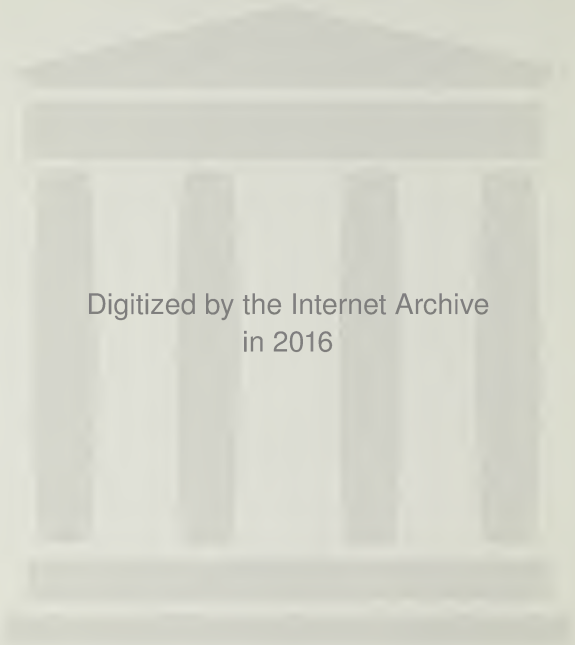
Questions the Catechism Didn't Answer

By Dr. Balthasar Fischer



Questions the Catechism Didn't Answer

50 CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTIONS
on
THE LITURGY OF THE CHURCH
by
Dr. Balthasar Fischer

The Liturgical Press

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INTRODUCTION

There is no longer a shortage nowadays of learned books on the liturgy. The educated Catholic knows how their number has grown during the last thirty years and what a precious amount of new information about the divine services of the Church they have brought to light. But the simple Christian who would want to gain a deeper knowledge of divine worship (happily there are ever more of them) would not be served by these works. He needs plain lessons in Christian worship that translate for him into simple and bold language the wisdom of the learned works. Such popular lessons in Christian worship this booklet wishes to present.

One would expect that every Catholic had acquired the necessary knowledge about divine services in catechism class. Yet, although valuable and solid, the catechisms of our youth fell very short on this important point. Even catechisms are children of their time, and during the first three decades of our century the interest in matters liturgical was surprisingly limited. Few suspected that a revival of the liturgical spirit would come over the Church during the first half of our century, thanks to the three great Popes by the name of Pius. Now many whose hearts are awake, also among ordinary Christians, suddenly realize that much can be learned from the liturgy that was not in the catechism.

For these the following fifty lessons about the liturgy are intended. Beginning with the body or nave of the church, the first five chapters describe sacred places, five are devoted to liturgical gestures, fifteen to holy seasons and the central mystery of all liturgy, the celebration of the holy Eucharist;

and the circle closes with five lessons on Baptism and five on the other sacraments. In each case this question is put to what has become customary and well-known: Why is it so and what is its lesson? Instead of thoughtlessly accepting current, superficial opinions, our purpose is to penetrate into what lies beneath the exterior of Catholic worship.

These instructions first appeared separately in the diocesan paper *Paulinus* of Trier and were then, upon request, revised and published in the booklet *Was Nicht im Katechismus Stand.*

BALTHASAR FISCHER

The House of God

1 . . . THE NAVE OF THE CHURCH

When formerly, in my religious instructions to children, I came to speak of the house of God, I usually asked the question: "Tell me, children, you have heard people speaking about the nave of the church; that the pulpit stands in the main nave, the confessional in the side nave. What do they mean?" Of course, we more commonly use the words *main aisle* and *side aisle,* but nave and aisle here mean the same thing. But why speak of nave at all? The word "nave" literally means ship or boat. That's a strange use of the word, don't you think? The church does not float on water, surely. Well, I shall tell you.

The early Christians, in speaking of the nave of the church, were thinking of Lake Gennesareth and of St. Peter's boat in which our Lord was often together with the small group of His disciples. Isn't it exactly similar in the house of God, they wished to say, that within its walls the Lord is with His followers amid the waves of world history? That is why we are so happy within this house, more so than in any other in the whole town or city; why we annually celebrate its dedication with great festivity as God's temple (if the building has been consecrated).

The Lord is actually present among us in this nave of the church as He once was with the apostles in the boat on Lake Gennesareth. And sometimes it happens to us, as it happened to them, that strong waves rage about our boat and we turn

suppliantly to our great Fellow-passenger. He now too, as then, seems to be asleep. Silently and seemingly unconcerned about our needs, He dwells on the altar and in the tabernacle. I believe that if we did not know His answer in advance, we would do as the apostles did and approach Him amid the raging storm, calling to Him: "Master, does it not concern you that we are perishing?"

But we do not want to be of little faith. We know that He who ever comes to us in our boat and sails with us, though He be the most calm and seemingly unimportant of our companions, is still Lord over all storms and of all world history. At the right moment He will extend His hand and there will be "a great calm."

See how a dead piece of old picture language begins to live and breathe! Only we must have a little patience, we must stop and reflect till the light comes. It can well be imagined how the eyes of the little ones in school, still living in their picture world, brightened up at my illustrations. And more so as I explained further that in this nave or boat of the church, fish are being caught, yes, human fishes, just as our Lord told St. Peter. They are caught with hooks, one at a time, and occasionally there is a jerk on the line and in the heart of the fisherman when he hears: "My last confession was so and so many years ago." With nets, too, they are caught, many at a time, with the bait of God's mighty words coming from pulpit or altar.

For these reasons we speak of the nave of the church, because in the church our Lord really comes to us time and again and stays with us bodily as once with His disciples on the lake; and therefore we sail with Him confidently amid violent storms. Even when He appears sound asleep, we know and believe what was already said in the Book of Psalms: "He neither slumbers nor sleeps who guards Israel."

2 . . . THE TWELVE CROSSES ALONG THE CHURCH WALLS

Few of those, I am sure, who Sunday after Sunday come to a consecrated church (only such have the twelve crosses), ever notice the little crosses painted along its interior side walls. Never have they heard a reference to this decoration, much less do they know what it is for. But on one particular Sunday of the year in such a church, the twelve crosses can hardly go unnoticed (if all is done right). I refer to the Sunday on which the solemn dedication of the church is annually celebrated. According to beautiful, ancient custom, a candle then burns before each of the crosses as part of the festive commemoration of the day on which the bishop solemnly blessed or baptized this house of God.

It is not accidental that candles are lit at those twelve places. For the first time they were burning there on that blessed occasion when the bishop with cope and mitre solemnly stepped down from the altar and anointed the church walls on those very spots with holy chrism, just as a newly baptized person is anointed on the crown of his head.

During the ceremony the choir chanted hymns about the heavenly Jerusalem, how it is adorned as the Bride of the Lamb and knows not the darkness of night. If you are familiar with your Bible, you will recall where the choir found those words—in the Apocalypse of St. John, in the chapter describing the heavenly Jerusalem. The house of

God should be a part of heaven, a reflection and image of the heavenly City. Read through that chapter again (ch. 21 of the Apocalypse) from beginning to end, and you will see why just twelve places on God's house are anointed. For there it says of the heavenly City which the apostle saw in vision: "The wall of the city has twelve foundation stones, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

Now you know why the bishop anoints those twelve spots along the wall of the church, the image of the heavenly Jerusalem. They should remind us of the twelve apostles; that is why the crosses are called "Apostle crosses" and the candles "Apostle candles." All the joy that comes to us in this earthly house of God and all the happiness—please God!—we may one day enjoy in heaven, rest "on the foundation of the apostles," and flow from the faith which the Twelve have faithfully handed down to us from the lips of the Master and firmly sealed by their martyrdom.

Really, this significant adornment on the church walls, if we understand it correctly, is a bit of the ancient veneration for the apostles. But over and above, the crosses want to tell us something more, which our Christian brethren in the East feel more deeply than we, that every Catholic church, no matter how small or poor, is part of the eternal Jerusalem, a forecourt to heaven.

That same chapter of the Apocalypse quoted above tells how the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem no longer need the sun or the moon, for "the Lamb is the lamp thereof." Isn't this more or less anticipated every time the same "Lamb" comes into our midst in a hidden form and we say to Him: "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us"? But also when the holy Sacrifice is over the "Lamb" remains present on the altar, reserved in the tabernacle, a living echo of the Eucharistic celebration. Hence very

fittingly, during our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the sanctuary lamp reminds us of those consoling words of the Apocalypse: "The Lamb is the lamp thereof."

3 . . . WHY MARTYRS' RELICS IN THE ALTAR?

Have you ever witnessed the consecration of a church? Yes? Well, then, one thing you have not forgotten is that it lasted a long time. But despite its length, I am sure you felt it was well worth attending. It is indeed a magnificent ceremony, stirring in parts and inspiring throughout.

One of the highlights (remember?) was the procession that bore martyrs' relics into the new church. The vestments for this were, appropriately, red; the singing festive, triumphant. Down the center aisle the procession moved, and on into the sanctuary until it reached the altar. There, in a little "sepulchre" ground into the horizontal slab *(mensa),* the relics were reverently interred.

That the altar should contain martyrs' relics is an ancient rule in the Church. St. Ambrose, the great fourth-century bishop of Milan, knew and honored it. What led to this peculiarly Christian custom, and what is its message?

The custom is, clearly, an outgrowth of another practice that was universally followed in the early Church. On the anniversary of a martyr's death, friends and relatives accompanied by a priest came to his grave to offer a commemorative Mass. On these occasions the coffin served as altar, or in lieu of that, an altar was improvised over the remains.

You can imagine what an impression this must have made on the bystanders, the more so because of the times. Persecution was forever in progress, or threatening. The holy martyr had met death for his faith. This was his grave. All present realized only too well that the same test might at any moment overtake each of them. The group was not very large, to avert suspicion. Often the destination was one of those sub terranean burial chambers which may still be seen in the Roman catacombs, where no sun came through from the outside and one had to make his way by candlelight.

What thoughts crowded their minds as they stood encircling the holy martyr, and in union with the priest offered the holy Sacrifice from an altar over his grave! Or rather, how spoke the holy martyr to them? For, speak he did, in the silence of their hearts. " 'Be imitators of me as I am of Christ,' " he began, echoing the Apostle (1 Cor. 11:1). "As for me," he continued, "I followed the Lord Christ, even to death; and now, in recompense, I share His glory, too, the glory of His resurrection which shall appear when He comes again in power and majesty. For this I have not myself to thank; no, I thank only the Lord's boundless mercy. The same eternal crown awaits you. In the Sacrifice of the Lord's death, here offered from my grave, is found the way and the pledge. Christ came to glory through death. Die with Christ daily, and never cease to die. Then shall you also live with Christ and follow in His glory."

