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— What is Mass?
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What Is The Mass?

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WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT THE MASS

Since the sixteenth century something sad, even disastrous has been happening to the idea of prayer. In our day we see the meaning of prayer gradually falling apart, so that there is hardly one solid piece left of it.

This breakdown in the idea of prayer had its origin in Protestantism with its insistence on individual freedom, private interpretation of Scripture, private determination of the law of God. Such false notions lead naturally to a false idea of prayer.

This decline shows itself in the divorce of prayer from the very elements which make it genuine and effective. Unfortunately this Protestant mentality has also infected the thought of many Catholics. We speak with Protestants on the street, on the train and at home; we find their religious views insinuated in writings not specifically religious. Contact here means contagion. The result is that our own ideas are colored by these indirect influences.

This cutting away of the substantial elements of prayer developed in three stages.

PRAYER WITHOUT SACRIFICE

1. Prayer was divorced from the idea of sacrifice. With the outlawing of the Mass and the smashing of Catholic altars, the so-called Reformation reduced prayer to mere lip-service without act or evidence to back it up.

To those cut off from the body of the true Church by the reformers, a church was an organ and a choir, a pulpit and a book. If there was an altar, it was not for sacrifice but only for holding a book. Songs of love for God died with the silencing of the organ. Protestations of adoration cost nothing but the breath spent in sounding them. Sighs of sorrow for sin demanded no proof of sincerity. Prayer was reduced to hollow words.

PRAYER WITHOUT FELLOWSHIP

2. Then prayer was divorced from our fellowship with other men. It became a solitary, lonely thing. Individual freedom, personal rights, extreme nationalism made men lose sight of their oneness, the unity of the whole human race. So far had men forgotten the divine unity of the human race that a phrase, *One World*, coined by a politician, hit them with the force of an atomic explosion. "A new idea," they cried, as if Christ had never prayed, "That they all may be one!" Far beyond Christ's meaning they interpreted the words, "When you pray, go into your room and close the door and pray in private to your Father," so that prayer was divorced from the prayer of other men and made alone with God.

All else we do in society with others: work, play, study, argue and debate, but not pray. Men lost the deep sense of the unity of the human race, because they lost the true idea of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ; they had torn it limb from limb. The social life of all men in Christ was forgotten. So men prayed alone, divorced from their fellowmen.

PRAYER WITHOUT GOD

3. And now prayer is divorced even from God. The collapse is complete.

Prayer used to be thought of as a seeking after God. Now in prayer men seek to satisfy a vague emotional need, to fill an undefinable sentimental void in their hearts, to find relaxation for their tired and taut nerves, to purchase a sense of power by contact with some unknown superhuman force, no matter if that force is Buddha, or Nirvana, or a cosmic radiation, or the fifth dimension.

This is not a false accusation; evidence for its truth abounds. Recently we heard of a professor in a medical school for whom the church represents one of man's intuitive approaches to truth. For him, to leave prayer uncultivated is to miss one of the greatest sources of knowledge. This is true no matter how ineffective the church may be, how poor the preaching, for there is a

beauty in any church service and food for thought in every sermon. The hurry of existence leaves little enough time for that quiet contemplation from which creative ideas arise. Going to church is one of the vital necessities.

But where does this professor's idea of prayer make contact with God?

THE CATHOLIC VIEW

In contrast to these motives for going to church, for praying, we have this statement of a Catholic woman: "To keep house means to exercise day in and day out a woman's peculiar talent for doing the same utterly unimportant things over and over again. I am not content with this. I want to say a word that will pierce the heavens and do a deed that will shake the earth. At church a deed is done and I help do it; there a word is said and I help say it. My word reaches the heart of God and my deed redeems the world. Consequently I go to church not to listen or to get, but to give and to do. Spiritual satisfaction? Say rather spiritual effectiveness. Comfort for the soul? Say rather use of the soul."

This good Catholic lady was thinking of the Mass. She was not infected with any Protestant mentality.

* * *

If you should wonder why we are going back to renew our acquaintance with the Mass, the answer is this: because too few Catholics think as this alive and alert Catholic lady whom we quoted. If all Catholics would think as she did, there would be no need of learning again about the Mass.

Sadly, the majority of Catholics must be convinced that there is no prayer without sacrifice; that there is no truly effective prayer separated from the family life of Christ and His members, that every prayer must look up to God first in adoration and thanksgiving and love, as well as look upon ourselves.

Here is the Catholic doctrine about the Mass.

The Mass is prayer with sacrifice.

The Mass is prayer and sacrifice with the Church.

The Mass is the prayer and sacrifice of the Church with Christ to God.

The Mass, in a word, is Catholic life.

This truth, that the Mass is Catholic life, was expressed seventeen centuries ago. A group of Christians was dragged in chains to Carthage because they had dared in secret to celebrate the Mass, despite the prohibition under penalty of death. When the man who had offered his house for this divine service was asked by the pagan governor why he had done this, he answered quite simply: "These are my brothers. I could not keep them from it, because without the holy Mass we cannot live."

May God grant that all who read these thoughts on the Mass will be so enlightened and inspired that they too will say, "We cannot live without the Mass."

IT IS THE MASS THAT MATTERS

How well the enemies of Christ and His Church sense the importance of the Mass to Catholics! It is always the central fortress in the kingdom of God which they labor to batter down. The rulers of Rome drove the early Christians into the catacombs. The Protestant rebels against Christ and His Church, His Mystical Body, centered their attack upon the Mass. In Mexico, in Russia, in Red Spain of some years ago, the Mass was the first Catholic act to be outlawed. In pagan Nazi Germany seminaries were closed and seminarians driven into civil or military life under penalty of death. Today bishops and priests, for the flimsiest of reasons, are herded into concentration camps or thrown into prison in China and Yugoslavia — to die. And all this to kill the priesthood and so to kill the Mass. Even they know too well that "It is the Mass that matters."

The true lovers and friends of Christ know that the Mass must go on, else the end of all is upon us. And the Mass does go on, in every nation of the globe.*

Priests may die as did Father Pro and hundreds of others in Mexico, because they offer Mass in secret mountain hide-aways and in broken farm houses; but the Mass is more important than their lives. Priests in disguise find their way into Red Russia with the blessing of the Holy Father upon their martyrdom, while the rest of the world trembles at the ruthlessness of the Red dictators and fears to defy their inhuman tyranny — and Russia still has its Masses. It is almost a monotonous repetition of history; monotonous but heroic.

And why this heroic, this apparently fanatical devotion to the Mass? Why? Because it is a command of the Master; the last order He gave before He went out into the dark night to die for us. Never shall we forget, never shall we neglect that last order from the Master.

Why did Christ lay such stress and emphasis on the continuation of the Mass? Because the Mass is the soul, the center of the divine religion that He has left us; because without the Mass there can be no Christianity, as without sacrifice there can be no religion.

TRUE RELIGION DEMANDS A SACRIFICE

It is a matter of history that there has never existed a religion which sprang true from the human heart which did not have its sacrifice. And here let us dispose of an objection at once. Someone may say: "Protestantism never had nor has a sacrifice."

With all respect to sincere Protestants we answer: Protestantism as a religion is a negation, as its name implies. It is a protest. Against what? Against the will of Christ; against the Mystical Body of Christ; against the truth and teaching of Christ. It is a fit of anger and resentment and rebellion against the social order God has set up in the world. But it is by no means a natural expression of man's religious life, of man's relation to God. That is why Protestantism is a dying religion. It arose from resentment, quarrels and greed, not from man's natural desire to acknowledge the rights of God and the duties of man.

Every natural religion springing clean from man's human impulses and convictions is built around a sacrifice. Why is this so? When men had gathered their harvests of grain from the fields, when men had watched their cattle grow from weak and tottering calves into fully developed animals ready for the slaughter, they instinctively thought of the God Who made all these things possible.

In their desire to express their gratitude, in their sense of dependence upon their Creator, in their conviction of what would become of them if His providence failed them, they took the finest grain from their fields and the choice head from the herds and offered them to Him as a symbol of their belief that all they were and all they had belonged to Him. Their reason went even further.

Thus in their ancient records you can read of the Aztec Indians of Mexico adorning the fairest virgin of their tribe and hurling her into a burning volcano or furnace. You can read of the North American Indians gathered on the banks of the Niagara River, hands and voices raised in prayer, while the most beautiful daughter of the tribe, helpless to disengage herself from her floating prison, drifts over the ridge of the falls in a canoe to sudden death as a sacrifice to the lord of life and death.

We do not endeavor to justify the slaughter of innocents; we are not saying that the fifth commandment of God was abrogated. But this we do say: the principle of these primitives is correct. The basic thought common to the idea of sacrifice is solid and reasonable.

In his effort to acknowledge God as his Creator and himself as a creature, the barbarian offered to Him the very life that God had loaned him, as the most precious thing in his possession. The principle is correct, though the application of the principle is false and erroneous. Nevertheless in the offering of the most precious thing he owned, the barbarian said with a deep sincerity that makes modern religionists seem hypocritical: "Lord, God, we acknowledge Thy sovereignty and adore Thee. We are grateful to Thee and thank Thee. We hope for Thy continued mercy. We repent of our misuse of Thy gifts and implore Thy pardon. See our sincerity in the gift we offer Thee."

AS OLD AS THE HUMAN RACE

Sacrifice is the highest form of religious worship, the outward public expression of man's entire dependence upon God. And because man's belief in a Supreme Being is natural, because it is natural for man to give outward expression to his inward sentiment and convictions, the offering of sacrifice is as old as the human race.

On the first pages of human history we find Cain and Abel offering sacrifice to God; one offered the fruits of the field, the other sacrificed the firstlings of the flock.

Even among pagans you will find this truth carried out. Plutarch, the Greek historian, writes: "You may find cities without walls, without literature, without a ruler; but you will never find a city without a deity, without a sacrifice and without prayer."

GOD COMMANDS IT

What reason urges, God commanded. When men began to wander hopelessly from religious truth, God Himself intervened. He selected the Chosen People to guard His truth; he codified the law of human nature on Mount Sinai and unmistakably manifested His will.

Among these very first prescriptions of His will was the command to offer sacrifice. By God's order, a family, that of Aaron, was singled out by Moses as the priestly family with only one work in life, that of prayer and sacrifice.

Minutely and in most precise detail did God instruct the Jews in this essential act of their religion. Individually, as well as socially, the principal acts of religion were prayer and sacrifice — not preaching. Some sacrifices were destined to the adoration and honor of God; others to thank Him; still others to plead for His graces and blessings; others, finally, were sacrifices for sin.

But though their sacrifices embraced almost all their possessions in one form or another, yet they all clustered around one which was the outstanding sacrifice of the Old Law — that of the Paschal Lamb. It was both a memory and a prophecy; a memory of the deliverance of the Jews

from the captivity in Egypt, and a prophecy of the delivery of the whole world from the captivity of sin under the justice of God by the redemptive sacrifice of the True Paschal Lamb, Christ on Calvary.

THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

Yet what adequate honor and glory can grain and animals render to God? How can they be acceptable, save only in consideration of the spirit of adoration and worship and love that prompts men to offer them? Still, in themselves they are not even perfectly symbolic of adoration and gratitude; they offer no true satisfaction for sin. In the words of St. Paul: "It is impossible that sin should be taken away with the blood of oxen and goats."

There was an imperative need for an offering, a sacrifice that could really and in justice offer to God the adoration, the thanks and above all the reparation for sins that He deserved. That, of course, meant an infinite gift. Even human life was insufficient, because it involved no infinite honor or reparation.

