumpet and a great sound, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from end to end of the heavens" (St. Matth. 24:30-31). Or, as St. Paul describes this great event: "The Lord himself with cry of command, with voice of archangel, and with trumpet of God will descend from heaven" (I Thess. 4:16). We shall not fear judgment day when it dawns, and we are awakened from the sleep of death by the blast of the angel's trumpet, if we use well our few days on earth and profit by the dwelling in our midst, on our altars, of this same Judge, but now in the lowly form of Savior and Servant. There is no outward glory or fanfare around this earthly throne—the altar and tabernacle—that we might approach Him without fear and ever keep close to Him by love and fidelity.

COMPLETE VICTORY

"Confirm O God, what thou hast wrought in us"
(Ps. 67:29).

From ancient times Psalm 67 was considered a Pentecostal hymn, and like a victory march its glad music resounds today and during the week. Today's feast forms the climax to the redeeming act of our Savior, and the beginning of the triumphal march of Christ throughout mankind. The Holy Spirit is, as it were, the triumphal chariot or the ark of the covenant that bears the incarnate God-King, accompanied by the victorious nations, triumphantly up to heaven's Mt. Sion. What David's prophetic eye had foreseen and his words had foretold, is now a reality. The Roman Catholic Church is now the messianic, universal Church that comprises all nations, and the Feast of Pentecost is the liturgical reminder of her manifestation and spreading. That world conquest of souls is repeated in the soul of each member of the universal Church, it is the conquest from a mere foothold on the soil of our soul (conquered by Christ in baptism), to the complete subjection of all her powers to her lawful Lord and King. The "kings" now offer presents, all the soul's powers, to this King—their undivided fealty and service. But lest they again prove traitors, we pray most ardently that God may "confirm," make lasting, irrevocable this due submission.

MERCY

"Bless ye the God of heaven" (Tob. 12:6).

Today's Offertory chant, as also the Introit and Communion, are an adaptation of the words of the Archangel Raphael to Tobias and his son. "Bless ye the God of heaven, give glory to him in the sight of all that live, because he hath shown his mercy to you" (Tob. 12:6). The mercies of God are summed up in our creation, redemption, and sanctification. The little word "mercy" is full of meaning. The Latin word for mercy is "misericordia." St. Thomas explains this word as meaning "miseria-in-corde," (misery into the heart). God, as it were, takes our "misery into His Heart," and His love impels Him to relieve it, especially by forgiving the cause of all our misery—our sins. God is goodness and infinite love. In the presence of misery His goodness and love become mercy. As the Psalmist sings: "Unto thee, O my helper, will I sing, for thou art God, my defense: my God, my mercy" (Ps. 58:18). "God," says St. Thomas, "acts mercifully, not, indeed, by acting contrary to justice, but by doing something above justice." The faithful angels sing their "Holy, holy, holy!" to praise the holiness of God. But we shall sing of His mercies. "The mercies of the Lord I shall sing forever" (Ps. 88:2). This will be the canticle of love and gratitude that we shall sing to God for all eternity.

CADET FIRE

"They shall be holy to their God" (Lev. 21:6).

If the priests of the Old Law were to be "holy to their God" because they offered "the burnt offering of the Lord, and the bread of their God" (Lev. 21:6), how much more pure and holy ought not the priests of the New Law be who offer, not a symbolic sacrifice to God, but the Son of God Himself as a real sacrifice to His Father for the sins of His children. The priest at the altar is the representative of all the faithful, but also their means of uniting themselves as co-offerers of the Holy Sacrifice. The attending faithful, therefore, like him, must be as pure and holy as possible, for they offer Christ to the Father with the priest. With the priest they offer their personal offerings of "incense" (their prayers) and "loaves" (their whole person, body and soul). Fire releases the sweet-smelling soul of the grains of incense, and it also changes the soggy dough into tasty bread. The fire of love does the same in the human soul. It destroys the root and fruit of sin, and makes our soul "tasty" to the Lord. He who said: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (St. Luke 12:49), remains in our midst in the Blessed Sacrament for that same purpose.

Feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

WANTED: A COMFORTER

"I looked for one that would comfort me, and I found none" (Ps. 68:21).

God is self-sufficient. He is infinitely perfect and happy. Yet, when love causes the second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity to become Man, He seems to be in need of everything, especially of our love, our comforting. His human Heart, weighed down by the sins of all men, longs for a sympathetic word or glance. To show us how much the human heart needs sympathy, Holy Mother Church places the words of David in the 68th Psalm in His mouth today. "I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none: and for one that would comfort me, and I found none" (Ps. 68:21). I, who can truly be consoled by God alone, am able to console the Heart of my Savior! Have I always done so? Or, has my protestation of love, made to His Face, been followed by a stab in His Back and Sacred Heart by a sinful deed? Words are cheap and deceptive. God looks to the heart. From that never-closed station should come a constant, throbbing message of comfort to the ever-waiting Heart of Jesus. It is the least I can do for His great comfort and consolation to me. And if I measure His longing for comfort by my own, I shall not hesitate to do so quickly, yes, constantly.

MERCY!

"Turn to me, O Lord" (Ps. 6:5).