As the group returned home, the experience at the grave went with them, not soon to be forgotten. No homily from the priest had been necessary; the saint's mute exhortation was quite enough. And because the experience could so rouse and strengthen the Christian soul, one did not wish to lose the opportunity when, under the Emperor Constantine, persecution came to an end and the cubicles in homes and ceme-

teries yielded to public edifices of worship. In fact, as the nations thronged into the Church, the memory of the martyrs became, if anything, more necessary. Accordingly, wherever possible the churches that now sprang up were erected over the site of a martyr's grave, and the altar was located above or near the sacred relics. Visitors to Rome will know what I mean. There, in the Churches of St. Peter, St. Lawrence outside the Walls, St. Clement, and many others, they have seen the small crypt near the main altar, called the "Confession," a small vestibule usually glowing with vigil lights in memory of the holy martyr(s).

Naturally, not every church could be built over a martyr's grave, since in some localities none existed. But the idea was maintained. If the grave of a martyr was not available, at least one could have a martyr's relics. And this is how our custom began. In solemn procession the relics of a martyr were brought from his grave to the newly-erected church. The procession formed outside the church, from where it moved inside and down the aisle to the altar, just as it is done today.

The why and the wherefore of relics in the altar should now be clear. The custom reaches back, if not to the earliest, still to very early times, and the reason stems from a fundamental dogma of Christianity. All Christian life is a martyrdom, or it is nothing. Every Christian must have the soul of a martyr, must immolate himself on a cross. This is the message of the relics, the message of the Mass itself. Without self-immolation prayer and praise, however "liturgical," can become like "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). To die with Christ, that makes the Christian. *Die with Christ to live with Him.* So speak the holy martyrs everywhere, from their graves and from all altars.

4 . . . THE ALTAR COVERED BY WHITE LINENS

One should think that for the altar the most precious silks or gold brocade would be barely good enough. How then does it happen that the Church so strongly insists on the altar being covered with linen cloths (and even three of them)?

The answer sounds quite simple, and yet many Christians no longer know what is really involved. The altar is a table, and mothers the world over have ever covered their tables with linen cloths. Why then should Mother Church not do the same with her holy table? The Christian house of God is, before all else, a second cenacle; in the center of the cenacle stands the holy "table of the Lord," covered in white.

Indeed, the altar in our church is more than just a table of the Last Supper; it also represents the rock of Calvary. It stands before us as the sacred place of Sacrifice and as the table of the sacred Banquet. Much as it reminds us in several ways of the Sacrifice (its elevated position, the crucifix, the candles, the relics), it derives its essential form not only from the Sacrifice, but also from the Banquet which flows from the Sacrifice. It is a table. To this day our Christian brethren in the East have no other word for the altar than "the holy table"; and also among us the altar plate is referred to in the Latin term of *mensa,* which means "table."

In former days the faithful realized more clearly than we do that the altar is a table. First of all, in those days it was covered in white before their eyes at each holy Mass (just as

is done on Good Friday). But what was more important, the faithful were permitted, at least in some places, to approach the holy table and there receive from the hands of the celebrant the sacred Food and drink of the chalice. How could they have forgotten that the altar is a table! Later on for various reasons the custom of the laity receiving holy Communion directly from the altar was changed; in general, they were to be kept outside the sanctuary altogether. A substitute table was arranged for; we give it the unhappy name of "communion rail." Nevertheless, it represents the altar table; it is the "table of the Lord" and therefore, like the altar in former days, it is covered with a white cloth.

The most important part of the altar is, therefore, not that which rises vertically above it. "We have a beautiful altar in our church," the children say; "there are many beautiful angels on it." They think—and many adult Catholics share their false notion—that the reredos (the upright ornamental panels behind the altar) is the main thing and the *mensa* is merely an adjunct; for the priest needs something whereon to put the chalice! There are altars that give the impression that the architect or the pastor whose wishes were followed had a similar idea. In reality the very contrary is true. The rear panel is not essential to the altar; it can be dispensed with, as it was missing in the oldest, and is fortunately also wanting with many of our newer altars. But the *mensa* can never be wanting; an altar without *mensa* is simply no altar.

To bring home this point to the faithful it is perhaps good that the ancient manner of celebrating holy Mass is now permitted more often by our bishops, the manner which our Holy Father makes use of regularly when offering the holy Sacrifice on the high altar of St. Peter's, namely, the priest does not stand in front of the altar with his back to the people, but behind the altar, facing the people. I do not, of

course, agree with those who maintain that this is the only correct way; that it is not proper for the priest to have his back turned constantly to the people who offer the Mass with him. The one at the head of a delegation appearing before a public official also has his back turned to those who came with him, and we see nothing improper about that.

Yet I think the other way should also be followed occasionally, since it has the advantage of impressing upon us more clearly that the heavenly Lord (whom the priest represents) is come "to keep the Passover" with us, inviting us to His sacred Banquet. All of us Christians should become more conscious that it is not simply for the fulfillment of our "Sunday duty," as we so thoughtlessly use the word, but for sharing a festive Banquet that we are invited. How pitiful if one of the invited guests should think: What is said or shown at this Banquet, I will listen to or look at, but I have no intention of eating. Truly, it is hard to understand how so many Catholics can behave that way Sunday after Sunday —except for the one Sunday of the year on which they make their "Easter duty."

5 . . . THE CHOIR

Perhaps you never realized it—we are so thoughtless in the use of words—but the same word is used for the sanctuary of the church as for that elevated platform, usually at the rear of the church, reserved for the singers and the organ. And you may even hear the same word used in a third sense, when the

priest announces from the pulpit that next Thursday evening the "choir" will have singing practice. Here the word "choir" no longer designates the place for the clergy or for the chanters, but the body of singers themselves, as when we speak of a "men's choir" or of a "choir of angels."

Is it merely accidental that the Church uses the same word in these three different meanings? Hardly. There must be some reason behind it. We want to get to the bottom of this, and perhaps it will prove worthwhile.

Scholars explain the matter this way: the word "choir" comes from the Greek; it refers to theatre life and denotes a group that appears on the stage, speaking and singing together alongside the principal actors. In this meaning the Church in the early Middle Ages adopted the term, applying it to those who sang in common at the divine services, namely, the clergy in the sanctuary because they carried out the Mass chant insofar as it had simple melodies. For at that time already it was, unfortunately, no longer possible for the congregation to sing more than certain short responses and perhaps the *Sanctus,* since the people had become too unfamiliar with Latin. Soon it became customary to give the name "choir" to the place occupied by the clergy in the sanctuary.

From the beginning there always existed a small group of especially trained singers within the large choir of the clergy who rendered the more difficult chants, the so-called *schola cantorum*. Gradually this group became known as the "choir," and when it separated itself from its rightful place among the clergy near the altar and sought out a new place as far as possible away from it, the name "choir" went along. So the loft in the rear of the church, where this backing-up movement ended, we call to this day "choir," because the choir of singers (now entirely from the laity) is located there. Quite properly one could have stopped calling the sanctuary a "choir," but

fortunately this was not done, and there remains, at least in the name, a last reminder that the church choir has some connection with the altar.

At this point the answer to our inquiry seems to have an important lesson for us. Choir service in church is altar service, originally performed near the altar and by clerics in liturgical vestments. Something of that holy reverence and recollectedness which marks the choir service of young clerics should also be reflected by members of church choirs. It were desirable and certainly more correct, if it could be provided, that the singers have a place (preferably concealed) near the altar. Some modern churches have already introduced this arrangement; but where this is not possible, those who provide the singing in our churches should be keenly aware that their service is service at the altar and even from their more distant place they must take part in the action at the altar with a greater living devotion than the rest of the faithful.

6 . . . FOLDING OF HANDS AT DIVINE SERVICES

From the time of our first and happiest religious instruction at mother's knee, we took it for granted that our hands must be folded in prayer—together, finger against finger, or with fingers intertwined. And ever since our first childhood visits to church it has seemed only natural to keep our hands folded in church and during divine services. But although you have done this thousands of times, and still do it daily at morning and evening prayers, at meals and in church, I am willing to wager that you really never asked yourself why it is done.

Actually, the answer is not so simple. At divine service itself, during holy Mass, you can observe how the priest does the very opposite during the most important prayers; he extends his hands. Why then do we fold them? Our forefathers who gradually introduced the custom must have had good reasons.

I believe they wanted to inscribe a very basic principle on our hearts without which there can be no prayer or divine service, the principle that if man wants to pray and share in the liturgy, he must first "recollect himself" and come to rest interiorly. Hands symbolize work, and thus also our human restlessness that is constantly pursuing us, early and late. By folding your hands you mean to say: *It is quitting time, now let all be silent, the noise of work and the clamor of my restless imagination.*

This basic principle you may have experienced often enough already. A mother who during the meal prayers must fuss and bustle around among pots and dishes "prays" with her lips perhaps, but her heart is not wholly in it. If a flea pesters you on Sunday morning and gets you nettled, then all your praying at Mass becomes choppy; your mind strays in all directions, far from what your lips are saying. Was it not for the very purpose of attaining rest and quiet before prayer that our Lord said: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret"?

Shut the door! Don't you feel that this is why you fold your hands, finger linked firmly to finger? Is it not as if you wanted to lock up your whole being so that nothing disturbs you when you now begin to hold conversation with the God of your heart, when you try to participate most intimately in the Sacrifice of redemption? All must be quiet about you and within you that you may hear the Lord's voice; it does not shout aloud in the streets; it is soft, silent as the growth of His flowers and the course of His stars.

Something else besides the basic principle about "quitting time" is meant when you fold your hands, finger against finger, at prayer and during divine services. There is something mysteriously solemn, something noble about the picture of two human hands folded together and raised in prayer, be they the small, tender hands of a child at night prayers, or the mature and honest hands of an adult—like those immortalized by Albrecht Dürer. Do you know what that is? The ancient idea associated with this gesture was that one wished to place his hands into the hands of God, as it were, in token of surrender.

Now that is man's highest nobility, to surrender himself completely and patiently into God's paternal hands. In this manner the vassal knelt before his liege lord, and still today

the newly ordained priest at the close of the ordination ceremony kneels before the bishop, his folded hands laid between the hands of the bishop, as if to say: Lead me wherever you wish, and I will follow. Here the folded hands imply a second basic principle of prayer. Whoever desires to pray *must surrender himself into God's hands;* no one can lift himself to heaven by tugging at his own shoelaces. He must say: Lead me wherever You wish, and I will follow, for You are our Father. It means placing your folded hands between God's fatherly clasp; and when assisting at holy Mass you do this most perfectly in the Name and spirit of Him who said: "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt!"

We fold our hands, therefore, at prayer and during divine services because all prayer and worship come under a double law, the law of separation and the law of self-surrender into the providential hands of a loving Father.

7 . . . WE KNEEL WHEN WORSHIPPING

There are those who think that kneeling is essential to praying. Which is, of course, a bit exaggerated. The most sacred prayers the priest recites during holy Mass are said standing at the altar; and formerly the faithful also stood about him (in the Canon of the Mass they are still referred to as *circumstantes,* i.e., those standing about). In recent years sound thinkers have pointed out how certain prayers cannot be said properly in a kneeling position. There is something so festively joyous about them, e.g., the Gloria or the Preface, that one must pray or hear them standing.