That is why the Word was made flesh, uniting Himself to us in order to offer the only worthy sacrifice to His Father. He did this not merely as our representative, but as a part of us, as our head. He paid the price of our sins, not as a friend will pay the fine imposed upon his friend in court, but as a hand will pay the fine for the whole body. He suffered, not as a friend suffers in sympathy, but as our head suffers the pain of a headache for the overindulgence of the rest of the body.

On Calvary we have the only sacrifice that can fulfill completely the office of sacrifice. The *altar of sacrifice* is the cross, raised on an elevation, midway between God and us. Voluntarily Christ mounts this altar. He is the *Victim* which is offered. Forever finished are the incomplete victims — sheep, scapegoats, lambs — and instead, His beautiful, holy, sinless body is broken and presented to His Father in our name. He, too, is the *priest* who offers. Of His own free will He makes this sacrifice. He does not bend His neck to a sword or hang limp from a rope. He stands erect, with head high against the altar, retaining full use

of His powers to the very end, commanding the situation, speaking now to God and now to man. He could have escaped as He did before, by miraculous flight through dense crowds, by the majesty of His divinity in the garden. But no! This is the hour of sacrifice for which He has waited so long. He will not retreat.

On the road down to Jerusalem from Bethany, knowing that they were waiting for Him, He had said: "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptised and how am I straitened, torn apart with eagerness, until it be accomplished." Calmly, as a priest at the altar, He now hangs on the cross and offers Himself in throes of love to His Father — freely, joyously.

Thus, by the sacrifice of the cross, the greatest gift was offered to God: the life and death of Christ, the God-Man. You and I, guilty of sin, die in the person of Christ. But He alone is crucified, the rest of us are free. God's love for us is proved, and the dawn of hope breaks once more upon the race of men. Life is worth living again; God is in our midst again, though dead on the cross.

Men are born into the world to live. With Christ it was just the reverse: He was born into the world to die. Death was not the collapse but the crown of His life and work, for He came to give His life for a redemption for many. When He had died, He had just begun.

Since His death was the supreme moment for which He had lived, He wanted to have it remembered before all others. He did not ask that men should write down His words in a Scripture. He did not ask that His kindness to the poor, the lame and the blind should be recorded in history. But He did ask that men would remember His death. For God's death for man was something too beautiful, too holy ever to be forgotten. In order that its memory might not be any haphazard narrative on the part of men, Christ Himself instituted the precise way it should be recalled. Man has instituted memorial days to recall the death and sacrifice of soldiers, but Christ instituted His own memorial to recall His death on the cross. This He did at the Last Supper. After He had said, "This is my body

which shall be delivered for you. This is my blood of the New Testament which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins," He added, "Do this for a commemoration of Me."

That commemoration, that remembrance of His death is the Mass.



THE PERFECT PRAYER

One of the blessings of our modern life is specialized service. Men and women specially trained and skilled stand ready to execute almost any human task in a far more perfect manner than we ourselves could do it. We have accountants to balance our books and keep our business orderly; secretaries to write our letters and arrange the trivialities of our life; managers to conduct our business; hostesses to conduct our parties; lawyers to handle our legal affairs; tailors and dressmakers to clothe our bodies; cooks to prepare our foods; laundries to do our linens; dentists to retain our chewing-power; detective agencies to recover our losses.

THEY CAN DO BETTER

The list is almost inexhaustible. It covers practically every department of life. And the striking advantage of the system is that these individuals are qualified by nature and by education to do the job far better than we ourselves could do it.

Now, would it not be wonderful if we had someone especially educated, trained and skilled by experience as well as endowed by nature to pray perfectly for us? Would that not be a source of incalculable ease and peace and

comfort to our often troubled minds and hearts? That such is the desire of most good Catholics is evidenced by the fact that they will ask others whom they esteem more holy than they — saintly children, holy nuns, priests — to pray for them. What is behind that request if not a conviction that God must have equipped some, both by nature and by grace and experience, to pray better than they do? This desire can reach a point where people will say, "Oh, if only I had a God to pray to God for me, I should be certain that my prayer would be worthy, certainly deserving of an answer."

IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

We have just that — A GOD TO PRAY FOR US — TO PRAY IN OUR STEAD.

Our Divine Saviour has assured us of this comforting supernatural service. "Hitherto you have not asked the Father anything in My name. Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything *in My name*, He will give it to you." (Jno. 16/23)

You wonder sometimes why your prayers are not heard and answered, why you do not receive the graces and gifts you plead for. Perhaps Christ is speaking the answer to your wonder today. Perhaps even after all these years and centuries, you have not yet understood the meaning of His words. Perhaps He still must warn you as He did the dull Apostles on the night of His last supper: "Hitherto you have not asked the Father anything in My name." Perhaps you have asked only in your own name — a name that has no power — no sweetness — a name that is perhaps none too pleasing to God because of your sins, your infidelities and disloyalties to Him and His love; a name that may have been written too often on the list of Christ's enemies.

Now, both by His Incarnation, which is the union of the divine and human nature, as well as by His personal appointment by His heavenly Father, Christ is our petitioner, our mediator with the heavenly Father. To impress the realization of His mighty love for His Son upon our poor dull minds, the heavenly Father spoke to mankind not just once, but several times.

At the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, the heavens opened and the voice of the Father was heard ringing down through the skies: "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Again when our Lord was transfigured on Mt. Thabor, there was a cloud overshadowing Him and a voice came out of the cloud saying: "This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him."

WORDS OF OUR LORD

How careful and desirous Christ Himself is to remind us of this power of His with His Father and of this office that He has undertaken: to pray for us, to stand before His Father and plead our cause for us. Recall for a moment one of the most moving and touching hours in His life. He stands before the tomb of His dead friend, Lazarus. Mary and Martha are there, and the Apostles, disappointed that Christ did not save Lazarus from the pain of dying. With tears in His own eyes, Christ groaned in deep prayer. They, therefore, took the stone away and Jesus lifting up His eyes said: "Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me. And I know that Thou hearest Me always, but because of the people that stand about I have said it that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me." And when He had said these things, after He had prayed to His heavenly Father, He cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth!" And presently he that had been dead came forth, bound hands and feet with winding bands; and his face bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: "Loose him and let him go." (Jno. 11/41)

Why did Jesus do this so publicly? As He Himself said, that we may know that the Father sent Him expressly to pray in our place, to offer our prayers to His Father. That is His office — an office called in theology, that of Mediator between God and man: He Who stands between God and man to offer our prayers to the Father for us.

Thus not only does His divine nature make His prayer irresistible, but by His very position, by His appointment from His Father, by His profession, He is the Pray-er for mankind. As lawyers are appointed by the State to plead

the cause of human beings before a judge, so Christ has been officially appointed by God the Father to plead our cause before Him as our advocate.

Listen to St. Paul insisting upon this truth: "For there is one God and one Mediator of God and man, the man Jesus Christ." (I Tim. 2/5) As man He is one of us and we can claim Him as our own. As God, His Father cannot refuse Him His requests, "Who gave Himself a redemption for all." In fulfillment of this office, Christ Himself tells us: "No one cometh to the Father but by Me. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." (Jno. 14/6) No plea, no petition, no prayer is deserving of respect and attention save it come to the Father with and through Christ Himself the man of *prayer for us*.

AT THE LAST SUPPER

Christ reached the height of His praying for us when He first offered the perfect prayer for us and in our stead. That prayer was begun with His lips at the Last Supper and ended with His body broken and pierced at the ninth hour on Good Friday. In that prayer He glorified His Father.

From His birth to His death Christ burned with zeal for the divine glory. And in His great prayer He prayed: "Father, glorify Thy Son. I have glorified Thee on earth." His great prayer also contained gratitude. This was His intention and desire at the Last Supper when *He gave thanks*. Then, only after He had given His Father glory and thanks, does Christ turn to the prayer of petition. "I pray for them (the Apostles). Holy Father, keep them from evil."

But all this was not the entirety of Christ's perfect prayer for us. Something more than words is needed to convince men of your sincerity. Something more is asked and demanded by God. "Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." He was the one to carry out His own principles.

Adoration means acknowledging God's sovereign goodness, our utter dependence upon Him, that all we have and are belong by first right to Him. How better tell that truth in the language of action than by laying down all, even life at His feet? That is what Christ did on the cross for us.

We owe God thanks for the boundless bounty He has showered upon us. How better tell Him our thanks than by offering up all we have as a return gift? That is what Christ did on the cross.

If our hearts feel a vast need for pardon, for grace and mercy and divine help and protection, how could Christ better obtain these for us than by presenting to God an even greater gift than He asks — His own Divine Self: the last breath of His lips, the last beat of His heart, the last drop of blood, a last groan?

We know that the last moment of any life is always the most precious; that of Christ is infinitely dear to His divine Father. Each drop of blood, a ruby of infinite value. Thus did Christ pray for us. Thus did He round out that vocal prayer of the Last Supper with the offering of His life on Calvary. He gave a God to God in our name. In that act of Christ's sacrifice all our debts and obligations were met and equalized. Christ backs His prayers for us with sacrifice. He energizes, electrifies it with the spark of sacrifice. No more perfect prayer could ever be conceived, not to speak of being offered by mortal man. Here is God praying a perfect prayer to God.

IN HIS NAME

Through none other than this prayer of Christ does the Church ever pray. Not in herself, not in the grandeurs and heroism of Our Blessed Lady, not in the superhuman merits of the martyrs, or of the confessors, not even in the accumulated sanctity of all the saints in the age-old history of the Church, does she presume to trust. Only in and through One does she dare to offer all her prayers to the divine Father: in the name of Him *Who is always heard for His reverence; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

Every sacrament she administers, every sacramental she approves, every prayer she utters, every Mass she celebrates, always, always: IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. He it is Who prays for and in her, as she cries out in the highest point of the sacrifice of the Mass: "Through Him and with Him and in Him be all honor and glory to Thee Almighty Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit." Here is the example of the prayer of the Spouse of Christ, yes, of His Mystical Body—not alone, not relying on its own merits, but only on Him and in His name.

How drastically, dismally, pathetically different from this perfect prayer are our poor attempts at prayer! What have we that could possibly recommend us to the love and mercy and bounty of God? Nothing! We have only our sins and the debts we owe for them. Can God look upon us and cry out: "This is My beloved child in whom I am well pleased"?

How often in our prayers do we think of the adoration, the thanksgiving we ought to pay God before we are so brazen as to ask for new mercies and favors? What have we done with His past blessings of body, of health, of goods, of friends, of His graces, that would entitle us to more? Too often we have used them in defiance of His will and His glory. With what sacrifices have we backed and strengthened our prayers? And even though sacrifices have given backbone to our prayers, what is the worth in the eyes of God of our puny gifts? We do not say, if we are humble, but if we are just decently honest, we shall admit that all our prayers and sacrifices have no value save when they are united to and become one with the prayers and sacrifice of Christ, the Man of the perfect prayer, our Mediator with the heavenly Father.

WE ARE NOT ALONE

How can we ever pray alone, poor undone children of sin? Can we ever be capable of fulfilling our duties to God, alone? No! We have become so helpless through sin, original and actual, that even with the best of will and the greatest exertion it would be impossible of our own strength to regain the friendship of God. Our adoration will never

correspond to the infinite majesty of God. Our gratitude can never measure up to the benefits we have received. Our reparation and penance could never repair the insult and the contempt our sins have offered to a Father of infinite goodness and love.