Psalm 6, from which today's Offertory chant is taken, is the first of the seven so-called Penitential Psalms (Ps. 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142), that portray so vividly the sentiments of the sinner, both by pleading complaints and comforting prayers. They are, as it were, the sinner's "Our Father," a seven-branched candlestick, burning before the tabernacle of the Most High, or like the seven-tinted rainbow that weaves the sun of grace and peace into man's veil of dripping tears. In our Psalm gripping descriptions of the misery and destruction of sin alternate with the tenderest emotions of hope, confidence, and repentant love. In verse 5 the royal Psalmist, fleeing, sick in body and soul, deeply moved by repentance and inexpressible pain of heart, experiences the still greater pain of being forsaken by God. Lord, where art Thou? How long wilt Thou turn Thy Face from me? Oh, turn back from the great distance Thou seemest to be removed from me. Turn to Thy helpless child Thy sweet, comforting, paternal eye. Save my soul from darkness, offenses, and dangers of death. Heal me in body and soul, not out of justice, but out of infinite mercy for Thy punishable servant.

SEEK GOD!

"Thou hast not forgotten them that seek Thee,
O Lord" (Ps. 9:11).

We find that we seek—God or self. In Psalm 9 King David, who has just won a glorious victory over his enemies, takes his harp and sings: "The Lord is become a refuge for the poor; a helper in due time in (time of) tribulation" (v.10). Then he continues in the verse of today's Offertory. To "seek God" is the beginning and end of perfection, is the condition and interior being of faith, hope, and charity. According to the Rule of St. Benedict, the novice should be observed to see "whether he truly seeks God" (Ch.58). To seek God truly means to seek Him candidly and exclusively, at all times and in all things, to strive towards Him with all one's ability, as the flame tends ever upward and the arrow flies to its goal. It means in need and oppression to flee to Him alone, and to expect help from Him alone with confidence and holy certainty. Truly, O Lord, all that seek Thee, build on Thee, surrender themselves to Thee, rest in the shadow of Thy omnipotence, these Thou wilt not, canst not, desert, canst not deceive their hope, canst not resist their child-like petition. Thus the grateful soul invites others to join in her way of peace and gratitude.

ASLEEP IN DEATH

**"Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death"
(Ps. 12:4).**

Psalm 12 is a prayer to be said when the soul feels herself oppressed by temptation and apparently forsaken by God. One of the trials of life is temptation, which means a "trial" or a "test." The "light" that the tried soul needs is to realize that temptations do not come by mere chance, that they are no duel between the soul and Satan, but that God also has His Hand in them. The most violent attack of the soul's enemy takes place with His permission, is an act of His love, is regulated and stamped by His eternal wisdom. Before the soul engages in it, His mercy has accurately weighed it, has measured it against her weakness, tallied its effects, and foreseen its outcome. Under His paternal eyes, yes, resting like a babe in its mother's arms, the soul engages in the conflict, equipped with the weapons of grace, whilst the enemy, by Christ's merits, has already been made powerless, a chained dog that cannot bite unless the soul draws too near and permits him. Her need to cry for help should increase her courage and cause her to realize the truth of the words of St. James: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been tried, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (St. James 1:12).

5th Sunday after Pentecost

MY HELP

**"He is at my right hand that I be not moved"
(Ps. 15:8).**

Psalm 15 is a Messianic Psalm. It is a memorial of victory erected to the Son of David, according to the flesh, Who triumphs over sin, death, and hell. Redemption is more glorious than the creation of a thousand worlds; it is the masterpiece of Omnipotence, the eternal glory of Wisdom, the crown of God's Love. It is the greatest and eternal glorification of Christ and the Blessed Trinity. Therefore the Savior, looking forward to this glorious reward of His sufferings, prays: "Praise the Lord, praise to My heavenly Father, Who has given Me understanding of the decrees of His Love, of the happy result of My sufferings." To encourage Himself in His approaching sufferings, the Savior reminds Himself of His own future glory, which He will receive for being obedient to death on the Cross. "I see the Lord constantly before me; He is always at my right hand that I be not moved." Could we do better than imitate our Savior in our own little trials by looking beyond them to our reward, and not forgetting the nearness of God's help by which we shall attain it?

STEP BY STEP

"Perfect thou my goings in thy paths: that my footsteps be not moved" (Ps. 16:5).

An act, often repeated, forms a habit. If the repeated act is morally good, the habit formed is called a virtue; if morally bad, a vice. Once the habit has been formed, the act is performed with ease, at times almost unconsciously. That is what the Psalmist asks in the above verse. He asks God to make his walking on "His" paths, the paths of the Lord's commandments, such a constant action that he does so almost unconsciously. Some habits of virtue are acquired more easily than others by certain people. A person who is not easily aroused to impatience or anger will have little difficulty in acquiring the virtue of patience and meekness. But it is doing the hard things that makes virtue genuine and meritorious. Again, things that are hard at first to corrupt nature become easier the more this nature is subjected to the guidance of the spirit. This holds for daily prayers, attendance at daily Holy Mass, and so on. The trick in acquiring a virtuous habit consists in performing the act with attention and perseverance. And not the least encouragement in striving for this goal is the fact that each act in the striving is meritorious.