And how about family liturgy? It is an old custom in Christian families to recite the table prayers sitting down; and if you have taken part in this you will know there is nothing irreverent about it; in fact, the action has its own special dignity when father, mother, and children take their places around the family table and before beginning the meal fold their hands in common prayer. Nowhere else can one sense so clearly what family life means. And when considering silent, interior prayer, many a person will have to admit that his most fervent and sincere prayers were not made either kneeling or sitting or standing, but when lying sick abed.

Nevertheless, it is proper that kneeling be part of Catholic worship, and that it hold a special rank among the bodily postures at divine services. Why is this so? Not out of mere custom, I am sure. There must be stronger, intrinsic reasons at work than are seen at first glance. Kneeling is the bodily expression of a spiritual attitude essential to prayer, that of humility. What the soul must do at prayer, no matter what posture is taken, that the body does when you pray kneeling; it makes itself small; it says, as it were: O God, I know I am as nothing before Thee. I am a poor sinner, have mercy on me!

This explains the high dignity of kneeling. What the kneeling body says, and what the soul, set mysteriously in motion by the body, says after it or should say, is the underlying sentiment of all prayer and worship, the very same our Lord was inculcating when He held up as a model the publican and his prayer: "O God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

At no time should we feel more definitely conscious of our sinfulness and unworthiness than when our Lord comes to us "bodily." Does it not say already in the Gospels about the apostles, about Peter and Thomas, that at such moments they fell down on their knees! Since earliest times, therefore, the Church insists that we bend our knees as the Lord comes in

the Eucharist, and that we remain kneeling in His presence. Where holy Communion can still be carried to the sick in a public manner (the practice is hardly possible in the United States because of the danger of irreverence to the Blessed Sacrament), it is always very impressive to see adult Catholics fall on their knees to express how small they feel before Him to whom the Church sings in the Gloria: "Thou alone art most high."

But even when there is no direct connection with Eucharistic adoration, the kneeling posture (if it is proper and respectful) exercises a wholesome, educative influence. Take another glance at family liturgy—so much depends upon it! Praying while sitting at table, as we said, is right and good; but conscientious parents will insist that their children say morning and night prayers on their knees, and not, as some do, at the breakfast table or after going to bed. All life long the child will profit by the disciplinary effects of proper posture at prayer, when the body expresses the chiefest thing in all prayer, no matter in what position it is made: O God, I am as nothing before Thee!

8 . . . STRIKING THE BREAST AT DIVINE WORSHIP

Whenever I reflect on the Christian custom of striking one's breast, an image comes to mind which I must have seen somewhere in my childhood days. In a lonely cave a hermit is kneeling—it may have been St. Jerome—and with a piece of rock he strikes his naked breast. Here can actually be seen,

transferred into stark reality, what we want to indicate by our innocent gesture of striking the breast. Whoever steps before the living God with an honest, upright heart loses the mask he ordinarily wears in the company of men. With painful clearness he suddenly becomes aware that he is a sinner, unworthy to appear in His all-holy Presence. The pain, boring deep into the hermit's heart, sought bodily expression. With the great saints of all ages, it expressed itself in rigorous self-discipline and penance for what we would call "little sins."

We weaklings, conscious of our great sins, want to combine with our prayers at least the symbolic act of self-discipline: striking one's breast. It is not, therefore, by mere chance that this ceremony is generally prescribed only when there is question of guilt: at the *mea culpa* of the *Confiteor;* in our cry for mercy from the depths of our sinfulness at the *Agnus Dei* during Mass and at the close of litanies; and when acknowledging our unworthiness before approaching the Lord's table.

Striking the breast is an insignificant sign, often carelessly performed; but like folding the hands and bending the knees, it expresses a basic attitude in prayer and Christian life, one that is seriously threatened with neglect in our modern day. There are plenty of Catholics to whom the word "sin" sounds old-fashioned. As long as they are not found guilty of some public crime, they consider themselves almost ready for canonization. Should it not make one reflect that the saints, even the most practical-minded and unemotional among them, could not do enough in bewailing their sins! They realized what a terrible disorder the smallest sin involves. They felt a wholesome trembling before the judgment seat of an all-holy and all-just God. They had the strength to face themselves calmly in the mirror, without self-conceit, and to admit unreservedly the mirror's answer: we all are sinners.

I would regard it as a good thing if striking our breast would at times serve to awaken this healthy disposition of the true Christian. The publican at the rear of the temple, whom our Lord set up before our eyes as the abiding model of genuine prayer, did not merely say: O God, have mercy on me. He said—and we say it after him every time we strike our breast: O God, have mercy on *me, a sinner!*

9 . . . MAKING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS WHEN RECEIVING A BLESSING

It lies so deep in our Catholic blood that it happens almost naturally. As often as a priest blesses us with his hand, or more so with the Blessed Sacrament, our right hand spontaneously goes to our forehead and we sign ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. It seems as if we wanted to catch the blessing and apply it to ourselves, to make it penetrate and nourish body and soul, our thought, speech and feeling.

That we do this with the Sign of the Cross is not just accidental. Blessings are given with the Sign of the Cross to remind us that in the world of the New Testament in which we live, all blessings come from Christ's Cross. Ancient pagans believed that the hands of their priests were automatically empowered to bless, hence worthy of veneration. The hands of Christian priests are indeed deserving of reverence, not as if they could of themselves produce a blessing, but because they may distribute the blessings flowing from the Cross and from Christ's altar.

If you understand this, you will easily see that there is no greater or more beautiful blessing than holy Mass. For in the holy Sacrifice the Cross of Christ is again raised up mysteriously in our midst so that its graces may stream down upon us. The Mass is the one great blessing to which our poor human life humbly bows every day—or at least on Sundays.

In this connection it always grieves me to hear people insistently expressing the desire that sacramental Benediction be given as often as possible after Mass (or even already before Mass) and that the Blessed Sacrament remain exposed during Mass for their special devotion. They have not yet learned how the Mass itself is the most beautiful and most powerful Benediction.

If then we eagerly reach out for ordinary blessings with the Sign of the Cross, it is no more than right that we repeatedly invoke upon body and soul the great blessing of the Cross in holy Mass by means of the Sign of the Cross. Whoever has witnessed the celebration of Mass in the Eastern rite will have seen how the faithful almost continuously accompany the Sacred Act with their big Sign of the Cross (from right to left) and with bowing.

We of the West are not accustomed to such frequent repetitions, but we have been taught from childhood to make the Sign of the Cross at least at the main parts of the holy Sacrifice. Thus we begin and conclude our assistance at Mass with the Sign of the Cross (properly, slowly, and with devotion, I trust); the one we make with the priest when he begins the preliminary prayers at the foot of the altar, the other when he imparts the final blessing. When our Lord comes to us for the first time with His word of blessing at the Gospel, we make the Sign of the Cross on forehead, lips and breast: all our thoughts, words and sentiments should be increasingly permeated with the message of Christ and of His Cross. When

He then enters bodily into our midst at the Consecration and renews the Sacrifice of the Cross among us, there is no more appropriate response on our part to this holiest of acts than a devout Sign of the Cross.

Some pious souls may overdo it by crossing themselves and striking the breast too often, but I believe we should make the Sign of the Cross at the elevation of the Host and of the Chalice, looking up with adoring faith, as if to say: "My Lord and my God, truly present on the altar, receive me, body and soul, into the blessing of Thy death on the Cross and into the power of Thy immolation."

The most meaningful Sign of the Cross at holy Mass is that which, as I observed in certain countries, is made on forehead, lips and breast, immediately after receiving holy Communion. Sharing in the sacrificial Banquet is indeed the best and most efficacious way of drawing the blessing of the Cross from the altar into our body and soul. At this moment it expresses in the truest and fullest sense what we want to signify with the Sign of the Cross: O Lord, fill my whole being, body and soul, my thoughts and words and sentiments, with blessings from Thy Cross. Draw me ever more deeply into Thy immolation and into its guarantee of victory!

10 . . . BURYING OUR FACE IN OUR HANDS

You need not know much about children to understand how hard it is for them to concentrate. What is impressed upon them one minute is already forgotten in the next, not that

they refuse to take admonitions seriously, but that some stronger impression has already erased it. Hence it would be entirely wrong to build a child's spiritual life purely on interior convictions, for these could not go deep enough to make a lasting mark. We must build solid external forms of religion into the life of the child, and these it will gradually fill with proper content.

Experienced educators accordingly have taught children the gesture of recollectedness, of which we here speak, after receiving holy Communion. For they know how this gesture, so natural to the occasion, would at that moment affect the heart of the child more forcefully than any explanation or admonition. It will tell them: Now you must turn inward. Now you must direct your eyes upon the silent Divine Guest within you. Now you must avoid all distractions so that you may hold intimate conversation with Him in your heart. Of course, we cannot expect miracles of piety from such a gesture; a child is but a child.

However, we adults might sometimes be much surprised—and put to shame—if we could but see what real Eucharistic devotion wells up in true childlike fashion behind the enclosure of those small hands. A precious instance of such interior devotion was given by a little seven-year-old in her reply to the question as to how she could pray so long behind those hands: first she told her dear Savior all the prayers she knew, and when finished with them, she told Him the story of Snow White!

Should we adults also, after receiving holy Communion, retain this gesture learned in childhood? Certainly there are those who can be recollected without it, but as a rule I think it would also be very helpful if we too would enclose ourselves at this important and precious moment of intimate personal contact with our Lord.

In late years one could at times hear the anxious concern expressed that such self-enclosure might give rise to the false idea that holy Communion is purely a matter between me and "my Savior." It would therefore be better, after receiving holy Communion, to kneel erect with folded hands and uncovered face, in token of our common fellowship at the holy table.

Such reasoning would be correct, if burying one's face in one's hands had to mean a selfish seclusion from one's neighbor. This no one will maintain. I even think that only he who has learned to look upon holy Communion as an altogether personal union with Christ will become increasingly conscious that by "growth into the Head" we also grow more closely together with all the members. In this age of distractions we must be on our guard against whatever weakens Christian recollection, because to imperil recollection would endanger the very foundation of Eucharistic piety.

11 . . . SUNDAY

You can perhaps faintly recall how your teacher once told you in school that most of the names for the days of the week date back to times immemorial when our ancestors were still pagan. That is true, they really are old. The pagan Teutons named one of the days of the week after the sun, another after the moon, one after their god of thunder, another after their goddess Freya. Accordingly we still have the names Sunday, and, with some linguistic adaptation, Monday, Thursday and Friday. But isn't it really strange that after so many Christian centuries, we still labor with these ancient pagan names, especially when the first day of the week, that of our Lord's resurrection, has taken on an entirely new meaning? How did it happen that this was not changed?

The Church came to our forefathers, not as a destroyer, but as a kind Mother. False beliefs had to be uprooted, even if hearts bled in the operation; that could not be helped. But not everything had to be torn out in the process. She knew exactly how precious little there is in a name. "If only they no longer believe in their god Thunder," she thought to herself, "let them say Thursday as long as they want." After all, it did not matter much in the case of the weekdays, and actually no Christian names for them existed. To this day the Church merely numbers the weekdays in sequence, except Saturday, and says, e.g., for Wednesday, *feria quarta,* the "fourth day,"

in sober Roman fashion. (The ancient Romans sometimes even called their children simply by number, as *Tertius* or *Quintus,* i.e., Number 3 or Number 5, instead of bothering about a first name.)