And our prayer — Lord save the word — though our poor distracted prayer could of itself pass beyond the searching eyes of the angels and reach the throne of God, it could never merit to be heard. What an abyss there stretches between the all-holy, eternal God and us poor sinners! In what a bad way we would find ourselves, had not Christ our mediator reached His hand across that abyss and Himself undertaken to pray for us, if only we would pray with Him! Pray with Him in His most perfect prayer — in the Mass. The Mass is the prayer and the sacrifice of Christ repeated daily for us. We need but to join in, unite heart and hand with the heart and hand of Christ. Then our prayer, like His, becomes perfect.

Of course, He will not force Himself upon us. We must join freely with Him in His prayer, in the Mass. I must place myself with Him, hold His hand, sink my heart in His, cling to Him and climb the mountain of prayer, the altar with Him, if I would offer the perfect prayer. With Him, as He bows low at the foot of the altar in the opening prayers of the Mass, for He is the high-priest clothed in the sacred vestments; with Him, we bow low in adoration, confessing our unworthiness and God's grandeur and majesty. In harmony of voice with Him we sing the song of praise and thanksgiving that the angels taught us in the Gloria of the Mass: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will. We adore Thee, we thank Thee, we glorify Thee." With Jesus, our leader in prayer, we move on to the pleading orations of the Mass, with outstretched arms, begging, in the name and person of Jesus, for pardon and for all the graces and mercies we need, for all the blessings and bounties for which we hunger in body as well as in soul. For this first part of the Mass has for its purpose and goal to dispose us for the great action that is to follow, an action that is ours as well as Christ's.

What a joy, what an honor to have Christ as our daily servant in prayer, ever ready to execute that office of praying for us! Yet what a responsibility for us if we neglect Him, refuse to pray with Him and fail in this first and most important duty of our entire life. He stands in our place at the altar of prayer. We had better stand with Him! He stretches out His hands and arms in supplication for us. We had better stretch ours out with Him! His voice cries out for us. Our voice had better join in harmony with His! His heart beats for us. Ours had better beat for and in His! For with Him and in Him and through Him alone may we offer the perfect prayer, the prayer that pierces the heavens and conquers the heart of our God, bringing down upon us the shower of His mercy, His love and His grace.



THE MASS IS MINE

Maybe you recall the Negro spiritual, *Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?* This is surely a good question. For the redemption of mankind was brought about by an act of Christ. That act was His sacrifice, His death on the cross. He performed this act *alone* and only once, on Good Friday afternoon, in April of the year 33.

At three o'clock on that Good Day, all the world should have dropped to its knees and cried out: "We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee, because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world."

APPLICATION OF MERITS

The far more important question for us who missed that death, who did not witness that act of sacrifice, is: "How can Calvary with its redeeming power mean redemption to us? How can the body which was broken, and the blood which was shed in A. D. 33 be of any value and profit to us in A. D. 1956?" And the all-important, though all-easy answer is — through the Mass!

For the Mass is not only a memorial of the heroic death of Christ; it is not only the unbloody representation of that divine sacrifice; it is also and supremely the application to us now of the merits that were gained then.

However, if the Mass is to be a benefit to us, if the merits and fruits of Calvary are to be applied to us, we must have some part in the Mass.

This fact stands out clearly in human organizations; only those who actually contribute to an enterprise can actually draw dividends or benefits from the organization. If I want a share in the profits of the First National Bank, I must invest in it. If I want dividends from General Motors, I must buy stocks in that corporation.

If I want to profit from the teaching of a university, I must apply my energy to study. If I want to build up my muscles on the field or on the court I must join the team and play the game.

In other words, If I want to take out, I must first put in, and the amount that I draw out is measured by the degree of my cooperation with the activities of the organization. Inactive members, dead members or dead partners are soon struck from the books. They fail to gather benefits because they fail to participate in the work which alone can produce these benefits.

PARTNERSHIP OF PRAYER

Now the Mass is a corporation, a partnership of perfect prayer. For the Mass is not only the sacrifice of the physical Christ in an unbloody manner, but it is also the sacrifice of the whole Christ, that is, head and members. Let us try

to understand this tremendous mystery; for it is a mystery in which Christ and we, His Church, are linked to do glory to God in the highest — to bring salvation to us the lowest. The Mass does not belong exclusively to Christ alone, for He gave it to His Church. It is therefore the sacrifice not only of the Vine — but of the Vine and the branches.

On the cross Christ offered to the Father in death the human nature He had taken from Mary. As Priest He offered that human nature in reparation for the sins of men. Hence that human nature can never suffer, can never die again. For after His ascension, that nature entered into its reward beyond nails and spear and blood. His office as Priest and Sacrificer can continue only if He takes other human natures to Himself.

And that is just what Christ has done.

As head of the Church, He has called others to Himself. By baptism He has given them the right to worship God with Him. By priestly ordination He has specially appointed some as priests to consecrate, to sacrifice in His Name: to do what He had done at the Last Supper.

“As a great patriot in time of a national crisis seeks not only to offer his own life for the sake of his country, but also strives to rally others to himself, that through their corporate unselfishness the whole nation might be preserved, so He, the glorified Christ in Heaven, seeks the enlistment of you and me and all of us, under His headship, that we may offer ourselves with His offering on the cross to win triumph of other Calvaries, even as He!”

THE MYSTICAL BODY

If this doctrine seems strange and novel it is because we have forgotten what it means to be a Christian and a Catholic; forgotten that the glorified Christ in heaven has incorporated unto Himself a Mystical Body which is the Church, a body which we constitute by being its members.

Our Divine Saviour Himself revealed this beautiful oneness of ourselves with Him as He left the supper room. Walking with His apostles toward the Garden of Olives, He must have passed the luscious vineyards along the way.

Pointing out the vines and the clinging branches, strong, sturdy, He said to them: "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 and you are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in Him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (Jno. 15/4)

Christ is the vine; we are the branches. The vine and the branches form one plant, sharing the same life, working together to produce the fruit. As the branches depend for their life upon the vine, so we, the member-branches of Christ, live in Him, live with His divine life of grace, become united to Him and become one with Him.

Whatever belongs to the vine belongs also to the branches. As the vine and branches live one life through the vital stream of sap so do we live one life with Christ through the vital stream of sanctifying grace.

St. Paul uses the expressive image of the body to impress upon us our close union with Christ: "Christ is the Head; we, the Church, are the members of His Body."

We know that our own bodies are made up of millions of cells. All these cells live the same life as the body and are fed on the same food. They are one in and with the body. Now Christ's Mystical Body, the Church, is made up of millions of cells: all those beings who are destined to live His divine life of grace. We, then, "being many, are one body in Christ." (Rom. 12/5)

Now this sublime revelation about Christ and ourselves holds especially true in the Mass, for there above all we are one with Christ in His Mystical Body. Think what a grandeur this truth brings to us. Christ is with us in all we do and with us particularly in prayer — in the perfect prayer of the Mass. The Divine Father seeing us at Mass, sees not mere human beings but He sees His only Son, He sees Christ. And we are with Him, especially when He ascends the altar in the twentieth century, to offer the sacrifice of the Mass. Whether we are conscious of it or not, we are in the Mass. We have a part in this partnership of prayer.

CHRIST DOES NOT ACT ALONE

In a real, though secondary sense, then, the faithful offer the sacrifice of the Mass because they are one with Christ. Christ acts as first Priest, as Head. Then the ordained priest on earth is the official, visible minister of Christ and of the Church, while the faithful, through baptism which enrolls them in Christ's priesthood, co-offer with the priest and with Christ. Hence in the Mass, Christ does not act alone. We act and offer with Him in virtue of our oneness with Him in the Mystical Body.

However, not every individual member of the Church has the same part in the holy sacrifice. Nor is the share in the benefits or fruits equal for all members. Some receive more, others less. Some contribute more directly and proximately in the offering. Others contribute more remotely.

The priest naturally holds the first place as offerer because of the dignity of his office. He was chosen by God as Aaron was to be the official, visible spokesman for God and for His people. And even though his private character or personal merit is unworthy in the eyes of men, still as priest at the altar he wears the official robes, the official dignity of Jesus Christ, the High Priest. And even though his prayers and actions at the altar avail him nothing, if he is grievously unworthy, still through his hands, unworthy and unclean though they be, the Heavenly Father applies to those who are worthy, the benefits and fruits of His Son.

OTHER OFFERERS

Next in the order of offerers of the sacrifice are those who by providing the elements of the sacrifice, and by making provision for the support of the clergy, enable them to offer the sacrifice.

Formerly the faithful supplied the priests with the elements actually needed for their human support and for the divine worship. They brought bread and wine and other gifts. They furnished the food and clothing and shelter for their priests, since the law forbade the clergy to support

themselves by trade or commerce. Gradually, however, as living conditions changed, the offerings of the faithful were given in the form of money.

Wherefore, now, all who contribute in money or in kind to the support and upkeep of the church, to the vestments and sacred vessels and to all those things needed for the sacrifice have a *special* active part as offerers in *all* the Masses offered by their priest. However, with regard to any particular Mass, the foremost place among all who take part with the priest in the sacrifice, is held by the one who most directly provides for the particular celebration by giving the stipend fixed by law. For it is the stipend for any particular Mass that takes the place of the gifts that were formerly made.

Earliest Church history verifies the fact that those who made these gifts or gave their equivalent in money, were to be considered as having a *real part* in the offering of the sacrifice — as being truly co-offerers with the priest.

SACRIFICE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH

Finally, as co-offerers, though in a lesser degree, are all those who are present, who are attending the Mass: the ministers at the altar, the servers in the sanctuary, the chanters in the choir and the faithful in the pews. Even those who are absent for a good reason, if they are present in heart and mind, share as co-offerers with the priest. For the Mass is the offering, the sacrifice of the *whole* Church, of the physical Christ and His mystical members.

In every sacrifice of the Mass, then, no matter whether the officiating priest be with or without a congregation, no matter whether he celebrates in the desert-wastes of Africa or among the multitudes that fill St. Peter's in Rome, it is we, the Church, as one body with Christ, who offer the sacrifice. The Mass is ours. It is *my Mass, for it is my offering and yours with Christ.*

Never attend Mass, then, as though it were someone else's prayer and sacrifice. Never attend Mass as you would a play in which others are the actors and you only a passive

spectator. In this divine drama of prayer and sacrifice you are an actor. You play a role second only to that of Christ, — no, not second, but a role that is one with His.

Be reminded of this startling truth when the priest at the altar turns to you and says with open arms of welcome in the person of Christ, open arms that embrace each of us into the oneness of Christ's Mystical Body: "The Lord is with you."

Yes, Christ is with you and you are with Him; and it is your sacrifice. Think of this when you hear the priest again in the person of Christ call out to you: "Let us pray!" For you and Christ must pray together just as you are one body together. The priest is not one man at the altar, he is Christ and Christ is telling and begging you to realize your part in this divine sacrifice. The Mass is our prayer and our sacrifice as well as Christ's.



THE MASS IS THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

The Mass is mine. It is mine because in it I help Christ pray and sacrifice. But it is mine also because through the Mass, the fruits and benefits of Calvary can and do become mine.

The Mass is from me to God but also *for* me from God.

THE FRUITS OF THE MASS

In human societies we know that the more we contribute the more we draw out of the society. This is true no matter whether the society be educational or social or financial. Our profits or dividends are proportionate to our investment. Likewise is this the case in the supernatural organization of prayer, the Mass. The more actively and intimately we participate in the action of the sacrifice, the more fruit we derive from it.