HOLOCAUSTS

"So let our sacrifice be made that it may please thee" (Dan. 3:40).

The sacrifice of "rams and bullocks and fat lambs" was ordered by God of old in place of man's sacrifice of himself. The sacrifices of the Old Law were symbolical of the one true Sacrifice of the New. As our Divine Priest and Victim says: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast fitted to me: in holocausts and sin-offerings thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, 'Behold I come—(in the head of the book it is written of me)—to do thy will, O God'" (Heb. 10:5-7). In the "holocaust" the "whole" victim was completely consumed. This, of course, could happen but once to each victim. Man was not allowed to offer himself as a burnt offering. If he had been permitted to do so, he could have done that only once. But, by offering the highest faculty of his soul, his will, on God's altar, he not only offers the best part of himself to his Lord, but he also can offer it daily, thus making the offering of himself ever more perfect, and consequently more pleasing to God. Besides the offering of self each morning at Holy Mass, you can make this offering as often as you think of it during the day in union with the Divine Victim being offered on some altar somewhere at that very moment.

LOOK UP

"Thou wilt bring down the eyes of the proud"
(Ps. 17:28).

It is a law of physics that "water seeks its own level." Nature follows the wise laws that an all-wise Creator has placed in it. It is man who upsets the right order by following the dictates of his own proud and selfish nature. As a creature, dependent on his Creator for everything, even for the use of his free will, his proper position is to be ever "looking up" to his Lord and Master for all he needs, and that he may, therefore, confidently expect from Him. However, he makes himself a god, and usurps his Creator's right by "looking down" in disdain upon his fellow creatures, who are shaped from the same dust from which his own body was fashioned. The Holy Spirit speaks of "a generation, whose eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up on high" (Prov. 30-13). "The eyes of the lofty shall be brought low. And the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment, and the holy God shall be sanctified in justice," says Isaias (5:15-16). If man does not get down from his high perch (his review stand of his big self) God must put him down in justice, so that he may assume his natural position and "look up."

ALL-DAY SUCKERS

"The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts" (Ps. 18:9).

When we speak of pleasure we usually think of the gratification of our bodily senses. The soul, however, also has its gratifications that far surpass the pleasing sensations in the body. The proper object of the human mind is truth, and the proper food of the will is goodness. The degree attained in both these proper ends is also the measure of the soul's pleasure. The soul may have this pleasure every day and all day long, in ever-increasing volume if the mind and will are engaged in "enjoying" God. In Psalm 118, written in praise of the law of God, the Psalmist sings: "Set before me for a law the way of thy justifications, O Lord: and I will always seek after it. Give me understanding, and I will search thy law; and I will keep it with my whole heart. Lead me into the path of thy commandments; for the same I have desired. Thy justifications I will never forget: for by them thou hast given me life. O how I have loved thy law, O Lord! it is my meditation all the day. How sweet are thy words to my palate! more than honey to my mouth. I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of thy justice" (Ps. 118:33,34,35,93,97,103,106).

ON TWO WINGS

"To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul"
(Ps. 24:1).

Psalm 24 was, already in the Old Testament, a powerful prayer for every need, and may have been used much by the Israelites in their Babylonian Captivity. The Psalmist has again reached a critical stage of his life. Grave dangers hang over him like menacing storm clouds and threaten him with certain destruction. To whom shall he flee? Where shall he seek help, rescue, safety? As the hunted bird flies to its sheltering nest, the frightened child to its mother's protecting arms and lap, the harassed poet now hastens, yes, flies to God. To Thee, O Lord, I lift up, I swing my soul. Heavy anxieties, pressing cares bend down my soul. But see, I give it two wings, and it easily flies aloft to Thee, to Thy protection and tender care. These two wings are deep humility and tender trust. I am the least, an unworthy servant; Thou art the commanding, the Almighty Lord. We have, or can have, the same two stout wings. But perhaps they need a few more feathers or a strengthening of the wing muscles by daily exercise.

11th Sunday after Pentecost

ARISE!

"O Lord, I have cried to thee and thou hast healed me" (Ps. 29:3).

The Gospel of today's Holy Mass relates the cure of the man that was deaf and dumb. The Offertory may be considered a song of thanksgiving for every soul, which, when the impure spirit of sin has been driven out, opens its heart and mouth to due praise of God. This bodily healing is a reminder of the rejuvenation that will take place at the general judgment. For the just man this will be the solemn consecration of the eternal dwelling of his glorified soul, of that splendid house that God will raise up out of the dust into which it had fallen, and will "remodel" most exquisitely. The glorified human body, no less than the glorified soul, becomes the altar of God upon which fire descends from heaven, not to destroy it, but to shine through it with ecstatic splendor. In happy expectation of this rejuvenation the soul thanks and praises God. "I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou wilt one day take me up with body and soul, and not let the archfiend and murderer of men triumph over me. On the eternal Easter morning Thou wilt heal all the ills of the body of this death. Then my salvation will be perfect and will last forever."

Feast of the Assumption

HIGH PRAISE

"With one voice offer high praise to Him."