In the case of Sunday, however, it is harder to understand why the old name was kept. When the day received a new significance, why not also a new name? There existed one really venerable name: the "Lord's Day," as the Apostle St. John already called the first day of the week. And the Church still calls it that. But the answer briefly is this: the Christians gave not only the day, but also its pagan name a new Christian meaning. By saying "Sunday" they no longer thought of a planet in the sky, but of that wonderful Sun which rose on Easter morn from the dark tomb. They thought of Christ, "the Sun of our salvation," as they loved to speak of Him. For this reason "Sunday" was for them another word for "Lord's Day."

Don't you feel how the old pagan word begins to shine in a wonderful Christian light when understood in this sense? Sun, i.e., light and life and brightness and warmth and joy—all that has life exults in it. He who on Sunday morning rose gloriously from a tomb is for us Light and Life and Brightness and Warmth and Joy! We call the first day of the week "Sunday" because the Sun of Salvation gives it light. This Sun did not rise only once; again and again It rises in our midst on the altar.

This gives the ultimate meaning to our going to church on Sunday mornings. It is not to fulfill a hard, rigid commandment, no, but that from the frost and cold and chill of our weekday world, we come out into the "Sun" where our chilled soul at once feels as if gently stroked by a Mother's warm hands. A missionary once asked an old Indian what he was doing for hours in church before the tabernacle without

a book (which would not have helped him much, as he could not read anyway) and without moving his lips in prayer. The old man answered simply and naively: "I hold my soul to the Sun!" That is why we call the Lord's Day "Sunday," because then we can hold our poor, sick soul "to the Sun" that it may be healed by the rays of divine mercy.

12 . . . WHY THE ANGELUS IS SAID STANDING ON SUNDAYS

The custom varies, but if in your church it is the practice to stand while reciting the Angelus on Sundays, have you wondered why? On weekdays it is always said kneeling, even on feastdays such as Christmas or Epiphany. Apparently, then, standing has nothing to do with the Angelus, but with Sunday. In this little, insignificant custom, so easily overlooked (did *you* ever stop to reflect on it?), we have a trace of ancient Sunday piety, a piety from the days of the Church's youth, from the age of the martyrs.

This was then the rule: on Sundays (and during all of Easter time) prayers are said standing; for every Sunday is a "little Easter," a "Resurrection Day" (so the Russians still call Sunday). On that day one must not pray bent low and kneeling, but rather standing upright for sheer joy that the Lord is risen. The act surges up from the very depths of human nature; for in the face of great joy a man feels bound to rise, be he sitting or lying down or kneeling. Standing alone befits intense joy. Standing best expresses man's dignity, no animal

can imitate it. On Sundays we must pray standing, so the early Christians said, because on Sundays we must rejoice in Christ's resurrection.

And secondly, they added, we must pray standing because of our own resurrection. To the Christian, Easter does not merely mean that Christ has risen, but that we all rose on our own Easter day, the day on which we were baptized, to walk in the newness of Easter life. Only the noblest of postures, standing, properly expresses this nobility, the highest on earth; of it we Christians are proudly mindful, particularly on Sundays. For now as brothers and sisters of the risen Lord we belong to the royal family of God (that is why at your Baptism you were anointed like a king). Anyone who has risen with Christ and has "stood up" from the death of sin should remain standing, mindful of his Christian dignity.

Here we ought to call attention to something you already may have noticed in your missal. In the Canon of the Mass before the Consecration the priest prays for "those *standing* about," even when everyone in church is kneeling or sitting. In ancient times when this venerable prayer became part of the Canon, things were quite different. Actually the faithful assisted at Mass standing, despite the discomfort. Why so? This too has something to do with Easter. The early Christians had the right approach, namely, every Mass is a bit of Easter. At each holy Mass we meet with the living, risen Lord; hence we must stand—so they felt—out of sheer joy, proud that we belong to Him and have risen with Him.

Is it wrong then, you may ask, to kneel during this most sacred part of the Mass, as we were taught? No, for in the course of time another approach, which is also correct and important, took precedence, namely, that at so sacred an action one must assist with deepest reverence. Therefore we need not and should no longer stand during the entire

Canon; but what the early Christians wanted to express by standing at holy Mass and on Sundays still holds for us as well. It is good that with the Angelus a small reminder at least has been preserved. Christians should feel happy and proud in reflecting on this basic truth of faith: Christ lives and we live in Him.

13 . . . THE ASPERGES BEFORE THE SUNDAY HIGH MASS

The *Asperges* is a ceremony known from childhood days. Before the High Mass on Sundays the priest does not begin as usual with the prayers at the foot of the altar, but vested in an ample cope with the stole crossed over his breast, he goes through the church and sprinkles the faithful with holy water; meanwhile the choir sings the *Asperges,* or during the Easter season, the *Vidi aquam.* And those present take the holy water with the Sign of the Cross as the priest passes by. Now, honestly, what would you answer if a Protestant friend who accompanied you to High Mass would ask you why the priest "squirted" that water on the people? Perhaps in your embarrassment you would say: "It is always done; it just belongs there." But both of you would feel that this is no explanation.

The answer, it is true, is not in the catechism; yet it is not hard to find if one does a little thinking. It is a question of holy water at the beginning of the greatest act of Christian worship, the main function of the whole week. Hence it must

have some connection with the holy water used at the beginning of our Christian life, the water of Baptism. With blessed water the blessing begins which you now experience at the altar, the celebration of holy Mass.

This is what the holy water before the Sunday High Mass means to say. If it had not flowed over your forehead, you would be excluded from the garden of paradise, now again open to you; you would not be permitted to eat of the tree of life, mysteriously planted anew in the midst of God's kingdom. Blind and with a chilly heart, you would sit and wait until "it" is all over, without recognizing Him passing by, the Lord of the new paradise, the new Adam, Christ. Now God be thanked that it is altogether different. You are baptized, you feel at home in this house and near this altar; you have a natural right to this paradise and in this family and at this family table of the new Adam, Christ Jesus. "Be proud, baptized Christian, of the family treasure that is here revealed." That is what the sprinkling of holy water wants to tell you. Therefore the hymn *Vidi aquam* refers directly to the water of Baptism; the prophet Ezechiel had seen it streaming from the right side of the temple (prefiguring the right side of the temple of Christ's body which the soldier opened with a lance), and "all to whom the water came were healed."

The sprinkling of holy water before the Sunday High Mass exhorts the baptized Christian to be justly proud, and this should ring in the ears of the pitiable Catholics who get up on Sunday mornings and lament over *having to go* to church, as if they had never learned to put it in the "Catholic" way: "It is my highest privilege to assist at holy Mass today!"

Mother Church has also another purpose in giving us holy water before the Sunday High Mass. Not only does she want to awaken a right and noble Christian pride, but also a true, repentant Christian humility (the two belong together and

where the one is, there the other should also be found). "You are baptized and should be proud of it," she says, "but look at your baptismal robe; see what you have done to it by your daily sins. With my prayer and blessing I want to help you wash it clean before you approach the holy altar." Therefore with the words of the *Asperges* (part of the penitential Psalm 50), the Church teaches us to cry to the Lord: "Wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow." Not that drops of water wash the soul clean. But the mercy of the Lord can.

Here is the answer you should have given your Protestant friend. The drops of holy water, falling on us before the Sunday High Mass, give us a little sermon at the entrance to the celebration of Christ's holy Sacrifice: "Take pride in being allowed to come, you baptized Christian; give thanks to Him who called you. Be humble, you sinful Christian, and before you come, petition Him who alone can wash clean the baptismal robe of your soul, and it will become white as snow."

How much value the Church places on this sermon can, moreover, be gathered from this that she exhorts us on coming to holy Mass to take holy water ourselves from the font at the door and make the Sign of the Cross on forehead, breast and shoulders. It is a pity that many Catholics do it so thoughtlessly and slovenly. (Perhaps you heard about the Protestant who came to church with his Catholic friend and afterwards asked him what everybody meant by those motions of the hand *around the stomach* upon entering the building!) True, one cannot always give full attention to an oft-repeated ceremony; but I believe that anyone who has at least a faint notion of the meaning of holy water at the church's entrance, as we have just discussed it, cannot but take it reverently, and cross himself devoutly—even if at the moment he is not actually conscious of how that drop of holy water points up a Christian's just pride and true humility.

14 . . . ADVENT YEAR AFTER YEAR

No Catholic who attends church regularly fails to sense a new awakening in his soul when year after year, on a Sunday at the close of November or the beginning of December, he again hears the stirring melodies of Advent, familiar to him from childhood. Even those near the rear vestibule catch the spirit and hum along. The rays of a holy, impetuously joyous expectation inflame anew all those present, as once they stirred up in their youthful hearts joyous thoughts of approaching Christmas.

But if one reflects, is it not strange that year after year we begin all over again, looking forward to the coming of One who already appeared two thousand years ago? Is it not the very substance of our faith that the Son of God has come and has redeemed us? Why then do we begin every Church year with this acting as if He had not yet come? We cannot well assume (though some pious books put it that way) that the Church is staging a sacred drama with the Old Testament as Act One, and so it has to be acted "as if" the Savior had not yet been born. Now the Church's liturgy is too serious and sacred for such playful "as if's." There must be something else, something genuine about it, if she directs us to begin every year with suppliant cries for the coming of the Lord.

Perhaps you will say: Mother Church means the coming of Christ to us and to the world. He did come, yet He still has not come because of our sins. There are millions who do not

know anything about Him, or no longer care. Even our own hearts have not yet embraced Him as they should.

This answer is correct; it is a good reason for our annual Advent, but it is not the whole answer. Did you ever notice that not only on the last Sunday, but also on the first Sunday of the Church year the Gospel about Christ's final coming on the clouds of heaven is read? For this final, redeeming coming the early Christians prayed with all the longing of their hearts. One of their most fervent cries, recorded on the last page of the New Testament (Apoc. 22:20) was: *Maranatha,* which means, "Come, Lord Jesus!" This is the original Advent prayer. It refers, not to Christ's first coming, but to one still before us, His return on the clouds of heaven.

You will ask in surprise: Why should I pray every Advent for a speedy end of the world? No, it is not meant that way. But every Christian should give a little time every year, removed from the turmoil of the world, to take a look beyond death and the grave, to learn how, as the Gospel of the first Sunday of Advent puts it, "to lift up your head" to the coming Lord "because your redemption is at hand."

Many have grown accustomed to regard the day of Christ's final coming as the dark Day of Judgment, forgetting the while that for those who believe and are saved (and surely we hope and pray to be among them), it is the blessed day of lasting salvation, for our poor body too. Did it ever strike you that in the Gospel just referred to, our divine Savior does not, as one might expect, speak of the fig tree in autumn, which casts off its leaves, but of springtime when it shoots forth its tender buds? Christ's return does not occasion a dismal world-autumn, but after the long cold winter of time comes the great world-springtime, eternal Easter!