And the first fruits of the Mass are intended for Our Father Who is in heaven. Picture the Mass as a mighty tree lifting its head high above the clouds of the earth, rising even into heaven before the throne of God Himself. From that divine tree God plucks the infinite fruits of adoration, praise, thanksgiving and propitiation. These first fruits, though they are from us, have actually an infinite value, for the infinitely perfect God does not spoil their perfection as they issue from the infinite heart of Christ, our divine head.

GRACES AND BLESSINGS

Other fruits from this infinitely laden tree fall to earth upon our souls. These are the graces and blessings that we need for ourselves. These are the fruits of petition for our body and soul; the fruits of pardon for sin and its punishment; the fruits of special actual graces and the increase of sanctifying grace. The pity is that though these fruits could be infinite by virtue of the infinite power of the Mass, never-

theless because of our lack of devotion or because we bring only a thimble-soul to the altar, we carry away from the tree of the Mass only a very limited supply of fruit.

Perhaps an illustration will make this truth more clear. The warmth and light of the sun are almost boundless. They can benefit every one in the world — those in homes, in factories or those even in the shade of trees. But the benefits for all these come in a weakened and filtered form. Whereas those actually in the sunlight receive more of its warmth than those in homes or in coal mines. And still others, by the use of a magnifying glass or some focusing apparatus, can concentrate the intensity of its rays upon them.

Now apply this illustration to the Mass and its fruits. As food and drink benefit the entire physical body, so all the faithful share in the *general fruit* of the Mass, for it is the sacrifice of the entire Mystical Body. All the faithful — all are included — the pope, the bishops, the priests and the laity. All are included, even though they are not thinking of the Mass — though they are tepid and full of sin or even externally cut off from the body of Christ by interdict or excommunication. None of these are excluded from the general fruits of the Mass for the Church prays for all.

Those at the most distant outposts of civilization, for example, Admiral Byrd at the South Pole, or the lone missionary in Africa, are not forgotten. Even down into the depths of purgatory flows that cooling stream of comfort from the Mass. Naturally, however, the closer the union with the Mass by fervor and devotion, and the more intimate the union of works and sufferings with this great sacrifice, the larger is the share of the general fruits.

SPECIAL FRUITS

Next in dignity and value are the *special fruits*. These are applied to those who are physically and mentally present at the Mass so that they are actual co-offerers with the priest at the altar. They contribute body, heart and mind and thus exercise as far as they can their office of royal priesthood. And in return they are remembered bountifully by the Giver of all good gifts. But these special fruits also

are proportionate to the degree of the intention of heart and attention of mind. Faith, love and, if possible, an intelligent and not merely a speedy, mechanical use of the missal, is their best contribution to the sacrifice and their surest guarantee of a generous return on their investment.

Finally, the *most special fruits* are those which the priest, in place of Christ by virtue of his ordination, can direct to whomsoever he wills. Ordinarily that includes the person or persons responsible for having the Mass offered, that is, those who give the Mass stipend.

On Sundays and Holy Days and certain other feast days of the year, the pastor of a parish is bound by law to apply these most special fruits to his people, namely, to those who support the Church and keep him alive to continue his work. He is forbidden to accept any other stipend or *intention* for that Mass. He must reserve its fruits as a weekly thanksgiving to his faithful supporters in the work of Christ.

Thus, the Mass is really our sacrifice: ours, not by a fiction of language, but by a divine order and plan. Ours it is by its very nature as the sacrifice of the Mystical Body which we compose and by which we are one with Christ the Principal Offerer. Ours, too, it is by reason of the fruits which are our own in the degree that we trouble ourselves to pluck them.

The Mass then is our perfect prayer, spoken not merely with the lying language of the lips but with the unquestionable accents of sacrifice, offered up by a God to a God in our name and for our benefit.

ANSWER TO A MYSTERY

In this vital truth we have the answer to the deep mystery of God's mercy to a sinning, treacherous human race. Why has God not long since destroyed a world in open rebellion against Him? How can infinite power tolerate the insults, the denials, the anarchy of a world that subsists only because He supports it? Why is He patient with a race of men who hourly hurl open defiance into His face, who blaspheme

Him, deny Him, make profane jests about Him, make Him the butt of their vile humor and call Him a hindrance to scientific progress? Why does He not lay low a race of men who seem to have nothing but contempt for His law and His will, who flaunt the putrid parade of their murders, their lusts, their hatreds, their revenge before His very face? How can He endure a race of men whose governments use His name as a camouflage, a mask for their national sins of injustice, uncharitableness, hatred and bloodshed? Why does He not wipe out this world and these men and be done with their insults?

Why? Because that same human race has membership in a Mystical Body which daily and hourly offers to God a prayer and a sacrifice that gave Him a glory, an honor, a praise, an adoration and a reparation so vast and so grand that like a mighty mid-day sun it pierces and disperses all the high-banked clouds of human evil and sin; because in one Mass offered by the Mystical Body, the honor, the love, the adoration given to God, is far greater than the insults, the hatred, the irreverence of all the sins of all men from the beginning of time to its last instant; because the prayer and the sacrifice of Christ is the prayer and the sacrifice of that same sinning race of men, who are destined to be, and many of whom are, members of the Mystical Body of Christ, that race which together with Christ is both priest and victim in the Mass. We live on, despite our deep unworthiness, because at our prayer and at our sacrifice, the Father sees His Beloved Sons in Whom He is well pleased.



THE MASS — MY OFFERING

That the Mass is our sacrifice, the sacrifice of the mystical body of Christ, is expressed throughout the whole ritual and words of the Mass, but especially in the part we would like to consider now — that part called the first principal part — the offertory.

Both by action and by word the Church strives to remind us of our part in the sacrifice when the priest says the prayer at the mingling of the few drops of water in the chalice of wine at the offertory.

As the priest pours a few drops of water into the wine, he says this prayer which you may follow if you are using a missal: "O God, Who in creating human nature didst wonderfully dignify it, and hast still more wonderfully renewed it, grant that by the mystery of this water and wine we may be made partakers of His divinity Who has vouchsafed to become partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost."

WHAT THIS PRAYER MEANS FOR US

This prayer reminds us that God had made Adam a masterpiece, the paragon of His creation. He had endowed him with wonderful gifts, which Adam rejected. Then God, by the Incarnation, and by the death of Christ, still more wonderfully renewed, recreated, and caused man, in the words of our Lord to Nicodemus, to be reborn by water and the Holy Ghost. As a result man has now become a partaker of the divinity of Christ, even as Christ became by His birth, a partaker of our humanity.

To represent this truth more vividly to our minds, the water becomes a symbol of us, human beings, while the wine is an emblem of our divine head, Christ. The water alone is not offered to God because without Christ, we, the water, would have no value. Nor is the wine alone without

the water offered to the heavenly Father, because unless we are in the Mass it cannot benefit us. Therefore the water and the wine are mingled to show us that we, in and with Christ, are the sacrifice that is being offered to the Divine Father.

Think of what that ought to mean for our daily lives! What a life of goodness and sinlessness we ought to lead so as to make our actions worthy offerings to God! Then we shall be able to say of all that we do: here is another drop of myself poured into the chalice of all Masses. Living thus as water mingled with Christ, we shall become worthy members of Christ's mystical body, we shall grow into an extension of Christ in the world, and shall be able to say: "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me."

In the ancient days of Christianity before churches were as immense as they are now and before Christians were numbered in the thousands, the faithful assisting at Mass expressed this act of offering themselves with Christ, not merely in words, but even in actions. In our Masses today there is only one procession of the faithful to the altar to take part in the Mass — and too many do not take part even in that — at the Communion. Then the faithful come to the altar to receive, to partake of the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass. In the olden days there were two processions, one, to the altar to give, the other, to receive at Communion time.

The faithful of those days understood well that they partook both in the offering and in the receiving of the Eucharist. They approached the altar each one in person and presented their part in the sacrifice; some gave bread and wine, flour or fruits. Others offered gold or other precious gifts according to their means. But their gift even then was a sign of the inner spiritual gift of themselves which each one made to God. By it they showed their readiness to sacrifice whatever God asked of them in their lives. Some of these gifts were used for the consecration — the bread and the wine. Others were kept for the adornment of the church, the altar, the sacred vessels, and what remained was set aside for the poor.

OUR OFFERING IN THE MASS

In our days when this procession is quite impossible and these assorted gifts are impractical, we, the faithful, no longer offer bread and wine and other material gifts. But the disposition, the readiness to sacrifice and to give ourselves to God out of love is still possible, yes, still necessary for each one of us.

The present practice of taking up the collection and receiving the offerings of the faithful at this part of the Mass is not just a matter of convenience, not held at this time merely because the faithful are seated and have nothing else to do. This is a continuation of the ancient offertory procession. This act should be performed in the same spirit in which the early Christians presented their gifts as part of the sacrifice and as symbols of themselves. It is a pity that the materialism of our age, the immediate needs of building and repairing churches and schools, in fact all such things as brick and mortar and coal should loom so large in our minds as to obscure the true meaning of the offertory. The visible gifts go to the same uses as the gifts of the early Christians, namely the service of God and the needs of the Church, the mystical body of Christ.

But we have forgotten the deeper meaning, forgotten our personal offering, whereas that is of more value to God than all the bricks in the world. He can create bricks and stones out of nothing, but He cannot force your love to offer yourselves to Him. You and you alone can do that. Thus while the dramatic expression of self-offering in a procession is past, the idea and sentiment of it is preserved in the offertory prayers and collection.

OFFERING OF OURSELVES

If only we say the prayers of the Mass with the priest, this thought of self-offering will be brought clearly to our minds. Lifting our eyes on high to the raised chalice we shall offer ourselves with Christ. Notice, it is *we* the priest says, not *I*. "We offer Thee the chalice of salvation, that in the sight of Thy divine majesty, it may ascend with the savor of sweetness for our salvation and that of the world."

May we be pleasing to God when offered together with Christ His Son — pleasing as an odor of sweetness! Bending down in humility before God, mindful of the words of the Psalmist, “A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise,” we beg that we may be received favorably by Him, and “May our sacrifice be so offered up in Thy sight this day that it may be pleasing to Thee, O Lord.” But Christ and His sacrifices are always pleasing to the Father: “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased.” Clearly then these words refer to us, that we by goodness and sinlessness of life may be acceptable to God.

Raising his eyes on high again, the priest prays to the Holy Spirit, “Come, O Sanctifier, almighty and eternal God, and bless this sacrifice prepared for Thy holy name.” Again Christ, the Son of God needs not to be blessed but we do, and the blessing is said more over us and our offering than over Christ. Then after the psalm begging God to make us pure and sinless as well as worthy to take part in His sacrifice, we summarize our offering in a beautiful prayer of oblation to the Blessed Trinity.

We have already united ourselves to Christ as head of the mystical body, and with the priest we have offered Him first and then ourselves to the Divine Father. Now we unite ourselves to the whole mystical body, to our Blessed Lady, to the apostles, to all the saints — for they too are members of Christ. In no grander way can we honor our Blessed Lady and the saints than by giving them part again in the Mass.

Then turning to the people, the priest begs them or rather commands them to “pray that both my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty.” Notice the words, “my sacrifice and yours.” The Mass is our sacrifice — our possession! What a joy to be able to offer to God a spotless host as our own prayer and sacrifice and to offer ourselves with Him in one act!