The Latin word used in today's Offertory chant to designate the Angels' art of praising God means "to praise or commend in all respects, to extol very much." God, being infinite in His perfections, deserves infinite praise. A finite or limited creature, however, is incapable of rendering Him this "due" praise. A creature can extol its Creator only "very much," to the limits of its weak powers. When, however, that creature is God's own Mother, sinless and perfect in soul, and now also glorified in body, Mary becomes, as it were, a "living harp" that gives forth most perfect music, that for all eternity will not cease its "high praise," so dear and captivating to the Blessed Trinity. From today on the angelic choirs have not merely a Queen and choir directress, to lead them in their chant, but the entire human family also has a chant leader, each one of which is destined one day to share in her glory and to join in her song of highest praise and highest thanksgiving. Each Feast of the Assumption, therefore, should serve as a time of "tuning" our fickle soul, and each day serve as a practice period in "offering high praise" to God.

COVERED HANDS

"The Lord was appeased from doing the evil which he had spoken against his people" (Exod. 32:14).

The historic incident, referred to in today's Offertory, is a striking proof of the truth of the words of St. James: "The unceasing prayer of a just man is of great avail" (5:16). Reminding God of His promises to the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses pleads that God may pardon the wickedness of His idolatrous people. Later he prays: "Either forgive them this trespass, or if thou do not, strike me out of the book that thou hast written" (Exod. 32:31-2). Moses boldly dictates to God, and his terms are—either, or. We do the same at each Holy Mass. Like Jacob of old, we cover our hands, folded in prayer, with the merits of Christ, our elder Brother, Who will be present on the altar personally in a few moments, that when we pray in His Name—"Through our Lord, Jesus Christ, Thy Son,"—the Heavenly Father, as Isaac did of old, must exclaim: "The voice (ascending from the pews) is indeed the voice of John or Mary, but the hands (merits) are those of my well-beloved Son." And He is appeased from punishing us for our infidelities. It remains for us to try to resemble this well-beloved Son ever more, and strive to pray with His sentiments.

Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

GREAT THINGS

"He who is mighty has done great things for me" (St. Luke 1:49).

Mary is not a splendor, a marvel, a trophy. She is a living person. God has not overpowered her with His magnificence. He has given her distinctness by His gifts and thereby brought out in relief the beauty of her sinless nature. Her Immaculate Heart is so human, but her sanctity and purity have become so constrainingly beautiful that their constraints reach even to the Eternal Word Himself, and He yields to the force of their attractions, anticipates His time, and hastens with inexplicable desire to take up His dwelling in His created home. God has done great things for Mary in view of Himself. "When Mary's soul and body," says Father Faber, "sprang from nothingness at the word of God, the Divine Persons encompassed their chosen creature in that selfsame instant, and the grace of the Immaculate Conception was their welcome and their touch. The use of reason from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception enabled her to advance in grace and merits beyond all calculation. Her complete exemption from the slightest shade of venial sin raised her as nearly out of the imperfections of a creature as was consistent with finite and created holiness."

FROM NOTHING

"My times are in thy hands" (Ps. 30:16).

Man is not a mechanical manikin that the Creator winds up once, lets it run down, and then permits it to lie neglected in some dark corner of the vast playhouse of this world. After creating him, that is, making him out of nothing, God must also preserve him in being, in existence, lest he again sink back into the bottomless pit of nothingness from which he was taken. In that sense we may understand the saying of the Psalmist: "My times are in Thy hands." I may, however, with equal truth say: "My times are in *my* hands," that is, my life is such as I choose to make it, either by the proper use of or the base abuse of God's precious gifts of life in time. Earthly life is made up of successive moments of time. The use of these succeeding moments forms the seed of eternity, that everlasting "now" when we shall remain in the state or condition fixed by our own choice as indicated by the use we have made of the successive moments of our mortal life, which have been determined from all eternity as to their number. We have but to make our times agree with God's view of and purpose in them and all will be well.

OUR SHIELD

"The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear him" (Ps. 33:8).

When enemies press upon God's faithful children, those that "fear Him" with a childlike dread of displeasing Him, the "angel of his presence" (Is. 63:9) will save them. When the Syrian King Benadad wished to capture Eliseus at Dothan, and for that purpose had the city surrounded by night, the servant of the prophet cried out in fear: "Alas, alas, alas, my Lord, what shall we do? But he answered: Fear not: for there are more with us than with them... And the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw: and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots round about Eliseus" (4 Kings 6:15-17). Yes, God's angels camp round about us to guard us. But more than that. Because of the words of the priest, "the angel of the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 2:7), "presently the Lord, whom you seek, and the angel of the testament, whom you desire, shall come to his temple" (Mal. 3:1). He comes, not to destroy but to save, not to deliver up to justice, but to save in His mercy. To His shielding arms we can fly for safety. For, whenever the Heavenly Father would strike any portion of the earth for its deluge of crimes, He sees outstretched there the Hands of His Son on the altar, pleading for mercy.

AN OLD SONG

"He put a new canticle into my mouth" (Ps. 39:4).