Too readily we Christians, amid our many preoccupations and wants, lose sight of that last, happy goal of all life and

history. Therefore the Church exhorts us to sing from our hearts and to pray with the early Christians, at least each year during Advent: "Come, O come, Emmanuel!"

Has Advent then lost all connection with Christmas? I did not say that. Advent means preparation for Christmas and as such was introduced into the calendar. But the Christmas feast, still devoid of the false sentimentality by which it is being more and more degraded, meant more to the early Christians. For them Christmas was the great annual feast of Christ's nativity in the flesh over against Easter, the day of His triumphant resurrection. But how could one prepare better for a feast of Christ than by earnestly looking forward to and yearning with all one's being for His coming—which really implies reaching out again and again toward His Coming at the end of days? Year after year Christmas would then bring the consoling and blessed realization that our Savior's final Coming is only a Return; that once He came to redeem His people from their sins but "in a little while" He will come again; then "your hearts will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22).

15 . . . THREE MASSES ON CHRISTMAS

If you wish to get beneath the privilege allowing every priest to say three Masses on Christmas, you will have to go back some fifteen hundred years, to Christian Rome of the fifth century. While the custom of saying three Masses on All Souls' Day was introduced by Pope Benedict XV in 1915

for the many who died in the First World War, that on Christmas Day is very ancient. Nor was a proclamation made on a certain day for the whole world; the Pope first made it his own practice in Rome and only gradually, like so many other papal customs, it spread over all of Western Christendom.

But what moved the Pope to celebrate three Masses just on Christmas? It happened in this way. At first there was on Christmas, as on other feast days, only one solemn papal Mass, the one now given in the missal as the third, "in the daytime." In the early days the Pope celebrated at St. Peter's. At the tomb of the first Pope, the Christians of Rome, together with vast numbers of pilgrims from all over the world, would gather to celebrate with St. Peter's successor the Birthday of the world's true Ruler. If you read carefully the text of this Third Mass of Christmas, you will sense the world-wide spirit of that ancient Roman celebration: "A Child is born to us, a Son is given to us! Government is upon His shoulders." Later, in the Rome of the Middle Ages, this Mass was offered in the basilica of St. Mary Major (as still indicated in your missal).

In about the fifth century pious pilgrims reported how the Christians of Jerusalem kept the feast of Christ's nativity. In the Holy Land they had had the enviable opportunity of celebrating the sacred mysteries at the very places where they were first enacted. Each year Christmas at Bethlehem was observed with solemn midnight services in the grand basilica Constantine had erected over the Grotto of the Nativity, around the actual manger in which the Savior had lain. Could this be somehow imitated in Rome? Was there not a replica of the crib of Bethlehem venerated at St. Mary Major? Thus it came about one Christmas that the Pope with his small retinue marched during the Holy Night to the basilica of St. Mary Major and there "at the crib" offered holy Mass.

Hence even today you find in your missal a double heading over the First Mass of Christmas: "At Midnight. Station at St. Mary Major, at the Altar of the Crib." In reading the text of this Mass you can still feel the great silence and fervor of the occasion (quite different from the world-embracing tone of the Third Mass): "The Lord hath said to me: Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee."

Some years passed, and the Pope began to celebrate a third Mass between these two. It happened this way. On his return from St. Mary Major to St. Peter's, he passed through the Greek quarters on the Palatine, where, by coincidence, there was kept on December 25 the feast of a famous Eastern martyr, St. Anastasia; in her honor a small church had been built at the foot of the Palatine. As a polite gesture, especially toward the Byzantine officials living in that quarter and toward the emperor in distant Constantinople, the Pope decided to honor St. Anastasia's "Nameday" by offering a third Mass in their little church. Therefore you still find over the text of the Second Mass of Christmas: "At St. Anastasia's." Thus it happened that we commemorate a martyr on Christmas (a unique instance).

The other title for this Second Mass is: "At Dawn"; that was about the time when the papal procession arrived there. It afforded a reason for choosing the Gospel of the shepherds—in the early morning they too hastened to the crib. Hence, too, all the atmosphere of dawn, centering on the theme: our true morning Sun is risen, Christ the Lord! "This day a Light shall shine upon us; for to us the Lord is born."

The custom, then, that every priest may offer three Masses on Christmas Day goes back to an ancient practice of the Holy Father in Rome. The priest need not travel back and forth (unless he has missions to provide for), but for him the three Masses are expressive of an overflowing Christmas joy. I

am sure we all share in his holy joy as our ears catch the venerable words of the three Christmas Masses, resounding like a threefold melody about the new-born Savior—from the soft, sweet tones of the Midnight Mass to the brightly joyous notes of the "Shepherds' Mass" to the full, sonorous strains of the Mass "at Daytime." "A Child is born to us, a Son is given to us! Government is upon His shoulders."

16 . . . THE GREEN COLOR OF THE MASS VESTMENTS

I wonder whether you have ever stopped to notice what kind of vestment the priest wears at the altar, a violet or a white or a red or a green one; or whether you belong to those who have come to believe that it is all accidental—the priest merely wears the first one handy in the sacristy. One thing you have surely noticed: at a funeral Mass the priest wears black. In social and civil life too, black is the color of sorrow. Another point you probably are aware of is that on the ordinary Sundays during summer and autumn, green is used (unless a higher feast falls on a Sunday, e.g., when the feast of St. Lawrence on August 10 falls on a Sunday; then red is used, the color for martyrs).

Now if you pay close attention, you will observe that green appears at another season of the Church year, namely, on the Sundays after Epiphany. The first of these Sundays is indeed an exception, because on it the feast of the Holy Family is annually celebrated, and the color is white. But from then on to

Septuagesima green holds its own. Of course, there are not as many Sundays as after Pentecost, and if Easter is early there are quite few, sometimes only one.

That green is used only during these two seasons of the Church year has its meaning. Both times mark the closing of a festive season, of Christmas or of Easter. During the festive seasons you see white, the color expressing joy (Pentecost is an exception, when red is used as reminder of the fiery tongues). Now also bear in mind that each of the festive seasons is preceded by a period of preparation, distinguished by the use of violet. So you see how the change of color at the altar reflects the wonderful ebb and flow of the Church year.

We might put it this way so that even a child would understand: twice a year we climb up a mountain, first that of Christmas, then the higher peak of Easter. Each time when it goes up hill, in Advent and from Septuagesima all during Lent, you see violet at the altar on Sundays. When the peak has been reached, all shines forth in white until the down-hill course begins, be that for the short stretch after Epiphany or for the long one (at least twenty-four Sundays) after Pentecost; then green is used.

Thus anyone who has learned to be a little observant will sense the spirit of the season when on Sunday morning he sees the priest coming out of the sacristy. He will know whether the praying Church (and we all belong to that, not just the priest) is resolved in holy earnest to climb one of the two summits of the Church year, or is joyfully surveying the top of a festive season, or has begun her downward journey, quietly meditating on the mysteries of the respective period.

So when, for example, you open your missal on a "green Sunday" after Epiphany and begin to read the opening words of the Mass text, "Let all the earth adore Thee, O God, and sing to Thee; let it sing a psalm to Thy Name, O Thou Most High,"

you no longer need an explanation of the song; you know that the praying Church is descending from the mountain of Christmas. Clearly before you is an unforgettable picture: the picture of the men from the East, in whom the whole earth for the first time fell to its knees before God-become-Man. And the Church now calls out to all her children from the ends of the earth to worship and fall down with them: "Let all the earth adore Thee, O God, and sing to Thee."

17 . . . LENT EVEN IN OUR DAY

Would it not be wise if the Church quietly did away with Lent as old-fashioned? It was good and proper at a time when men used to carouse and live like gluttons the rest of the year (and when they still had stronger nerves than we!). Forty days of fasting each year were good for them. But such a custom no longer fits into the world of our day! Why an extra Lent when for many people all the days from January 1 to December 31 are days of fasting? Instead of going to the trouble of dispensing right and left, it would be much simpler to discard the whole "apparatus," and we would have a year with spring and Easter without having to listen to the usual "Lenten announcements!"

Why did the Church never heed such reasoning? Is it because she is old-fashioned and will never discard ancient customs? No, that is not it. Actual ballast the Church has always shaken off in the course of history (although she may not have been in a hurry to do so). But the annual Lenten observance she cannot and will not give up. Why?

First of all, because the law of fasting is something from which she can never wholly dispense anyone. Something has to be demanded from all her children, even from those whom she dispenses from bodily fast. It is because—let us say it straight out—she believes in the devil. Secondly, she likewise believes in his most dangerous partner, the "old man within us." On principle this "man of wickedness" will never react either to "good will" or to pious exhortation. He can be roused only in one way, by force. Unfortunately we do this of our own accord only very faintheartedly or not at all; that is why the Church each year provides forty days of Lent. A Christian, if he wants to be and remain one, must do violence to himself, to his lusts and desires. That can't be helped. Not without purpose, then, are these forty days preceding Easter; for if you wish to live and rejoice with Christ, you must in all earnestness have died with Him first.

Can anyone look at the suffering Savior without a burning feeling in his soul that he still has it much easier than his Lord and Master? To die with Christ, that we try to do by means of physical fasting, and by other types of Lenten mortification. If it hurts, it is a sign that it is good for us; and if our action benefits another, it is doubly good.

Moreover, Holy Church will never yield and abrogate Lent because the season of penance is more to her than just a time of fasting. Fasting and self-denial represent but one, and not even the most important, aspect. As envisioned by the Church, the picture is this: the forty days preceding her greatest feast should be days on which each one really enters into himself, days of recollection, the forty-day annual retreat of the Christian people, as it has been beautifully named. A season given to prayer more than any other. A season when one devotes time to spiritual reading. A season for gathering together somewhat our distracted, fluttering heart so that, calm and rec-

ollected, it may enter upon the solemn annual celebration of the work of our redemption.

Mother Church would prove herself a poor mother if she would surrender a thing so precious, especially when she must witness how so many of her children, amid an environment growing daily more pagan, lose more and more in self-control and interior spirituality. She well knows how her enemies revile her as a gloomy pessimist because of her educational principles. Little does she worry over that. She is convinced that true life and true joy, the risen life of her Lord and the Easter joy flowing from it, can be found only through self-conquest and interior recollection.

Accordingly the season of Lent, which Mother Church annually celebrates with us and to which she refers in her simple language as *Sancta Quadragesima,* the "Holy Forty Days," does not suppress joy, but rather serves to increase it. Her seriousness is no gray, dismal austerity. From the very outset there shines the cheersome light of the festive Easter celebration, for which Lent prepares us. Her sadness is not a harsh and hopeless sadness; it is the bitterness of Christ's chalice, of which it is written: "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also rise with Him."

18 . . . THE BLESSED PALM BRANCH ATTACHED TO THE CRUCIFIX

Here is an old, venerable custom which, I believe, is being gradually neglected, along with so many others. When on

Palm Sunday the blessed palm branches are brought home, father or mother picks out the choicest ones and places them behind each crucifix in the house; and there they remain till next Palm Sunday, no matter how withered and pale they may look. Even if you have been accustomed to this decoration of the crucifix from childhood days, you might feel embarrassed if a non-Catholic visitor would ask you why it is done. Grandfather or grandmother might still have the answer ready: the blessed palm branch is there to call down God's blessing upon us; therefore we also put it in the barns and fields, and behind every crucifix in the house.