The closing of the offertory is called the secret, from the Latin word *secretata*, meaning separated, because it was said over the gifts that were separated from the others to be consecrated in the Mass. The thought so prominent in all the offertory is repeated, namely, that we present our gifts to the divine Father, and we are also offered with them.

HOW TO OFFER YOURSELF

And what are the gifts we offer — the gifts that we can place upon the paten and the altar side by side with the immaculate host that is to become Christ in but a few moments? During the offertory St. Gertrude was accustomed to place herself upon the paten in spirit, surrendering to God her body with all its senses, her soul with all its powers. Let us not neglect in spirit to place our offering on the paten next to Christ, as a small host near the large host which is Christ.

Why do you suppose our Lord chose bread and wine out of all creation to represent His body and blood? First of all, to represent our unity one with another in His mystical body. Just as wine is made up of many grapes and bread of many grains of wheat, so we the individual members of Christ are made one with Christ in the re-offering of Calvary to the heavenly Father. The second reason was probably to remind us that our part in the Mass was a sacramental part, that we assist at Mass not as spectators at a drama, but as cooperators. For just as grapes become wine only by passing through the wine-press, so too we become one with Christ only by reproducing in our lives the cross which He lived in His own life. And finally, because in offering bread and wine we offer the most substantial nourishments of life which represent the very substance of our being.

Therefore we offer first ourselves, our body, our soul, that there may be nothing in them unworthy of a member of Christ, nothing that cannot stand side by side with Christ and be offered to the divine Father; and whatever of evil or sin is in us, that we offer to be destroyed.

Have we not some sorrow that weighs us down? Let that be our gift to God, sanctified and made especially pleasing through the cross of Christ. Must we not work and labor from early morning till late at night, at home, in factory, in office or on the street? Let us offer our work and our good will; they are precious gifts. Has God perhaps lavished joys and prosperity upon us, blessed us abundantly with health and happiness? With grateful hearts let us bring our joys, our happiness, our good things and offer them to Him,

that they may not injure us. Has God sent us poverty, sickness, loneliness? Then with a resigned love let us unite them with His poverty and pain and loneliness.

Every one of us must often practice self-denial, restraint of our passions, avoidance of the occasions of sin and evil; every one of us knows what St. Paul meant when he said, "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and concupiscences." Let these too be our gifts in the offertory. Never come to Mass empty-handed, for God has given each of us something that we can and should bring to bind us to our divine Friend and Head — Christ!

OUR SHARE IN THE SACRIFICE

Do you now see what St. Peter implied when He called the ordinary faithful a kingly priesthood, implying that they as well as the specially consecrated priesthood have a share in offering sacrifice to God? That is your right, your privilege — to be offered. Then we go from the Mass to resume the work of our daily lives. Behind us we leave the altar and the tabernacle housing the sleepless Christ, Who from that vantage point watches the world and us. The candles go dead in their sockets. The missal and cards are removed. The altar is covered reverently by the sacristan. Mass there has ended.

But the Mass that our lives might and should be is not ended. Our task of offering sacrifice is not over. We still have lives of endless sacrifice to lead. Like the priesthood of Christ, our priesthood never ends. *We can make our lives Masses.* We can make not merely a good intention in our works, we can make our works Masses. With a vast sweeping intention, as in the morning offering of the Sacred Heart Apostleship of Prayer, we can unite ourselves with the Masses as they are offered in endless succession around the globe.

EVERY ACTION OF THE DAY

Even more personally, we can offer to God with Christ every least and every greatest action of the day, and we can offer it with the priest who at that moment celebrates

one of the three hundred and fifty thousand Masses said throughout the world each day. All that we say and do and suffer as the hands of the clock swing round, we as offerers, can present on the altar to God. Our most trivial actions can become other offertories placed on other patens and poured into other chalices around the earth.

We do not cease to act as offerers even when we resume the common places that occupy us at desk, counter, workshop, in kitchen, classroom or office, on the playing field, at the party, or during a play. All may be offered by ourselves, the members of a priestly head, Christ, to God.

If we really want to make a profitable good intention, then let us offer ourselves and our works with Christ in every Mass. There they take on a value that comes from Christ. And thus we shall see the new dignity and worth that invests our actions. They carry the morning sacrifice through the day.

We do not assist at Mass, nor merely go to Mass. We take part in the Mass. We stand at the altar, hand in hand and heart in heart with Christ Himself. That is just what most of us need. It is so hard to work and suffer and carry on alone, but to have another with us, a strong Friend, Who offers Himself with us, sacrifices Himself with us, and lives with us, that is encouraging and heartening. That makes our offering and life easy and joyful. We have that with Christ in the Mass!



THE MASS — MY CONSECRATION

One of the most thrilling, beautiful and heroic scenes that I have ever been privileged to witness is that of the consecration of a young lady to Christ—the scene of a nun's religious profession. The entire consecration is spread between two ceremonies; between the two is interposed the period of her novitiate. She enters the chapel for the first time clothed as a lovely bride, white-robed, veiled, carrying a gorgeous bouquet in her arms. She comes forth for the second time a somber nun, clothed in black, her body entirely garmented except for her face. She has almost lost her identity, even to the extent of changing her name.

Now she is called Sister.

But the sister of whom? The sister of Him Who is called the First-born of all the brethren, our Brother, Jesus Christ. The human being has suffered a mystical death; there is born of that act of consecration a new being, a spouse and lover of the divine Christ.

This act of consecration of a nun, this transformation usually takes place during holy Mass. It is a sacrifice within a sacrifice: a small Calvary erected side by side with the mystic Calvary of Christ.

WHY IS THIS DONE AT MASS?

This act of consecration and change, this transformation takes place at Mass because it is through the Mass that each of us can and must be changed into the likeness of Christ. Through the Mass we must put on Christ that we may be able to say: "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." And this transformation of us into Christ can be effected only by suffering and by sacrifice.

In the Mass the lifeless forms of bread and wine receive a new being. They are changed, transubstantiated, consecrated so that they become a new and divine substance at the very moment that the Mass is completed and effected. For the words of consecration have a double office: they change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ and by that same act they accomplish the act of sacrifice.

On the cross Christ willed the separation of His blood from His body to the very last drop, and because He was of our flesh, death was the normal result. We can almost hear Him say as He hangs upon the cross: "Father, this is My body; this is My blood. They are now separated from one another as a reparation for the separation of humanity from Thee by sin." The scourge, the thorns, the nails of the executioners and the lance were but the tools of this death and this sacrifice on the cross.

In the Mass, as also at the last supper, that sacrifice of the cross is repeated and renewed. The last supper, the cross and the Mass are the same sacrifice, differently offered and presented to the divine Father. In all three the high priest, Who assisted at the table of the last supper, upon the tree of the cross, and now at the altar of the Mass is the same — Christ. Only here at the Mass, Christ acts and speaks in the person of the priest: "This is My body." In all three the victim offered is the same: it is Jesus Christ at the table of the last supper under the appearances of bread and wine; on the cross under the form of a broken, bleeding victim, and in the Mass under the forms of bread and wine.

In all three the purposes of the sacrifice are the same: to honor and glorify God by making Him a worthy gift, a divine gift; to show man's gratitude to God by returning to Him a gift of infinite value for all His gifts; to satisfy and repair for all men's sins by a divine victim offered in man's place; and to plead for grace and blessings for soul and body.

THE MYSTICAL SACRIFICE

Only the actual manner of the offering and sacrifice differs at the last supper and the Mass from that of Calvary and the cross. As on the cross the separation of the blood of Christ from His sacred body effected the sacrifice that redeemed the world, so in the Mass the mystical representation of this separation of the blood from the body of Christ effects this sacrifice.

Since Christ has risen from the dead and since His body is glorified, Christ can die really no more. *Death hath no more dominion over Him.* His body and blood upon our altars are His glorified body and blood now enthroned on the right hand of His heavenly Father, so that now there is offered to the Father a mystical representation of the death of Christ, a reminder to the heavenly Father that Christ was once on the cross and is still on the altar the victim once slain for us.

In the Mass the body and the blood are mystically separated; not indeed, by the scourges, the nails and lance, but by the consecrating words of the priest. At Christ's command the priest performs separate consecrations. Over the bread he says: *This is My body.* Then over the chalice of wine the priest says: *This is My blood.*

By the separate consecrations, through the mystic lance and nails of the consecrating words, the body and blood are symbolically but not actually separated, and the separation on Calvary is re-presented. By the words and intention and action by which the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ, the sacrifice of the Mass is accomplished.

OUR PART IN THE SACRIFICE

But is Christ, the Head of the mystical body, the only one who is consecrated, the only one who is sacrificed on the altar in the Mass? Is the Mass His sacrifice and His alone? No, indeed! We are inseparably united to Christ by grace

into the unity of His mystical body; He is the vine and we are the branches, as members of His mystical body, we must do whatever the Head does if we are to be worthy members of the Head. The words of consecration then have a double significance; they refer both to the Head and the members of the mystical body; to Christ and to us.

At the offertory of the Mass we presented our gifts to God under the appearances of bread and wine and also ourselves under the symbols of bread and wine as the supports of the life of our body. At our baptism we were changed into members of Christ; we were born again of water and the Holy Ghost; we began to share in the life of Christ through sanctifying grace. But Christ did not endow us with this dignity merely to honor and ennoble us. He did it in order that we might live and act and work in and with Him, especially that we might love and suffer and sacrifice ourselves with Him. He gave us this share in His own life that we might be able to say now at the moment of consecration: "Here too is My body; here too is My blood."

At the moment of consecration we must have a strong faith in our glorious dignity as members of Christ. We must realize that we too, even as the bread and wine, are consecrated into the spirit of Christ and changed into His members.

Consequences of a sacrificial nature follow from our consecration into Christians. If the words of consecration apply to us insofar as they reassert our oneness in and with Christ, they apply to us too insofar as they demand that we have a part in the sacrifice which those words effect and accomplish. At the consecration of the Mass our Lord is saying to you: "You, Mary, you John, and James and Ann and Teresa, give Me your body and your blood. Give me your whole self. I can suffer no more. I have filled up the sufferings of My physical body, but I have not filled up the sufferings of My mystical body. I can suffer no more. But now you may and must carry out My injunction: 'Take up your cross and follow Me. Fill up those things that are wanting in My Passion.'"

THREE WAYS TO SACRIFICE YOURSELF

On the cross our Lord was looking forward to you to carry on His sacrifice, hoping that you would give yourself to Him at the moment of consecration. In the consecration of the Mass that hope of our Lord for you is fulfilled, if only you will live up to it.

How can you take part in the sacrifice that is implied in the consecration? By the actual separation of your blood from your body? Some have been called to take that part in the Mass — that is the way the martyrs lived the Mass long ago in Rome. That is also the way today for the martyrs of Russia and China. That is the way the heroic saints who mortified their bodies unto the shedding of blood have taken their part in the Mass.

And there are hundreds of such saints in the world today, reliving the Mass in their sacrificial lives. If this way is not for you then you may and must have part in the consecration-service without ascending the heights of such a real and heroic Calvary. You can do so in three ways.

SEPARATION FROM SIN

First, you must realize that you cannot preserve this divine life, this membership in Christ's mystical body save at the price of sacrifice. A readiness to sacrifice the sin, the evil, the vicious passions in you and in the world is the first way to live in Christ. "They who are Christ's have crucified their flesh with its vices and its concupiscences."