We are creatures of routine. Whatever we do repeatedly soon becomes a habit, and we do it thoughtlessly, mechanically. So mechanical the performance of our daily duties may become that at times we have to stop to consider whether we have really performed some of them. Unfortunately the same rule holds for our acts of worship. Attendance at Holy Mass and the recitation of certain formulas of prayer can become very mechanical. We must "rout" the "rut" out of routine by putting into our various actions and duties the ever-invigorating and stimulating principle of love. It is the mind that moves the will to act, to love. That is the "new canticle" that the Lord wants to hear from our mouth, or rather, from our heart. He knows the words of this song of praise already, He always knows them. But, each act of love is, as it were, a new act, and can and should be more perfect than the one that just preceded it. It is this incessant song of love, which the human heart plays on its delicate fibres, that delights the ear and heart of God. He puts inspiration and the power of expression into our hearts, but He waits until we freely give expression to our canticle of love issuing from our heart.

LOOK DOWN

"Look down, O Lord, to help me" (Ps. 39:14).

The Offertory chant repeats the above prayer of the Psalmist to emphasize the soul's need. Much is suggested by the two words—"look down." In them the Psalmist expresses his complete dependence on the Lord as well as his deep humility, which is the truthful acknowledgment of what we are in the sight of God. In her weakness, misery, and sinfulness the soul would like to run away and hide, so that the all-searching eye of God would have to "look" long for her, play a game of divine "hide and seek." And, when spied by the divine eye, the soul prays, not that God in His justice may punish her many infidelities, but that in His mercy He may pardon all her offenses, heal the many and deep wounds caused by sin, replace her fickleness by strength of will and courage. The soul, on her part, must "look up" to God, whence alone help can come, by childlike trust in His infinite mercy. Her confidence is increased by the words of the Psalmist: "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes look on the poor man: his eyelids examine the sons of men" (Ps. 19:5). Hence "our eyes are unto the Lord, our God, until he have mercy on us" (Ps. 122:2).

PRAY THUS

"Upon whom thy name is invoked, O God"
(Dan. 9:19).

In His farewell discourse to His Apostles Jesus assured their sad hearts: "Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full" (St. John 16:23-4). That is just what Holy Mother Church does. When she asks for any grace of the Father, she concludes her petition with the words "through Jesus Christ, Thy Son." At this holy Mother's knee we learn to lisp our prayers by uniting our childish voices with her maternal pleadings. Not only do we learn from her how to pray, but we also learn the more important lesson always to pray *with* her, to unite our weak prayers with her all-powerful pleadings, for she always prays in the name of and through the merits of Christ, her Head, Who "in the days of his earthly life, with a loud cry and tears, offered up prayers and supplications to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7). The prayer of our High Priest rises incessantly from our altars. We have but to unite our prayers with His.

18th Sunday after Pentecost

EVENING MASS

**"He made an evening sacrifice to the Lord God"
(Exod. 24:5).**

Periodically a plea is made for having an evening Mass. It may be the novelty that attracts at first, but it is safe to say, with human nature being what it is, that, were it introduced, there would soon be just as many reasons given, and perhaps a few more than for the morning Mass, why it is impossible to attend this evening Mass. But, granted the best dispositions, a person can attend bodily only the mass (or masses) celebrated in a church. The solution seems to be much simpler. Holy Mass is one sacrifice, celebrated from the rising to the setting of the sun. Just now, somewhere it is evening, and Holy Mass is being celebrated. A mere act of the will, a union of the worshipper with the Divine Victim on the altar where He is offering Himself at this moment, makes it possible to assist at this Mass. Thus you can assist at Mass all day and night long, irrespective of the time shown by your watch or clock. This does not mean, however, that you should not assist bodily at Mass as often as possible, but it indicates a simple method of offering a continuous sacrifice to the Lord God.

19th Sunday after Pentecost

QUICKEN ME

"Thou wilt quicken me, O Lord" (Ps. 137:7).

The Introit of today's Mass represents the Lord as saying: "I am the salvation of the people; in whatever tribulation they shall cry to Me, I will hear them; and I will be their Lord forever." When the Psalmist is "in the midst of tribulation" he knows that God will "stretch forth His right hand against the wrath of his enemies," and that "His right hand shall save him." But the Lord must do more. He must not merely give life to His creature, and then preserve that life against all man's enemies, but He must also "quicken" him, that is, He must constantly give him new life and vigor. The blessing of life is such a great treasure that the Creator gives it to man only a moment at a time in order that he may not squander or lose it, but use it to its fullest advantage. To do that we must offer it each moment with our Victim on the altar as a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. For, life is not a gift, it is a loan. It is not our property that we may squander at will, but the deposit of the Lord that must be returned to Him with interest. If in the past we have been wasteful of this great treasure, we must now take "quicken" in its second meaning and—"get busy."

20th Sunday after Pentecost

HOMESICK

"There we sat and wept" (Ps. 136:1).