An excellent answer. But if some "progressive" considers you gullible or superstitious for thinking that a palm branch can call down God's blessing—there are even self-styled modern and enlightened Catholics who purport to have outgrown such ideas!—let him consult a Holy Week missal and see the exact text: "Graciously let Thy grace and blessing rest wherever these branches are brought." Not that the palm branch can of itself produce the blessing (this grandpa and grandma also knew), but the prayer of Holy Church which is, one might say, attached to it calls down God's blessing upon house and barn and field.

But if we carefully read further in the liturgy of Palm Sunday, we find another answer which, I believe, is even better. You have surely heard it said that the palm since ancient times is a symbol of victory; one often sees the martyrs represented with palms in their hands. One of the Palm Sunday antiphons gives a similar picture: "Crowds go out with flowers and palms to meet the Redeemer; worthy homage they pay to the Conqueror who comes home in triumph!" See how wonderfully the palm branch fits behind the image of the crucified and dying Savior. It is a sign of His victory; it tells us that this image only apparently is an image of death,

that in reality it is the image of life, of Him who overcame death by death. That little palm branch is a large, shining symbol of Easter above the sad scene of Good Friday.

If understood in this way the palm branch behind the crucifix gives the right answer to those who remark with a pitying shake of the head: What a sad and frustrating religion this must be which teaches its people to hang the image of a dead body on their walls! For believing Catholics the image of the crucified Christ is not an image of death, but of life. Of course, it reminds us that we all must die one day (a good and wholesome thought), but amid the sorrow of death on earth it proclaims the comforting message of Easter, of victory and bodily resurrection.

19 . . . THE EASTER VIGIL

That the centre of gravity of the Christmas celebration falls during the night, at the Midnight Mass or very early in the morning, has always seemed quite natural, for Christ was born on the first Christmas night. But that another and greater feast, Easter, has had since 1951 its midnight celebration, occasions surprise here and there. You may even have heard the somewhat impatient whisper: It was good enough for so many hundreds of years, why couldn't they have remained satisfied with it now?

A statement like this betrays more ignorance than knowledge. The two major events of Christian faith, the nativity and the resurrection of the Son of God, took place, according to the Bible, in the silence of the night, or at least in the dark

hours of early morning. From earliest times both "blessed nights" in which the light of redemption shone forth were sanctified with divine services. In fact, the celebration of the Easter night belongs to the oldest strata of Christian worship; it already had a three-hundred year history when the Christmas feast was introduced.

That the Easter-night festivity was in time moved to the preceding evening, and later even to Holy Saturday morning, proved most unfortunate. As a first result of this transfer, the church remained practically empty during the most beautiful and most important divine service of the whole year. Secondly, those who attended experienced the painful realization that the Easter joy of Holy Saturday morning was premature; for during the whole first Holy Saturday the Lord's body was still resting in the tomb. Thirdly, the liturgy's chief symbolic action, the light struck from stone, which from early days was carried into the church with a triple *Lumen Christi* signifying the risen Savior, lost much of its meaning when performed in the brightness of dawn (and the wrong one too!) instead of during the dark of night.

All these incongruities, doubly distressing because for centuries they prevented the climax to the liturgical year from receiving due recognition, were removed by the bold decision of Pope Pius XII in 1951. Now the churches are again crowded; everybody feels that the proper hour for Easter joy has struck, the night, namely, when Christ our Lord broke through the darkness of the tomb and rose triumphantly as the First-born of those who sleep. (This holds good also when the celebration is held late Saturday evening; and it would be yet more in place if some future decree would allow its observance early Easter morning when it is still dark). At any rate, now everybody is satisfied that in such a nightly celebration the symbolism of the Easter light can be fully appreciated.

It was a happy move indeed to restore the "Easter light" celebration according to its ancient form. Essentially, the rite is again as it was fifteen hundred years ago at the most venerable place of Christian Easter festivities, the Holy Sepulchre Basilica in Jerusalem, and in many places in the West. As then at Jerusalem, every one who now participates in the celebration receives a light from the blessed Easter candle and holds it in his hands.

Each year the Easter light in our own hand can speak its profound message to our heart. It is the blessed message that in our poor, trembling hands and hearts we are to carry the Easter light of Christ into the midst of the world's darkness. The Sun that rose from Jerusalem's tomb on that first Easter night did not again sink from sight on some distant horizon. It remains here to light up and warm and set aglow our innermost being so that we can exclaim with the Apostle: "I live now not I, but Christ lives in me." For this reason Baptism is conferred upon adults during Easter night; for this reason baptismal water is blessed; and for this reason with burning candles in our hand we annually renew our baptismal promises, our determined NO to the darkness of Satan and our grateful YES to Christ the Light.

That amid the darkness of the world into which we were born we might better perceive the Easter message of Christ's all-conquering Light, the Easter celebration has again been placed where it belongs, and where once it had been for more than a thousand years. Indeed, of the many acts for which Pope Pius XII will be remembered in centuries to come, an outstanding one will certainly be this: he restored to the Christian world the "blessed night" on which we annually celebrate the work of our redemption.

20 . . . THE ALLELUIA AT EASTER

It is almost incredible what little thought is given to the Easter *Alleluia*. When we have reached the highest joy of the Christian year, the joy that Christ lives and we in Him, then to voice our jubilation we employ an expression that should always mean Easter to us, the Hebrew word *Alleluia*. It really does not sound like a word at all, rather like the awkward stammer of a child. Except for scholars, no one bothers about its meaning.

Certainly, the word *Alleluia* can be translated and explained. It is a cry of joy and praise from the psalms and originally meant: "Praise Yahweh!" It is one of the few words (*Amen* is another) which the early Church took over untranslated from Jewish worship, a token of the soil from which she sprang. But that does not explain why she picked just this Hebrew word to voice her Easter joy, an expression that to her children sounds so mysteriously vague.

I believe she did this to impress upon them that over against the abyss of the mystery of our redemption commemorated at Easter, all human language fails; that in face of God's immeasurable mercy then experienced, we have but the amazed stammering of a child. To me our *Alleluia* always sounds, especially when sung with many notes on the final *a,* like the yodeling that wells forth from the simple, pious heart of an Alpine shepherd when at early dawn, after the darkness of a deep Alpine night, he witnesses the indescribable grandeur of

the morning sun as it kisses the snow-capped mountains with its first soft rays. The feelings this gorgeous sight arouses in the unspoiled heart of the shepherd cannot be expressed in words learned at school, he must give vent to them in familiar yodel. So also the heart of the true Christian, which is ever childlike, does not find ready words to convey its sentiments on beholding our truly wonderful "Morning Sun" that on Easter morn rises triumphantly from the night of the tomb to shed light and warmth and joy upon us and all the darksome world. Its summary of the whole mystery is a joyous *Alleluia.*

All the joy and gratitude of an over-flooded Christian heart gushes forth in the Easter *Alleluia.* That is why this shout of joy is so dear to us, as it ever was to those before us. How the early Christians loved to sing it! St. Jerome writes: "Listen where you will; even the farmer behind the plow sings *Alleluia.*" And in his famous letter to the noble Roman lady Laeta on the education of her young daughter Paula, he says: "When she sees her grandfather she wants to run into his arms and embrace him; and even if he does not care to listen, she sings for him the *Alleluia.*"

During the Middle Ages cathedral and monastic choirs sang a series of farewell *Alleluias* on the eve of Septuagesima Sunday (from then on to the present day the *Alleluia* is omitted all through Lent). Even impressive burial scenes were enacted as these simple pious souls bade a sorrowful farewell to their beloved *Alleluia.* "It is so dear to us, we carry it as a treasure in our hearts," wrote Durandus with reference to the practice on Saturday before Septuagesima. "As a friend bidding farewell before a long journey, we embrace it again and again and kiss it on the lips and on the face—wherever we can reach it." And still today the rubrics prescribe that the return of our "dear friend" be announced

solemnly and with a clear voice by the sub-deacon to the bishop or the abbot at the Easter night service: "Most Reverend Father, I announce to you a great joy: the *Alleluia!*"

This then is the meaning of the Easter *Alleluia*: by it a bit of the "great joy" of the redeemed is echoed against the gray sky of our daily toil; by it is aroused a bit of the nostalgia felt wherever true Christian joy is found; by it we nourish a longing for the City of which it is written, "*Alleluia* shall be sung in its streets" (Tob. 13:22).

21 . . . PENTECOST EMBER WEEK

In following your daily missal you must have noticed the four weeks of the year during which occur the Ember Days, viz., the Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays that are days of fast and abstinence. We might call them "recollection weeks," because they invite us at each quarter of the year to serious reflection, to thanking God for the blessings of the harvest (although this does not hold for the spring Ember Days which were introduced last), and to unite in common prayer for those presently being readied for Sacred Orders. (In early times it was necessary to prepare for ordination by a week of fasting.) Ember Days occur annually during the weeks following Ash Wednesday, Pentecost, the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross on September 14, and the feast of St. Lucy on December 13.

There is nothing striking about Ember Days in the spring,

fall, and winter seasons; but to have them immediately after Pentecost may seem somewhat strange. Days of fast and abstinence during the octave of so high and joyous a feast appear inappropriate.

However, it all becomes clear when we understand what Pentecost really is. Actually, Pentecost does not look forward, but backward; it marks the close of the fifty-day Easter celebration. We may have lost this approach: Easter, the great feast of our redemption, should last, not one or three or eight days, but fifty days in order to afford ample time to vent our Easter joy. The "blessed fifty days" was the phrase used to denote this most beautiful season of the year by the early Christians. The rejoicing reached its climax on the fiftieth day in grateful memory of the Lord's true Easter Gift, the precious Fruit of the redemption, namely the Holy Spirit, who on that day came down upon the apostles and disciples. Surely the catechism is correct in calling Pentecost a feast of the Holy Spirit; but it should add: Who was given to the Church as an Easter Gift. The very name *Pentecost* refers back to Easter; for just as the liturgy calls the eighth day after a feast "octave," (the Latin for *eighth*), so the fiftieth day after Easter is known as Pentecost, after the Greek for *fiftieth*.

As long as Pentecost was understood in this sense as the close and fullness of Easter, it was not thought fitting to give it its own octave; and no one would have dreamed of viewing this climax to Easter as the introduction to a new and independent festive cycle. They rather argued: Now after the fifty days of rejoicing during which there was no thought of penance and fasting, after the Easter celebration which sounded its joyous finale gratefully on Pentecost, the faithful may again quietly feel that, despite Easter joy, Good Friday is still with us. Thus it came about that the summer Ember Week was allowed to follow immediately after Pentecost.

22 . . . THE FEAST OF THE SACRED HEART ALWAYS ON A FRIDAY

Not all Catholics are aware that in recent decades the Feast of the Sacred Heart was raised to a higher rank among the feasts of the Church. Since it is not one of the holy days of obligation, many pass it by—those who seem to think weekday Masses and feasts are only for old and pious women. I am convinced that not a few readers of this chapter, were I suddenly to ask on what day the Feast of the Sacred Heart occurs each year, would feel much embarrassed. So I will first tell you, it always falls on the third Friday after Pentecost.