When greed for wealth would make us dishonest, we must separate that greed from our hearts; when passion for pleasure would tempt us to impurity and intemperance, we must separate this passion from our hearts; when bitterness towards others draw us to hatred, we must separate that bitterness from our souls; when desire for social position and prestige would make us defiant of God's law, we must separate our hearts from that desire; when the friendship of men is a barrier to the friendship of Christ, we must divorce ourselves from the affection of men.

We must die to the evil in us and in the world; that is our first part in the sacrifice of Christ. But it is only the beginning, not yet the end; it brings us only to the foot of Calvary, not to the peak. It is only our birth, not yet our adulthood.

CARRYING THE CROSS

Secondly, this divine beginning of Christ in us, this grace must grow, it must not remain stagnant and sterile; we must not always remain children in grace but must grow to adulthood. "If any man will be My disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me." Living and growing in this life of Christ, then, means the carrying of the cross.

Anyone who imagines that it is easy to be a true member of Christ's mystical body, a genuine Catholic, has not really tried to be a real Catholic as yet, has no realization of the meaning of the word *Christian*. It is not easy to practice the charity and the meekness and the consideration of Christ toward others, even to the sacrifice of self. Ask Father Damien, martyr of the lepers; ask foreign missionaries, ask sisters who wear out young lives for Christ in schools, hospitals, orphanages; ask mothers and fathers of families who see in their children other Christs and in their own duties those of other Marys and Josephs. Ask those who seek to live united to Christ their Head in a life of prayer; those whom you find at daily Mass and Communion, in their daily visit to Christ in the Eucharist, who force themselves to find time for their daily rosary, for their daily stations during Lent. Ask those who strive to keep the laws of fasting and abstinence which the Church of Christ lays down for them. Ask those who set up Christ as the ideal and model of their actions, who try in their daily lives, in the little actions of each hour to act as He would act. They will tell you that being true to those words of consecration which they pronounce over themselves at the consecration, "This too is my body, this too is my blood," demands that they take up their cross daily and follow Him.

SUFFERING

Finally, living the Mass means never wasting suffering but always being good stewards of the trials God gives us. There is hardly anything so tragic in the world as wasted pain. Think of how much suffering there is in hospitals, among the poor and the bereaved! Think how much of that suffering goes to waste. How many, or rather how few, of those lonesome, suffering, abandoned, crucified souls are saying with our Lord at the moment of consecration: "This is my body, take it."

And yet that is what we all should be saying at that second. "Here is my body, take it; here is my blood, take it. Here is my soul, my will, my energy, my strength, my property, my wealth — all that I have. It is Thine. Take it. Consecrate it. Offer it. Offer it with Thyself to the heavenly Father in order that looking down on the great sacrifice, He may see only Thee, His beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased. Change this poor bread of my pain and sorrow into Thy divine life. Thrill the wine of my wasted life into the divine Spirit; unite my broken heart with Thy warm heart; turn my cross into a crucifix. Let not my abandonment, my sorrow, my bereavement go to waste. As the drop of water is absorbed by the wine at the offertory of the Mass, let my life be absorbed in Thine.

"As Thy great St. Gertrude used to take her life, her heart, her body and soul and mind and all, and drop them into the chalice at the moment of the offertory as a drop of water and pray Thee to change all into Thyself at the consecration of the Mass — so do I drop my life and all into the chalice of Thy Sacred Heart that I may be changed truly into Thee. Consecrate these trials of my life which would go unrewarded unless united to Thee. Transubstantiate me, so that like the bread which is now Thy body and the wine which is now Thy blood, I too may be wholly Thine."

"I care not if the appearances remain, if like the bread and wine after the consecration, I seem to all earthly eyes the same as before. My station in life, my routine, my work,

my family — all these are but the external appearances of my life which remain unchanged. But the substance of my life, by my love for Thee, by my spirit of sacrifice, by my union with Thee in the Mass — my soul, my mind, my will, my heart — transubstantiate them wholly, transform them entirely into Thy service. Thus finally, when I make the last act of sacrifice on my bed of death, it may be made in union with Thee in the Mass. And then the first words that I shall hear in eternity will be spoken by Thy sweet lips over me as I lie in Thy eternal embrace: 'This is My body; this is My blood, made one with Me in the sacrifice of the Mass.' "



THE MASS — MY BANQUET

There is a double reason why Communion by the faithful ought to be a part of every sharing in the Mass; a double motive to impel us never to omit Communion from our Mass unless, by a state of disgrace, we are unworthy.

The first reason is our need of the strengthening food of the body and blood of Christ. There is nothing so ridiculous, so absurd, so pitiful as the *hunger strike* of a supernatural kind of so many Catholics. They complain of the exacting demands of a good Catholic life; they murmur against the severity of the commandments, of the heavy demands of the laws of the Church. Besides, they are constantly exhausting themselves in the spiritual combat of life; now it is a sacrifice to be made — now a temptation to be battled — now passions to be mastered. And in this constant struggle, this battle which never ends as long as life lasts, the will exhausts its energies. We need, therefore, to be constantly

refreshed, re-supplied with supernatural vigor. Have we an unfailling source of strength and life? Indeed we have: "My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth the flesh of the Son of Man and drinketh His blood shall not see death forever." We can hear the injunction of Christ in our ears: "Each day do you eat this bread of the strong, because each day you must suffer and struggle and labor; just as each day you eat the bread of earth because each day in the labors of life your body is weakened and worn by the toils of life."

The second reason for receiving Holy Communion whenever we assist at the sacrifice of the Mass, even daily, is that our assistance at holy Mass is, in a certain sense, incomplete unless we receive the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion.

SACRIFICE AND SACRAMENT

Christ gave us the Mass both as a sacrifice and a sacrament. The sacrifice is a gift in which we offer God adoration, gratitude and reparation. The sacrament is a gift in which God offers us Himself as the food of our souls. At Mass we give to God what is His — let us then take from it what He made ours!

Every time Mass is offered there goes out to us a pleading invitation from Christ: "Come to the wedding feast!" How we restrict and limit the graces that Mass brings to us when we try to take part in the sacrifice without sharing the banquet which Christ has spread for us! We do not really take part in the Mass completely at all. We treat Christ, Who is the Host of this divine party, as we should treat a host at any party to which we were invited, if we were to come to the dinner table, unfold our napkin and then refuse to partake of the food set before us.

How must Christ feel, when we recall that with desire He desires to eat this feast with us! How must He be disappointed when He recalls what this banquet has cost

Him in His passion and death; when He remembers how lovingly He has amassed here the graces of strength and peace for our tired and dejected souls! The beggar seems to turn his back on the hand that offers him a meal. The dying person apparently turns away from the medicine of life which the divine physician holds out.

Thus Christ is made almost to feel again the desolation of being abandoned by His friends and left alone on the Calvary of the altar. How like to Good Friday are so many Sunday mornings, repeated in thousands of churches — Good Fridays multiplied a thousand times — as the crowds file by His cross and barely look up to Him. So few ask Him why He thirsts; so few partake of the gift of His body which was broken and His blood which was shed, now become food and drink for them. Ah, the precious loss of such precious food and drink!

Though the vicar of Christ has yielded to the objections of hunger, late hours and health, why will people still remain glued to their pews when Christ begs: "Take ye and eat!" To say nothing of going out of their way to attend daily Mass, why do so many neglect to share fully even in their Sunday Mass? Either they are in the state of grace and could receive, and then their refusal must be attributed to coldness or carelessness — coldness to the love of Christ or carelessness for their own spiritual good; or they are not in the state of grace and dare not receive, and then their Catholic conscience, their concern for their own salvation, ought to bring them to their knees in the confessional, there to be raised again to life.

OBJECTIONS

But some may object: "I do receive Communion frequently and still I am not a saint, still daily tumble into the same faults, still have to fight the same habitual sins. I seem to get so little out of my Communions. What is the matter?" One answer is that all too many communicants receive Communion without being properly prepared to receive the graces of Communion.

A flower garden cannot spring from a cement sidewalk, even though you spread the most costly seeds over that hard and unresponsive stone. Nor can a soul blossom forth in the roses of holiness even though the divine seed of the Eucharist be cast upon it, if that soul is not disposed to receive the graces.

It is the same sun and the same rain and the same seed that is given to the rich black soil of Illinois and to the sandy soil of New Mexico, yet one is productive of wealth, the other productive of poverty. Why? Because one is disposed to receive the seed and sun and rain, and the other is not. There is the answer to the sterility of our Communion: our souls are dry, half-barren, sluggish soil and upon them the seed of grace will not bloom to its fullest.

Bring the comparison closer to the Eucharist. A friend may love you intensely, may be constantly offering you affection, favors and gifts. But you do not feel the same toward him; your heart is not on fire as his. You pay little attention to his gifts. You scarcely bother to extend a hand to receive them. You turn from intimate affection. All his love and favors are practically lost on you, simply because you are not sufficiently disposed to receive either his love or his gifts.

Now Christ is that person Who comes to you with an ardent love and unnumbered gifts, with arms and heart loaded with graces, blessings and favors. But his success in giving these gifts depends so much on *your* willingness and *your* capacity to receive them, on *your* faith and love for Him, on *your* extended arms and open heart.

You may have a gallon of the most costly and expensive wines for your friend, but if he has come with only a thimble, no matter how strongly you may want to give it all to him, he can take no more than a thimbleful. Naturally you feel very sad because your love and generosity toward him are thwarted by his coldness and stupidity. So must Christ feel when He comes with His arms filled with infinite treasures of grace and He finds only a thimble-heart and even that half-closed to His love.

Now, how can we improve the soil? How enlarge the thimble? By an intelligent preparation for Holy Communion.

REMOTE PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION

Our preparation for Communion should be two-fold: one remote, the other immediate. The remote preparation is the sinless and Christly living of our daily lives. Christ must not be the Friend whom we meet merely for a few warm moments in the morning. He is the Friend Who stands at our side all day and watches over us by night. Really to be prepared for His reception in a fit manner in Communion, we ought never to forsake Him in the course of the day.

Never forsake Him. That is the keynote of a true preparation; never forsake Him. Not by mortal sin, for that sin builds a hard crust around the soul, keeping Him out. Therefore cling closely to Him by seeking only one objective in your daily life: the accomplishment of His holy will, the quest of His pleasure. Try even not to turn from Him by deliberate venial sin. Then He will love to walk and talk with you. Never leave Him, but strive to live thoughtful of Him. Then Christ will dwell by faith in your heart.

We know He walked with Adam and Eve in the evening hours of Eden. He walks with you through the long dreary hours of the day in the Eden of faith. He leaves you only when you drive Him away by serious sin. Do not slight Him, ignore Him, forget Him. You would do that to no other loved one. Do not do it to Him. Have the delicacy of turning hourly to Him during the day, whispering words of love.

IMMEDIATE PREPARATION

The more important preparation is that which you make just before Holy Communion. It consists, ideally, in the intelligent and prayerful participation in the Mass with the priest.

Remember that at the consecration you offered yourself with Christ to your Father. You said, "All glory to God, the Father and Spirit through Christ and with Christ and in Christ." You have celebrated your Mass, your sacrifice. Now be on the alert to receive back your offering, the sacrament, from the Father. Therefore, recite, at least in your heart, if not from your missal, the prayers that will enlarge the thimble and enrich the soil.