Psalm 136 is very dramatic. It describes very graphically the sad lot of the chosen people of God in their captivity in Babylon. On the willow trees that grew on the banks of its rivers they hung up their harps because their hearts were too heavy to "sing the song of the Lord in a strange land" (v.4). We, children of God, destined for our true country—heaven, must spend our years of exile on earth. During the week our work and cares distract us and cause us to feel less the pain of our exile. But on the Lord's day, when, as it were, we draw nearer to God and dwell more in spirit in our true country, our heart becomes a prey to real homesickness and ardent longing for heaven. Yet, we are just as near to God during the days of labor and suffering as we are on the day of rest and prayer. What we need to do is to make the spirit and spiritual work of Sunday into a golden thread that runs through the bodily work and cares of the weekdays, so that these also speed us on our way home. Sunday will then not be the round of a ladder to heaven, but the signpost along life's highway that directs and speeds our steps.

21st Sunday after Pentecost

IN CAPITAL LETTERS

"All that he hath is in thy hand" (Job 1:12).

When we wish to stress a word, we say that it is written in "all caps" (capital letters). Thus—JOY. In today's Offertory chant we have a condensation of Job's dramatic life story. Job sums it up in the words: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). The devil, with God's permission, did a thorough "job" on Job, for he robbed him of everything but his life—and his complete trust in God. Then God spelled this "job" with a capital "J" and made it Job, whose latter end He blessed more than his beginning. "And he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. And he had seven sons and three daughters. And Job lived after these things, a hundred and forty years, and he saw his children, and his children's children, unto the fourth generation, and he died an old man, and full of days" (42:12,13,16). The words of the Offertory, quoted above, were spoken by God to Satan. We must speak them to God: "I, and all that I have is in Thy Hand."

MY KING

"I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance"
(Ps. 2:8).

Man is by nature gregarious. He likes to be one of a large crowd, to live in a community. It is the exception that merely proves this rule. Though sharing his life with his neighbor, he may not so readily share his talents and possessions with him. To satisfy man's "hoarding" instinct God comes to his rescue. He gives Himself completely to each human being. Not only once in a lifetime does the Savior enter into the human soul, but even daily, and each time completely. As the Father gives the nations to His Son as His rightful inheritance, the Son in turn gives Himself as liberal inheritance to each one of His people, His children. The Son gives himself completely. The individual gives of himself, according to his own measure of generosity and gratitude. In order to receive more of Christ, who gives Himself to the soul completely, the individual must make more room for God by reducing his self-love. We are, then, as rich as we choose to be, possessing of the eternal goodness, riches, and essence of the Divine Person as much as we choose for ourselves. Will it then be hard to "seize" all, the Divine Being, and to leave all frail, sinful human nature? My King, make me Thy selfless footstool.

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

PROPER MAKEUP

**"Give me a well-ordered speech in my mouth"
(Esther 14:13).**

It is second nature to a woman to make herself look attractive. Queen Esther was no exception. "She laid away the garments she wore, and put on her glorious apparel. And glittering in royal robes . . . with a rosy color in her face, and with gracious and bright eyes . . . stood before the king, where he sat upon his royal throne, clothed with his royal robes, and glittering with precious stones, and he was terrible to behold" (Esther 15:4-9). But before that royal audience she "laid away her royal apparel, she put on garments suitable for weeping and mourning: instead of divers precious ointments, she covered her head with ashes, and she humbled her body with fasts: and all the places in which before she was accustomed to rejoice, she filled with her torn hair" (14:2). That make-up moved the Lord to "give her a well-ordered speech" which moved the king to save her people from their enemies. Proper dress is in place in the house of God at all times, but especially during times of worship. But more important still is the proper state of soul that will make the soul's well-ordered speech of prayer and praise please and glorify God.

SOUL NEGATIVES

"Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord"
(Ps. 129:1).

There is nothing perfect in this world. Things are not as good nor as bad as they might be. Things would be better if we, and especially our free will, were better disposed. Things are no worse than they actually are because God has placed His world-encircling palm beneath our little evils. It is "out of the depths" that we cry constantly to the Lord and He so graciously hears us. What a pit of miseries our poor human nature encloses! Bodily ailments, labelled with fancy and unpronounceable names, seem to be without number. And who will number and classify all the ailments of the soul—the weakness of the mind (eye) and the ailments of the will (the spine and limbs of the soul), and so on? Well does Job paint his picture: "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state . . . The days of man are short, and the number of his months is with thee: thou hast appointed his bounds which cannot be passed" (14:1,2,5). That is the dark negative from which the bright print of hope in God is made.

24th Sunday after Pentecost

SEED OF HOPE

"Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord"
(Ps. 129:1).

Today's Offertory chant is the same as that of last Sunday. It again repeats the cry of the Psalmist that comes "from the depths." The "De Profundis" (Ps. 129), is usually associated with a departed soul, for whose repose it is fervently said. Yet it is also said as the 4th Psalm of the second Vespers on Christmas Day, and there is surely nothing "dead" about the newly-born Divine Infant. Because of His "birth" there is life and hope for all sinners. It is that "seed of hope," planted deep down in the fertile soil of our needy soul, and watered by the abundant tears of repentance, that strains ever upwards to the source of light and life—the Divine Savior in the heavens, to God. The winter of preparation and expectation will soon be past, and the seed of hope will sprout anew, for the Savior will soon be nigh "Who singularly has settled me in hope" (Ps. 4:10). It is the Divine Sun of the Mass that must help this sprouting plant of hope to grow ever stronger and taller until it finally blossoms and blooms into possession. That will be a lifelong task, but one that should have new thrills in the doing each day, yes, each moment of each day of our earthly life.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

WITH THEE

"The Lord is with thee" (St. Luke 1:28).