Why was this particular Friday chosen? Because the whole meaning of the Sacred Heart feast is very intimately connected with Good Friday. To adore the Heart of Jesus is not a sentimental devotion (although, unfortunately, some pious books and many pious pictures may give that impression). It means to worship the Love that redeemed us. This was done, of course, ever since there were Christians in the world, and all the feasts of our Lord that we celebrate throughout the year commemorate basically nothing more than His Love.

But only in the piety of the last centuries has this Love been pictured in the striking symbol of the human heart. Now the great revelation of divine Love is the crucifix, Christ with outstretched arms; and its most beautiful expression is the wounded Heart of our crucified Redeemer pierced by the soldier's lance. On Good Friday, indeed, the Church's every

thought and prayer center on the crucifixion, but her soul is filled with sadness over the abysmal wickedness of those who nailed, and still nail, her Bridegroom to the Cross.

Thus it became natural to devote a special feast after Easter to Christ's redeeming Love on the Cross, a kind of "transferred Good Friday." It should be a *Friday,* and this could not happen till the first free Friday after the Easter season, hence on the day following the former octave of Corpus Christi. Here we also have the reason why this joyous feast of the Lord has a Good Friday Gospel: "One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side, and immediately there came out blood and water." For the same reason this Gospel is read on every First Friday, the day each month dedicated to the blessed memory of the Heart of Jesus.

As with the Sacred Heart feast, so too with Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi is celebrated on the first free Thursday after the Easter season, since it is meant to be a "transferred Holy Thursday." Gratitude and joy over the Holy Eucharist could hardly unfold in the quiet, solemn reserve of Holy Thursday; hence a bright Eucharistic feastday after Easter was sought, a day on which to give full festal expression to so glorious a mystery. Perhaps it was not accidental that a woman's loving heart pressed for the introduction of both these feasts: Corpus Christi by Blessed Juliana of Liège, Sacred Heart by Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Year after year after we have celebrated our redemption for fifty days with grateful *Alleluias,* we should be able to appreciate better how on these two final feastdays our redemption continues in the sacred mystery on the altar, and how it has its deepest source in the loving Heart of Jesus.

23 . . . THE FEAST OF MARY'S ASSUMPTION DURING HARVEST TIME

One beautiful custom is to call a feast of the Blessed Virgin "Mary's Day." It has the ring of pious simplicity and is peculiarly well suited for her assumption, a mystery we now embrace with the holy certainty of faith: Mary has preceded us body and soul into the glory of her Son, the first of the redeemed. In an old Farmers' Calendar of Tyrol there was added another name, just as beautiful and childlike, on August 15: "Our Blessed Lady of the Ears." Sheaves of grain with golden ears took an honorable place on summer's high feast of our Lady.

Could it be mere chance, this connection of Mary's assumption with harvest time? (Over a thousand years ago in Constantinople they used to hang the first ripe grapes on Mary's picture on the feast of her assumption; and in the West it is still the custom in vine-growing countries.) The Bible likes to speak of Judgment Day as harvest day for the world: "Put forth thy sickle and reap," so says the voice of the angel of judgment in the Apocalypse (14:15), "for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe."

That last of days will indeed be God's harvest day; the graves will open, and the Lord will gather into His everlasting barns all who have not wantonly cut themselves off from Him. Was it not a beginning to this harvest day when Mary, as the first of the redeemed, was taken up body and soul into heaven?

Is she not the first precious sheaf from God's fields, the first delicious grape her Son and Bridegroom had planted? Every year when it is harvest time in our fields we want to celebrate with joy the beginning of the great day of the world's harvest: Mary's assumption into heaven.

Evidently this deep connection was far more vivid to the minds of our ancestors than it is to us. They had the custom of putting a wisp of herbs, blessed in Mary's honor before the High Mass on August 15, into the first sheaf taken from the field. This meant as much as: O Mary, pray for our harvest! And silently there echoed in the depth of each heart: O Mary, you yourself are such a first blessed sheaf brought home into God's heavenly granary!

When they placed a bit of the wisp of herbs blessed on Assumption Day in the coffin beneath the head of a deceased, it was meant as a prayer for Mary's intercession: May the same finally happen to this dead body that happened to Mary's body; through her intercession may it also be gathered on God's great harvest day—a sheaf for the eternal barns!

To God's great harvest day our eyes should turn and our hearts be lifted up every year on the feast of "Our Lady of the Ears" in memory of her who with body and soul entered as the first sheaf. This is the reason why we annually celebrate the assumption of Mary into heaven during harvest time.

24 . . . THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING IN LATE AUTUMN

The Feast of Christ the King on the last Sunday of October is the youngest of the greater feasts of the liturgical

year. Only several decades old, it is a tiny infant alongside the nearly two-thousand-year-old Easter Day or alongside the sixteen-centuries-old Feast of Christmas. Despite that, I know how you have already grown attached to this most recent feast. There is something austerely joyous and hearty about it.

You may be wondering, then, why they did not find a better place for it in the calendar. Why put this joyful feast on the last Sunday in October, when in the northern hemisphere it is turning cold and dreary, and when the sleet and snows of early winter come, when only All Souls' Day fits in properly? Ordinarily the Church seems to show better taste with her feasts, so that they harmonize with the tenor of the season. Could one imagine Christmas in mid-summer, or Easter in fall, or Pentecost in winter, when we are used to associating Christmas with snow and Easter with budding nature and Pentecost with the bright summer sun? And yet the Feast of Christ the King, the joyous feast of our undying King, was designedly placed in the season of nature's dying.

Are you unable to figure out the reason? Must it always be that nature outside furnishes a bright, festive setting? Could it not for once serve as a dark background so as to set off more brilliantly a glorious feastday? Think of that other bright feastday, which for a thousand years has come in late fall right near the Feast of Christ the King, the Feast of All Saints! How it grips us year after year, when it seemingly draws back the curtain separating us from the world beyond, and high above all earthly withering and decay unfurls the shining vision of eternal, unfading, abiding peace to which each year brings us a step nearer.

Now you can see why the Feast of Christ the King was purposely placed here in the late fall in the immediate neighborhood of All Saints. Here too dying nature presents the sombre background for a bright feast. The Church wants to

console our poor, trembling, human soul during these gray days of fog and mist when it realizes more fully than at other seasons how along with nature it is subject to the common lot of death and decay. She wants to console it with the immortality that is promised "in a little while." She wants to teach it, amid the perishing things of nature, to extend its hands to that other bright, imperishable kingdom about to come.

Therefore, on the Feast of Christ the King Mother Church shows us first the royal countenance John was allowed to behold, the countenance "like the sun shining in its power" (Apoc. 1:16), the countenance without which the nations here below cannot be happy, and from which the coming kingdom receives its splendor—the countenance of the eternal King, of the God-Man Jesus Christ. And then on All Saints she shows us the innumerable human countenances illumined by this royal countenance which have "no need of the sun or the moon to shine" upon them, for "the Lamb is their lamp" (Apoc. 21:23). And finally on All Souls' Day she shows us the faces of those who still suffer in darkness, waiting till at last "the eternal light shines upon them," issuing from the countenance of the Eternal King.

Over a hundred years ago the eighty-year-old scholar Chateaubriand lay dying in Paris; nothing grieved the aged patriot more than that in his old age—during the Revolution of 1848—he had to see his king again take to flight. As the priest entered his death chamber with the Blessed Sacrament, the dying man lifted himself from his pillow, shook his grey head dejectedly and faintly mumbled to himself: "The kings are being wiped out." Calmly but firmly came the words from the mouth of the priest: "I bring you the King who does not perish."

Each year when it makes our spirits droop to see summer with all its earthly beauty pitilessly blown away by the storms of time, and kings with their pomp and splendor, then Mother Church takes us by the hand and says: "Come, and I will show you the King who does not perish!"

25 . . . A SAINT'S FEAST

There would be many days on which to celebrate the feast of a saint: the day of his birth, or better the day on which he became a child of God's family in holy Baptism; if the saint was a bishop or a priest, the day on which he was consecrated or ordained. Yet in most cases the Church holds to the day of death for celebrating the memory of her saints. What may be the reason?

When we open the book of the Church's heroes and saints called the Martyrology, we find an ancient term, come down to us from the days of the early martyrs, to mark the day of a saint's death: *dies natalis.* This literally means "birthday." The Church takes in full earnest something that we also should take in full earnest, yet often do not. She takes death in the Christian spirit. She is thoroughly convinced that death is only apparently the end, but in reality the beginning of the true, eternal life. What precedes is really nothing but the "birth pangs" of real living, as our Lord explains to us in one of the most beautiful Gospels of the whole year: "You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy. A woman about to give birth has sorrow, because her hour has come.

But when she has brought forth the child, she no longer remembers the anguish for her joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:20f.).

When the Church celebrates the feast of one of her children, then her festive joy arises from the fact that this person has passed through the "birth pangs" into the true life and now dwells there and intercedes for us. Therefore she commemorates that day, which for our dull eyes is a "day of death," but for her unbeclouded eyes of faith a *dies natalis,* a birthday into heaven.

Still another reason makes the day of a saint's death memorable. To be holy is really nothing else than to be like Him of whom we sing in the *Gloria:* "Thou alone art holy!" A man becomes more holy the more he resembles Christ, maturing, as St. Paul tells us, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ. But never is this similarity greater in a saint than at the moment when he realizes that the ninth hour of his Good Friday has struck and he willingly and gladly stretches forth his hands with his Lord and says: It is consummated! Only at this moment does he enter into full likeness with his Master, into His death, but also into His passing through death to life.

The Church, therefore, loves to celebrate the memory of her saintly sons and daughters on the day of their death. On that day they became most like Christ; on it they died with Him to the world and began their eternal life. Thus the day of their death was their *dies natalis,* their birthday unto true and eternal living with God.

26 . . . THE "WE" IN THE PRAYERS OF THE MISSAL

It is a peculiar thing with the missal. There are people, even very simple folk, who "had not learned anything" (as they modestly confess), but once they become caught by the missal, can't let go of it. Year after year they feel more at home with it. In this ancient and venerable house, they notice how their praying slowly catches something of the solemn breathing of the Church at prayer, how it grows more calm and relaxed and joyous. And their deathbed words may reflect the spirit of the little girl in a village along the Rhine, who in her last moments kept repeating: "We praise Thee. We bless Thee. We adore Thee. We glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks for Thy great glory."

But there also are people who with the best of will cannot get anywhere with their missal. Let them be consoled: there are many ways of assisting at Mass, with or without a book, which are proper and devout. Our Holy Father said this only recently in his encyclical on the liturgy.

However, even if you should belong to this second class, the missal is nevertheless no longer a sealed book for you. Time and again at Mass you hear others recite prayers from it in common, and it must have occurred to you that they often say as many as ten times: "We offer" or "We offer up," and not a single time "I offer" or "I offer up." How does this agree with the catechism? Did it not state distinctly that the priest alone can say Mass? Would it not then be more reason-

able for him to omit the "We" at the altar and say each time: "I, the priest, offer up this sacrifice"?