First, the Lord's Prayer, Who offers you now the living daily bread. Then listen to John the Baptist as he points to the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. Cry out with the Church to Christ to grant the peace He wants you to possess. Bow low as you implore Him to make you cling to His commandments and never to let you be cut away from Him. And finally, hope high that the Communion will bring health to your soul and body, and not guilt or added blame, through Christ our Lord.

Then at last, when the festive bell calls you to your place at the banquet, play the role of the humble soldier of Rome and confess: "O Lord, I am not worthy." You feel the touch of God upon your tongue. One more sigh of sorrow, one silent breath of welcome, one last act of desire. This is the hour — *do* think of it — in which the Son of Man has come. It is consummated.

What has happened? Once before He came to Elizabeth, and the unborn Baptist leaped for joy. Once before He merely looked at water and it became wine. Once He touched a leper and the dead flesh lived again. Once before, He came to a grave and called forth a living friend. Communion time may be only a cool empty moment to you. But warmth and love and longing will bring the torrent of the Mass into your cup — overflowing.

THE THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION

And now a word about thanksgiving. Here the question may be asked: "Why does Mass end so soon after Holy Communion? Why is there not more time given officially for our thanksgiving after Holy Communion? Our Holy Father gives the best answer. When the sacrifice is finished,

it is finished. Hence the congregation that offered it is then dismissed. But he insists that those who were intimately united with Christ in Holy Communion should remain to make a suitable thanksgiving.

The word *thanksgiving* is an incomplete word, almost a misnomer. For it contains so much more than it says. It is something like the word *confession*. That word means accusation, the telling of our sins. Yet we all know that for forgiveness of sin in the sacrament of penance, much more than the mere accusation is required. We take similar liberties with words in our everyday life. When a friend invites us to dinner, we do not merely eat, wipe our mouths and dash out of the house. We do much more than take dinner. We comment occasionally on the appetizing dishes served. We express our special gratitude to the hostess for all the work involved in preparing it for us. We very often praise one or the other choice dish that is particularly tasteful. And then when the table has been cleared we sit around for several hours to make the evening a pleasure for those who invited us. We exchange our views on personal matters. We may even become intimate enough to complain of our needs, or to reveal our troubles. And once again before taking leave we mention how grateful we are and what delight the invitation brought us.

Our Lord wants us to be at least human with Him. That should not be too difficult as long as we keep our faith alive to the great thing that has come to pass in Holy Communion. St. John Eudes used to insist that for a fully worthy Communion two eternities would be required, one eternity to prepare and the other to thank Christ for the gift of Himself. Even the saints did not have this opportunity but they supplied as well as they could. The great St. Theresa was once asked how she spent her time after Holy Communion. "That is the time to do business with Christ," she so rightly answered.

SUGGESTIONS

The moment you feel the touch of the host on your tongue, send your guardian angel and your favorite saint and Mary, your Mother, in advance into your heart to make the final

last-minute preparations in your stead. And when you have returned to your pew, get down to business. We make the following suggestions, merely as guides for your convenience. Build your business-time around the word F A T H O M N. Faith in the Real Presence of Christ truly and substantially in your soul. I believe. Adoration: O Jesus, You are all the mountains and I but a grain of sand. You are all the forests and I but a leaf on a dying tree. You are all the oceans and I but a drop of water. You are Who must be. I am who need not be. Thanks for the goods of nature — the earth, the mountains, the air; our food, our loves, our dreams. Thanks for the goods of grace: for God, for the Church, for our faith — and for this Communion. "O good and gentle Jesus, look down upon me. . . ." Here recite the indulgenced prayer before a crucifix. "O Jesus, pardon me my sins, save me from the fires of hell." Mary! Thank her for Christmas, for Calvary and for the Mass. She made them all possible. Needs — of body: health for yourself, your loved ones. Needs — of soul: more charity toward God and your neighbor, grace for your usual weakness, grace to persevere in your resolutions. No more sins!

This conversation with our Lord will take but a few minutes. If you are faithful here, the minutes will multiply but the time will seem so short. You can end it when and as you please, but not until you have thanked Christ once more for this banquet and promised Him to return for another share at your earliest opportunity. Thus your thanksgiving will be a full and rounded-out word. It will have meant a loving visit with the Host Who invited you to supper with Him. It will not be wanting in etiquette, in the refinement of manners that we show toward even the least of our brethren.



THE MASS AND THE MOTHER OF GOD

Many people are unhappy, not because they must make sacrifices, but because they refuse to make the sacrifices that purchase happiness. The reason they are sad is that they imagine that selfishness and self-gratification and pleasure are the stuff that joy is made of.

The opposite is true.

A sacrifice is not only a sign of joy, but the price at which joy is purchased. Gifts are made on joyous occasions and bring joy to both the giver and the receiver. Gifts are exchanged by those who love: husband and wife, man and maid, child and parent; they are made on joyous occasions: weddings, anniversaries, commencements, birthdays.

What is true of the gifts we make to men is immensely more true of the gifts we are privileged to make to God, and especially the perfect gift of the Mass, the gift of His own divine Son. The sacrifice of the Mass is a mighty and sweet fountain of joy both to God and to ourselves.

The truth of this statement is exemplified nowhere better than in the life of our Blessed Lady. She who is the cause of joy to the world must have been a cause of joy to herself as well. Can a heart be sad that is thrilling and dancing with a great and perfect love as was her heart in its love for God? Can a soul be depressed when it is bent on the accomplishment of a glorious work that cannot fail as was the soul of our Blessed Lady? And yet we know that her life was a life of sacrifice. Her love for God entailed immeasurable sacrifices. Her work in the world's redemption meant a long life of suffering, yet never for a moment was she sad. Sorrowful, yes, at times, even unto tears, yet always deep in her heart she was joyful.

In our articles about the Mass we have been urging you to an understanding and love of the Mass that would help to make the Mass a part of your life. As in all things worthwhile Mary has gone before us in this. If we understand her life of sacrifice rightly and truly we shall see that her life was such a Mass. In fact, she was the first sharer in Christ's Mass and thus helped to redeem the world. She lived her Mass with Christ. Let us look at her life step by step.

There was in her life the period of preparation in which her soul was disposed for the intimate offering of the Mass, even as in each Mass there is a period of preparation in which we should be disposed to enter into the spirit of the Mass. This preparation for us begins with the prayers at the foot of the altar through the Confiteor, the Kyries, the prayers, the Gloria and Credo and the Epistle and Gospel. Here we ask pardon for our sins; plead for grace; glorify the God in Whom we believe; enliven our faith in the Epistle and Gospel.

Mary's Mass began with her Immaculate Conception preserving her from every trace of original sin. That preparation continued through the prayerful years of her childhood in the company of her sainted mother, Ann; through the religious instruction and formation in the school of the temple, down to the pure hour of her virginal marriage to Joseph.

At the Annunciation in the home of Mary and at Bethlehem, when Christ was born, the offering for the sacrifice was provided. Just as you and the members of the Church provide the material bread and wine for the sacrifice of the Mass, so then she and God worked together to produce the material flesh and blood of the first Mass. That material was Christ, Her Son, first of all, whose body for the sacrifice she wove out of her own sinless flesh and blood. But that was not all. If her Son was the Redeemer, then His mother, in the designs of God, must be the co-redemptrix, and all that He does as Redeemer, she must do as co-redemptrix. Therefore did she provide also *herself* for that offering — her entire self, mind and heart, body and soul, hopes and joys, tears and sorrows — all, she made ready for that first

Mass. She would not let her Christ go along that hard and sacrificial way alone.

After that preparation of the offering, the Mass of Mary hurries on to its offertory. After forty days she joined the first offertory procession, or rather led it up to the altar of the temple in Jerusalem. This first offertory we commemorate in the feast of the Presentation.

The law of the Jews commanded that the first-born of every family, excepting only the tribe of Levi, be presented and offered to God. As a symbol of the offering of her Child, Mary's poverty could offer only two turtledoves to be sacrificed in His place. Christ thus was presented, given to His Father for the work of men's redemption. The turtledoves of that day have become the offertory donation, or the bread and wine of the Christian Church. But here, too, Mary is inseparable from her Child. Her sacrifice must be one with His. As from her heart swells a prayer of offering to her Father in heaven, of all she is and has, a strange answer is dropped from the prophetic lips of the old priest. In her heart Mary is saying: "I pray that my sacrifice and my Son's may be acceptable to Thee." And the answer breaks in upon her soul: "It is accepted — you must suffer with Him even unto death. *And thine own soul a sword shall pierce.* The sword of sacrifice must bury its hot blade to the hilt in her tender, young heart. Mary's sacrifice of the Mass has begun in dead earnest.

Her life passes into the hush and quiet of the secret, hidden years — the awed silence before the solemn mystery of the consecration. It is the period when her mind is enlightened more and her heart strengthened more for the terrible moment of complete offering and sacrifice. For her this period is the time to build up herself and her Son for that great sacrificial act. And how does she do it? By a life of close union and intimate prayer with Christ. Even she had to pour into her heart and soul the steel of strength she borrowed from God in prayer, that the consecration which was soon to come might be genuine and true, and not a mere ceremony of words and empty actions. Her life had to be transformed into Christ's, in its thoughts and desires, in its loves and actions. That could be done only by bringing Christ into her heart, that He might work His wonder there.

Whether, during those blissful years, Mary was washing clothes down by the village stream with the older women, or whether she was cleaning the home, or preparing the meals, or mending the clothes, or even chatting with the neighbors, or playing with the Boy Who sported on eternal lawns with the angels for His playmates, or building houses in mud and sand with Him Who built the world with stone and fire and molten lava — no matter what or where — always her heart and her mind were moving about her Boy, Jesus.

There was but one sacrifice, for Jesus and Mary now as ever were but one. She hears the ringing of the bell in the pounding of the hammer through her Boy's hands and feet. The rushing away of His friends from the cross is so much like the flight of Catholics from the Mass, as if they almost cry out to Christ: "Hurry and die that we may get back to our fun and money-making and friends." In the dull nails and sharp spear she sees the words of consecration. In the mockery and trivial gambling she sees the irreverence and inattention of modern Catholics. In the elevation of the cross she envisions the elevation of the host and chalice. In the agony that breaks her heart at the moment, she foresees the life of sacrifice that we must live if we too would truly love Christ, be with Him in a union of love and finally become like unto Him.

In the cry that broke from her heart as she raised her eyes to the broken body hanging before her, she felt she was speaking with each of us, her other sons and daughters: "This is my body; this is my blood. Mine because I gave it to Him long years ago when we began this Mass together; mine, too, because He has taken me into Himself, made me one also with Him in His new body, His Mystical Body. In a double sense is this my body and my blood."

Then rang over the hill the announcement of the completion of the sacrifice: "It is finished!" The sacrifice has reached its climax, for then the body of Christ was separated from His precious blood. From Mary's heart came the same cry. She had reached the very limit of her power to suffer. She was for the moment separated from her Son. Far easier for her would it have been if her body had been

cut off from her blood and her soul from her body. For Christ was the very soul and spirit of her life, even more than the soul with which she thought and loved and lived.