Today we celebrate a Feast of great spiritual joy because, as we pray in the Oration, the Father, "through the death foreseen" of His Son, preserved His Mother "unsullied by sin," and we ask that, by her intercession, we, "pure in heart," may come to Him. These last three words—"come to Him"—deserve our attention. We may render these words by—"turn to Him," Who dwells in our souls by grace. Jesus, by His death, prevented Mary from contracting the taint of inherited sin, and by that same death has removed that inherited stain from our souls as well as the guilt of all personal sins committed after the reception of holy baptism. The Lord is, therefore, truly "with us," though in a much less perfect manner than "with Mary." The perfection of His dwelling in our souls is due, not to His own wish or will, but according to the imperfection of our cooperation with divine grace. He is with us only as much as we let Him. What we need, therefore, is not merely to be "pure in heart," but also to be "generous of will." We must not keep back the least spot of His lawful domain—our little souls,—but subject our whole soul to His lawful rule.

1st Sunday of Advent

MY TRUST

"In thee, O my God, I put my trust" (Ps. 24:2).

The Offertory chant today is the same as that for the 10th Sunday after Pentecost. It is plain that the important word in the above text is "Thee." "In the Lord I put my trust" (Ps. 10:2). "My soul trusteth in thee, and in the shadow of thy wings will I hope" (Ps. 56:2). He alone is the solid basis for our confidence. All other trust is "upon the broken staff of a reed... upon which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it" (Is. 36:6). The Holy Spirit warns us: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall" (Prov. 11:28). "He that trusteth in his own devices doth wickedly" (Prov. 12:2). "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool" (Prov. 28:26). Hence, what we are and what we have are no solid basis for confidence. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Sion: he shall not be moved for ever that dwelleth in Jerusalem. Mountains are round about it: so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth now and for ever" (Ps. 124:1-2). And by the mouth of His prophet Jeremiah God speaks: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. Blessed be the man that trusteth in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence" (17:5,7).

2nd Sunday of Advent

OUR TURN

"Thou wilt turn, O Lord, and bring us to life"
(Ps. 84:7).

To understand these words of the Psalmist we must read the preceding verse. "Wilt thou be angry with us for ever: or wilt thou extend thy wrath from generation to generation?" (v.6) "Thou wilt turn" is a Hebrew expression and may be translated by the simple word "again." "O God," prays the Psalmist, "change Thy anger *again* into favor, Thy strict justice into paternal love! Then we shall, as it were, arise from the dead, we shall raise ourselves from the grave of sorrow and affliction to a life of hope and trust. If Thou wilt "turn" Thy Face, turned away from us in anger, back to us with pardon and favor, it will be like the spring sun that makes all things sprout, grow, and come to full maturity." God has done that long ago. God still does that each moment of the day and night. Holy Mass is both the record of God's goodness and pardon as well as the instrument of grace and peace. He is always "turned" to us. It is we who fail to turn to Him with the proper dispositions of soul, necessary for pardon and reinstatement in God's favor and grace. To Thee, O Lord, we turn with all our hearts.

BROKEN BARS

"Thou hast turned away the captivity of Jacob"
(Ps. 84:2).

Man's most prized possession is his personal liberty. His most irksome punishment is, therefore, to be confined behind the bars of a prison for a longer or shorter period of time. His gnawing desire would, if it could, cut the restraining bars in two. Yet, he sometimes has a false notion of the nature of true liberty, and fails to realize that he can be his own jailer, or even hangman. God, the Creator, has given His noblest creature a free-will that he may freely choose to serve His Creator by doing *His* Will. If man chooses to serve himself, by heeding the dictates of self-will or of the devil, by obeying his suggestions to evil, he becomes the basest slave. Just as man by his free-will makes himself the slave of Satan and sin, so, by an act of contrition he freely turns away from slavery to liberty, to God, by accepting the Hand that has "blessed the land" of his soul by "turning it from its captivity" by "forgiving its iniquity." The Savior has come in human form as our Divine Liberator. He will come in a few moments in His Eucharistic form to be the help we need to break the bars of sin and enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

"Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (St. Luke 1:42).

These words, which we recite so often each day, mark the beginning of our salvation. Father Faber thus sketches this dramatic moment for us. "Innumerable decrees of God, decrees without number, like the waves of the sea, decrees that included or gave forth all other decrees, came up to the midnight room at Nazareth, as it were to the feet of that most wonderful of God's creatures, with the resistless momentum which had been given them from eternity, all glistening with the manifold splendors of the divine perfections, like huge billows just curling to break upon the shore; and they stayed themselves there, halted in full course, and hung their accomplishment upon the Maiden's word." At Mary's word of consent the "Word was made flesh." In a few moments, at the words of consecration, the Savior will be present for us under the chaste appearance of the sacramental species. He comes again for us, for our salvation, to be present in our body and soul, to fill us with grace, and to make us really "blessed." His coming to us rests on our consent, and the fruits of His coming, on our dispositions of soul. If in the past Jesus could not work in our souls as He so eagerly wished, shall we bind His Hands again today?

HE COMES

“Let the earth be glad” (Ps. 95:11).

The thought of the Offertories of the three Christmas Masses may be expressed in a single sentence. Jesus “comes down from heaven” to “establish His throne” upon the solid foundation of “justice and judgment.” Jesus comes as lovable Babe, as mighty King, as stern Judge. He came to earth on the first Christmas night as a lovable Babe. He reigns in heaven now as glorious King. He will come at the end of our life and at the end of the world as a stern Judge. Let us consider Him as a charming Babe, soon to come in the earthly form of the host now being offered. In a few moments, at the elevation, we shall look “upon the Face” of the Babe, come again from heaven to be our prized possession, our most precious Christmas gift. He comes to give Himself to us that we may give ourselves, together with Him, back to the Father. The Christmas Mass is Jesus’ gift to us, but it is also our choicest gift to the Father. Without the Mass there would be no Jesus; without Jesus there would be no Christmas. Should we not, then, be glad? And, to increase our ecstatic joy, Jesus triples the offering of Himself, for according to an old proverb, “all good things are three in number.”

HE REIGNS

“Thy throne is prepared from of old” (Ps. 92:2).

Thirty-three years were required for the charming Babe of Bethlehem to grow to full, perfect manhood, to complete His bloody conquest of souls, and then to enter heaven as crowned King to ascend the throne “that the Father had prepared from the beginning.” Only a few moments, the time that elapses between the elevation and the communion of the Mass, are required for the Eucharistic Babe to grow to full manhood and to enter our hearts as lawful King and to take possession of this holy land that He has bought back from the slavery of sin and Satan. Jesus is present in the Holy Eucharist as He is now in heaven, with His glorious, kingly life. Our soul, into which our King comes, wearing the royal robes of the Eucharistic Species, is, therefore, truly His throne. The more lowly that throne, the more He delights to sit on it, for, as Mary sings in her Magnificat: “He has put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted the lowly” (St. Luke 1:53). Our body is the lowly footstool by which He ascends to the throne of our soul to sit (live) there until expelled by the tyrant, self-will, and the sword of grave sin.

HE JUDGES

"Justice and judgment are the preparation of thy throne" (Ps. 88:15).

The remainder of verse 13 of Psalm 95, the first part of which was used in the Offertory chant of the 1st Mass, is: "Because he cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with justice, and the people with his truth" (Ps. 95:13). God is the only essential Being, the Supreme Being, a Simple Act. There can really be no separate attributes in God, because He is a Simple Being, and is, therefore, His own Attributes. His Attributes are not distinguished from the Divine Essence, nor among themselves. These perfections are the way in which He invites us to regard Him. They are different sides of His character, different aspects of His majesty. Today's chant calls attention to His Justice, and especially to the necessity of justice in our souls, for it is the throne room of the God-man, the just Judge, Who, by right of conquest, can lay claim to this holy land and regal throne. If in our soul "justice and peace have kissed" (Ps. 84:11), if we have made our peace with God by using the merits of Christ to restore our soul to the state of justice or innocence, then the new-born King will come to reign in us, not to judge us.

Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity

ROYAL BLOOD

"Thou art from everlasting" (Ps. 92:2).

Royal lineage among earthly rulers can be traced back at farthest to the beginning of the human race, to Adam who was created king of the creation which antedated his own creation. But it is still "human" lineage. Our new-born King is divine, and "from everlasting." By His very nature He is outside and infinitely above space, and bodies, and time. He is "eternal," because His existence, having neither beginning nor end, nor succession of time, is simple and indivisible in duration. In God there is neither past nor future, but an eternal present. He "is" God and our King. He, Who is outside of time, enters into the narrow circle of the few days of our earthly life in order to make our present moments one with His eternal present. What an exhilarating moment the present can become if, with the firm grip of faith, we use it to cling more closely to and to unite ourselves more unreservedly with our ever-present King. Contact is necessary for a blood-transfusion. Our King comes to impart His divine life to us by sanctifying grace, that we may one day sit on the throne and wear the crown prepared for us "from everlasting" in the mind of God.

Mass for the Dead

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

"From the deep pit."

This is the only Offertory chant that has retained its original form. In a very dramatic way Holy Mother Church, as it were, calls the dead back to life, that is, to the hour of death, which decided their eternal destiny. She represents the departed at that moment, when in the presence of death they could still prepare for the divine judgment. She represents her children in their death agony, surrounded by wicked enemies, and on the brink of a frightful precipice, which threatens to swallow them up. Accordingly the Church prays to the Lord to preserve them "from the pains of hell and from the deep abyss, and to deliver them from the lion's mouth, lest hell swallow them up and lest they sink into darkness." These petitions are the more appropriate and touching because we unite our gifts and prayers with the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, and thus accompany the departing soul to God's judgment-seat, that she may experience the goodness and clemency of the Lord and be permitted to pass "from the temporal death of the body into the eternal life of glory." Besides being a very efficacious means of alleviating the pains of the departed soul, this prayer also fills the living survivors (all of us), with holy gravity and wholesome fear.

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