We have said that Holy Communion is God's return to us for the honor, praise, gratitude, reparation and petition we have rendered to Him. Communion is God giving us not merely a grace or some grace, but the very Author and Source of grace and divine life, Himself. It is true that we can believe that our Blessed Lady had received Communion at the last supper with the apostles, and she continued to receive daily her own Son from the hands of His best-loved apostle, St. John. But Mary's return for her part in the sacrifice of Calvary was even more wonderful than Holy Communion. Since she redeemed mankind with her Son, since every grace that Christ merited by His Passion, she also merited by her compassion; since she with Christ paid the purchase-price of grace for our salvation, not merely by giving Christ a humanity in which to suffer, but even more so by suffering with Him, she ought to have a part in the distribution of grace. Her Communion in that first Mass, her Communion in every Mass that has followed lies in this: that Christ communicated to her the disposing, as she sees fit, of all the graces which they together have merited upon Calvary. She is the invisible communicant at every altar in every Mass, receiving all from an affectionate divine Son for distribution to other poorer, weaker, helpless children — you and me.

Calvary is the reservoir of all the graces and blessings and mercies that God has destined for mankind. The Mass is a channel through which those graces flow upon this our age. The seven sacraments are seven outlets of that divine stream of mercy and bounty. But Mary is the keeper of the reservoir; she is the co-offerer with the great High Priest, Christ, and with you and me, the lesser priests of the royal priesthood of Christ. But, more important for us, she may rightly be called God's engineer who opens and closes the valves in the channels of grace leading from the Mass into our souls.

Some will tell us that love and devotion to Mary impede and obstruct our advance to God and to Christ. How ridiculous! Did our mothers impede and obstruct our advance

into life and our progress along the way of life? Does the open door hinder our advance into a room? All who attended the first Mass on Calvary and took from it the saving grace for their souls — Magdalen and John, the good thief and the centurion, Longinus, stood at that first altar with Mary and through Mary drew from the cross the grace that saved them.

Mary stands at every mystic Calvary since, still the co-redemptrix, still praying, offering, sacrificing with the divine Redeemer, her Son. Here above all she fulfills the mission entrusted to her at the first Mass of mothering, protecting, loving us as her children; here a hundred thousand times a day she is reminded of her office toward us in the words re-echoed from every new Calvary's peak: "Woman, behold your sons and daughters. Keep them close to Me and to the source of grace in the Mass. Sons and daughters, behold your Mother and stay near to her side, for the crimson grace that flows down my cross is hers and hers alone to enrich your souls."

Thus is the Mass the divine fountain of Mary's power, of her position of queen of men, of her office as mistress and lady of all lands, for through the cross and the Mass all the omnipotence of God, in a certain true sense, passed into her hands.

And with this power, this exaltation, this divine station of Mary among men, from the cross and the Mass comes unbounded joy to the heart and soul of our Mother. Easter joy from Good Friday's sacrifice!

Calvary was dark and terrible and painful and bloody, for that was the hour of sacrifice and toil; the Mass is joyful and beautiful and even gay. On Calvary there were no beautiful vestments, save the thorns on His head and the marks of the scourges. On Calvary no lovely flowers bloomed nor precious vessels glistened, save the red roses of His wounds and the empty vessel of His divine heart. On Calvary no lights and candles, save Him Who was the Light of the World, fast being extinguished by the hatred of men. On Calvary no joyous singing save the moaning and agony of the Son of God and Mary. But all these are in the Mass, for the Mass is to us the source of all good things through Mary.

GOING UP TO THE ALTAR OF GOD

I go up to the altar of God!

Do you really mean it? Are YOU going to the altar? Or are these just words you mutter, while you actually stay right in your pew with prayers and thoughts you could indulge just as truly at home in your bedroom, or on a park bench, or on some hilltop?

Go up there to the altar! God is expecting you — expecting your adoration, your gratitude, your reparation for a mountain of sins under which you have tried to smother His majesty, His goodness, His rights. The souls in purgatory are hoping and praying that you will go up there to the altar, for there you can release great floods of relief and comfort for them. The whole world, bent low under the weight of its weakness, its crimes, its infidelities, hopes you will go up to plead for the mercy it needs so badly, so desperately.

Your own family, your friends; sinners swallowed up in the fiery flood of big cities and pagans buried in the darkness of mission lands cry out to you to go up and come back with grace and strength and salvation for them.

Do you not hear the entire Church, on earth and in heaven, saints and martyrs, confessors and virgins, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons the world over inviting you: "Come up to the mountain of sacrifice where Christ our Head awaits us. Come to the family prayer, the family offering, the banquet of God's family on earth."

Go then to the altar of God to offer, to pray the Mass; not to daydream the Mass. Go up in thought and intention, in understanding, conscious of the tremendous action you are about to perform. The Mass is yours; take your part in it.

But how can this be done? Ideally, by following step by step, word for word, prayer for prayer, what your representative, the priest at the altar, is doing. Following the Mass in your missal carries you to the heart of the divine action. This is the way the Church prays the Mass, and you are the Church. This is the way Christ is praying the Mass, and you belong to him. Thus, as Pius XII teaches in his letter *Mediator Dei*, "The faithful may, united with the priest, pray together in the very words and sentiments of the Church." But note that the Holy Father says *in the sentiments* of the Church. Unfortunately, the missal may be used mechanically, without attention or understanding. If the use of the missal turns into mere routine, a page-flipping operation, a neck-and-neck race with the priest at the altar without intelligent union with the thoughts and sentiments of the principal offerer, then the missal defeats its purpose.

To quote Pius XII again: "The chief aim (of the use of the missal) is to foster and promote the people's piety and intimate union with Christ and His visible minister and to arouse those internal sentiments and dispositions which should make our hearts become like to that of the High Priest of the New Testament." The missal is not a magic charm that makes us intelligent and alert to what is going on at the altar. Our interior heart is more important than our book.

Some with a dramatic sense, with an alert imagination and keen sense of the symbolic, are able to read the story of the Mass and its meaning in the language of symbol and action, of dress and furniture, with which the Church has surrounded the Mass. Such a one was the father of a priest who always assisted at Mass very attentively, but without prayer book, missal or rosary. When asked why he did not use a book as other people did, his answer was simple: "But, my boy, I do make use of a prayer book. When I am present at the holy sacrifice, I see and read in the altar, the priest and the ceremonies that surround the Mass, the story of the passion and death of my Saviour. As the Mass is the unbloody renewal of what once took place on Calvary, I feel that I can do nothing better during it than to follow

the priest as he performs the sacred rite. I find the Mass itself the best of prayer books."

Why all these dramatic externals of the Mass if not to arouse interest, attention, understanding of what is going on? So many have eyes and see not, missing the entire aim of the Church in surrounding the Mass with such gorgeous pageantry. They have eyes and see not. They stare as into a void, absorbed in their devotions or in dumb daydreaming. All this drama should mean something to us: the altar, the cross, the candles, the vestments, the actions of the priest. A Christian at Mass sees: —

THE ALTAR ELEVATED — Christ climbed the hill of Calvary for the first Mass.

THE ALTAR CROWNED BY A CRUCIFIX — here the sacrifice of Calvary is renewed.

LIGHTED CANDLES — Christ is the Light of the World, Who enlightens every man that comes into the world. Christ is the Word of God, God and Man, our Mediator, standing between us and God, bringing man to God and God to man.

THE PRIEST COMES TO THE ALTAR — the priest represents Christ and us. He bears a cross on His back, as one of us, and this cross says that this is our sacrifice also. The servers with the priest, close to the altar, remind us that we should also be there offering the sacrifice of Christ and of ourselves, the sacrifice of the Mystical Body.

Each action of the Mass is likewise a meditation for those who have eyes to see and faith to comprehend:

BOWING IN LOWLINESS OF BODY, the priest tells us to bow low in humility of heart and mind, in adoration and sorrow, because "He must increase and I must decrease" in my sense of my own importance and greatness.

OPENING HIS ARMS at the *Dominus Vobiscum*, the priest says: "The Lord be with you" by grace and charity. You should be with Him too in the oneness of His Mystical Body, in the oneness of His sacrifice.

EXTENDING HIS ARMS in prayer, the priest takes the attitude of pleading and supplication.

STRETCHING OUT HIS ARMS in the canon of the Mass, the priest reminds us of Christ's arms outstretched on the cross, embracing all of us in His sacrifice, nailing our sins to the cross, inviting us also to come and have our due part in this renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary.

Each posture conveys to us a meaning:

WE KNEEL to adore, to beg; shrinking into our nothingness before the grandeur of God.

WE STAND like soldiers at attention, to hear with earnestness the word of God and to show our reverence for it.

WE SIT to think, to contemplate the deep, quiet mysteries of our faith.

If we but understood the dramatic actions and gestures of the Mass, and paid attention to them, how compellingly they would lead us to enter into the mysteries of the perfect prayer that is Christ's and ours.

The feeble grandmother, the tired housewife, the unlettered laborer, can follow the Mass with their sorrowful beads. They know with a simple and bright faith that the Mass is Calvary renewed. Calvary brought down the ages to us; not only that Christ might give and offer, but that they too might give and consecrate and offer with Him their daily Calvary, their apparently unending agony, their toil and weariness, their heartbreak and loneliness, their sweat and tears, their aching backs and heads, their trembling hands and sagging knees. Too tired to page a missal, too dull of mind to understand the involved phrases, too feeble

of sight to read the small print, these other Christs plunge to the very heart of the sacrifice, lay their suffering selves beside Him on the altar, stretch their agonies beside Him on the cross of the consecration and eagerly embrace Him in a Communion that is a union mindful of Mary holding her Son in her arms for the last time beneath the cross. Their rosaries are the keys that open to them the very soul of the sacrifice of the Mass. Let no one tell you that they are wrong, for Pius XII himself says in the *Mediator Dei*:

“Many of the faithful are unable to use the Roman missal even though it is written in the vernacular; nor are all capable of understanding correctly the liturgical rites and formulas. So varied and diverse are men’s talents and characters that it is impossible for all to be moved and attracted to the same extent by community prayers, hymns, and liturgical services. Moreover, the needs and inclinations of all are not the same, nor are they always constant in the same individual. Who then would say, on account of such a prejudice, that all these Christians cannot participate in the Mass nor share its fruits? On the contrary, they can adopt some other method which proves easier for certain people, for instance, they can lovingly meditate on the mysteries of Jesus Christ or perform other exercises of piety or recite prayers which, though they differ from the sacred rites, are still essentially in harmony with them.”

No matter what method we use in taking part in the Mass, whether we read the prayers of the Church in the missal, whether we read the dramatic story of the sacrifice written in the action and postures and vestments of the Mass, or whether we read the signposts of the sacrifice along the highway of the rosary, what is supremely important is that we know and are aware of what we are about, and what Christ is doing in the Mass, what we should be doing with Him. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” — the mind, the spirit of sacrifice.

On Calvary there were three groups of people. Those who had nailed Christ to the cross; those who were merely curious, neither hostile nor devoted, who stood and stared; and finally those, like Mary and Magdalen and John the

beloved, who suffered every pain, every agony, every insult keenly. These made Calvary their own by sympathy and love and union. Among Catholics we find these same three groups. Those who nail Christ to the cross by their lives of serious sin, in particular their sins of missing Mass, of sacrilegiously receiving the Eucharist. Secondly, those who go to the Calvary of the Mass dully, stupidly, without understanding or sympathy for the sublime action there taking place, who are there as if by force of compulsion and who hurry away as if in relief. And finally those who stand at the Calvary of the altar even as Mary and John beneath the cross, with deep understanding, with personal sympathy; who link themselves to the divine Victim and mingle their tears with His tears, their toil with His toil, their lives with His life, and who leave the altar with hearts throbbing with joy, with divine satisfaction, hearing the song of Paul running through their minds. "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me. For I live in the faith of the Son of God Who loveth me and delivered Himself for me."