Certainly it is and remains true as the catechism had it, that only a duly ordained priest may in Christ's Name pronounce the words of consecration over the bread and the wine at holy Mass—anyone who would teach differently would no longer be a Catholic. But if someone would add to the sentence, "Only the priest can consecrate," the other words, "Only the priest can offer," then this second sentence would be just as incorrect as the first is true. For we all who are gathered around the altar as "God's holy nation" offer with the priest to our heavenly Father the divine Lamb upon the altar. This is the doctrine of the Church.

Unfortunately this second sentence was not as clear in the catechism as the first, and I suspect there are many Christians who at holy Mass consider themselves mere pious spectators or listeners at a sacred drama and do not reflect that at the Mass they are much more than spectators and listeners: they are actors and co-offerers. In his encyclical our Holy Father made the point very clear and explicit. "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and *yours* may become acceptable to God the Father Almighty," the priest says when he turns to the people after the Secret prayer.

When you take your place in the pew at High Mass next Sunday (I presume in your favor that you are not one of those who scrupulously avoid High Mass), think this over: what is being done at the altar is *your* sacrifice. If a pious pagan had had on his heart what may weigh down yours on a Sunday—say, for instance, you had a sick child at home or a son buried on the battlefield of a foreign country—he would have said: "I have no rest. I must offer a sacrifice to the gods that they may hear me in my misery. I will take a sacrifice gift, the best and most costly is hardly good enough, and

offer it to the gods." Now you have the most precious and noblest Gift that can be found between earth and heaven; as your oblation It rests on the altar and is being offered to the true God, our heavenly Father, namely, His only and most beloved Son, sacrificed on the Cross.

Perhaps you were not aware of this. Perhaps if you asked your neighbor what he did in church and he gave you an honest answer, he might have to say: "I just wait till it's over." Is this not sad enough to bring tears?

27 . . . LIGHTED CANDLES ON THE ALTAR DURING MASS

This is also a point to which little thought is given, although it is quite interesting. Whether you come to the early Mass at seven o'clock or to the High Mass at ten, before it begins the server regularly comes out of the sacristy to light the candles on the altar. And both times the church is already well lighted, at the earlier hour with electric lights, at the later service by the natural light of the sun now sending bright rays through the choir window and flooding the whole altar with its blaze. Why then lighted candles? Is it only because the Church, so loyal to tradition, cannot wean herself of this old-fashioned way of lighting up the altar? This might hold good for the early Mass, but for the ten o'clock High Mass there would surely be light enough without candles.

I believe there is a deeper reason for the strict ecclesiastical ruling about candlelight at holy Mass. The burning candles on

the altar of sacrifice are not there to solve a technical problem of lighting. They are symbolic. And the symbol refers to us who surround the bright, festive altar of sacrifice, co-offering and singing and praying.

From early days Christians loved to see themselves represented by pure, nobly erect and brightly burning candles. You are not surprised at the pious mother, kneeling before a statue of the Sorrowful Mother praying for her missing son —how she would like to stay there all day, but she must hurry home to cook and mend—that she lights a candle in front of the statue as if to say to the candle: Now you stay here in my place and pray all day!

Similarly we, the co-offerers, are represented by the lighted candles on the altar of sacrifice. It is as if we carried the burning candles and ourselves with them to the altar at the offertory (as the newly-ordained still do in the Ordination Mass); and there they stand as symbols of all those who, together with the priest, offer the divine Lamb upon the altar to the heavenly Father. I feel that we co-offerers at holy Mass could not express our intentions more simply and more profoundly than by this token of the burning candle. The "old man" within us (how well we know him!) must die with Christ ever more definitely and decisively so that the "new man" may live more wholly and sincerely. (Therefore we should always bring along a specific resolution—if it were only to practice more patience amid daily trials—and, as it were, lay it on the paten at the offertory.)

To die in order to live: that is what the candle does. It *lives* by giving light, only because it constantly *dies* by melting and consuming itself. And in doing so it also tells us (and that is perhaps the nicest part of it) how we are to offer ourselves with Christ, suffering and dying with Him. Without fuss, then, quietly and without complaint as the candle does, be

intent upon one thing only: to live more intimately with Christ, letting your light shine to make others cheerful and at peace.

The burning candle on the altar of sacrifice is *you!* Look at it, imitate it. From the strength of Christ's sacrifice die and live with Him!

28 . . . THE TRIPLE CRY FOR MERCY

If you have ever been a Mass server, you will remember how you had to pay close attention at this quick dialog with the priest, the *Kyrie,* so as not to become mixed up. You couldn't just repeat the priest's words, you had to stick to the text: *Kyrie* once, *Christe* twice, then *Kyrie, eleison* again. The final *Kyrie* you had to leave to him. (You may have heard the mean old joke of a Mass server that here we have the reason why girls can't serve: they would find it too hard to let another always have the last word!)

Whatever you thought about the arrangement at the time, it was no mere whim on the part of those who composed the Mass text. There are nine invocations: three times *Kyrie, eleison,* three times *Christe, eleison,* and three times *Kyrie, eleison.* When these nine appeals are said alternately, contrary to the original plan still commonly followed by the choir at High Mass, then naturally the uneven numbers (hence also the ninth or last) fall to the priest, and the even numbers to the server or whoever makes the responses. Now that you are grown up, you no longer worry about that technical ques-

tion. Rather, you will ask: Why this triple cry to the Lord for mercy at the beginning of Mass?

There is an answer to this question in the catechism which has been there for over a thousand years. It says that this number nine has something to do with the Blessed Trinity: the first three invocations are addressed to the Father, the next three to God the Son, and the last three to the Holy Spirit. As beautiful and venerable as this may sound, we know today that such reference to the Blessed Trinity was made later on. Originally it was meant quite differently, namely as a ninefold appeal to Christ; and about this again there was nothing in the catechism.

These invocations at the beginning of the Mass are the remnant of an ancient litany in which the priest mentioned one by one the various needs of Christendom and of the parish, for example, the conversion of the pagans and the Jews, the return of separated brethren, the consolation of the sorrowing, the blessing of the fields; and each time the congregation would call down Christ's mercy with the Greek cry *Kyrie, eleison* (the custom began in the East). In the ancient litanies it was quite common to address invocations to Christ. Later on when this public expression of common needs was discontinued (unfortunately) and only the answers of the people remained, the familiar nine was chosen to have a round number. This also made it possible to introduce a little variety without spoiling the symmetry. The three middle invocations could begin with the Latin *Christe* instead of the Greek *Kyrie*.

This then is the meaning of the nine invocations at the beginning of Mass: right at the start of the holy Sacrifice we present to Christ all our needs and anxieties along with those of our family and of the great family of God, the Church, with which we are united, and thus call down His mercy upon

the world and upon each individual soul. As noted above, these invocations were first made in behalf of others, for the pagans, Jews and schismatics, for those in exile, for the suffering and afflicted in general. Therefore the Greek appeal is correctly translated by "Lord, have mercy!" and the "on us" usually found added in our missals and prayer books is not there at all.

The best part about these invocations at the beginning of Mass is that they are so quickly heard. Only a few minutes after we have called upon the Lord, He appears in our midst to renew the work of His mercy. As once upon the Cross, so now upon the altar our Savior extends His loving arms to embrace all human misery. I could well imagine a pious Christian fervently repeating to himself after the consecration the appeals of the *Kyrie, eleison*: For the holy Church I pray and for those who do not yet know her or no longer care to know her: *Lord, have mercy!* For those suffering in this parish I pray, for the poor, the sick, the sinners: *Lord, have mercy!* For my little daughter I pray, she is so sick: *Lord, have mercy!*

29 . . . STANDING DURING THE GOSPEL

It is a rule of courtesy, as we already learned in childhood, that when a person of higher rank passes or enters where we are seated, we rise and stand and thus show our respect. This rule also holds in the house of God. Thus when the priest leaves the sacristy and goes to the altar, the congregation does not remain kneeling or sitting but stands in reverence for him who represents Christ among them.

Another time during the Mass when all stand is at the Gospel. There are two reasons for this, I believe. The one is clear from what we have already said. At the Gospel One truly of higher rank comes to us; for the first time the Lord appears it is by His word, and not in person as later at the consecration. We are listening not merely to the inspired words of an apostle as at the Epistle (that is why we may then sit, listening attentively), but to the living and life-giving utterances of our divine Master. There is hardly a Gospel which does not contain the words: "Jesus said. . . ." Out of reverence for Him who, as it were, opens His mouth again and speaks into our ears and hearts, we stand and listen. If the Gospel is not to be read again in the vernacular, we should follow the reading or singing of the Latin text in our missal.

But our standing at the Gospel has another meaning. What the Lord here tells us is not merely the "glad tidings" (that is the meaning of the word *evangelium* from the Greek); it is also an order, a command. What we hear we must carry out in our private or family life that the world may be ever more filled with the spirit of the Gospel. When a person appears before his supervisor to receive an urgent command, he will not sit down or kneel; by a standing posture he will want to express that he is ready *stante pede* to carry out whatever is commanded. With a like spirit of cheerful readiness, with the spirit of a lay apostle, we should listen to the Gospel, standing attentively. The knights of the Middle Ages used to bare their swords and hold them aloft during the Gospel. That conveyed the same idea. They wanted to show their readiness to fight for the spread or defense of the Gospel in the world.

But why, you may ask, have we then been taught to kneel reverently and not to stand at the moment when our Lord appears in person, when the bell tinkles for the consecration?

Here I must first tell you—perhaps to your surprise—that for many centuries it actually was customary to stand at the consecration and it is still today the practice in the East. During the Holy Year Pope Pius XII assisted at a Byzantine High Mass in St. Peter's; he attracted the attention of the faithful of the Latin rite because he remained standing at the consecration. In the West the feeling of our human littleness and unworthiness before the eternal King gradually grew so strong that a posture indicating respect and self-abasement, that is, kneeling, was preferred. And this too, I think, serves a good purpose.

30 . . . THE "GENERAL PRAYER" AFTER THE SERMON

In European countries it was a custom, and still is in some churches, to recite in common a prayer for the needs and necessities of all Christendom after the Sunday sermon. It was known as the "General Prayer." Unfortunately the custom has lapsed in many places, and neither pastor nor faithful seem to realize how much they have lost in this thousand-year-old treasure of the Mass liturgy.

What connection has this General Prayer with the Mass? Christians of past centuries had the idea that the readings with which the Mass begins must end with a great prayer of petition for all members of the Church and their needs. We still have one instance of such an ancient and venerable reading service closing with a series of solemn prayers. On Good

Friday after the third lesson, namely the Passion according to St. John (and the sermon, if there is one) is finished, there follow the "great petitions" for the various members and needs of the Church. Here we meet some of the most impressive prayers in the Church's liturgy. These prayers give the original model for the General Prayer.

The custom later lapsed in Rome, and its function was taken over by the Kyrie-litany at the beginning of Mass. Beyond the Alps, in France, in England and Germany, the old Roman custom of alternate prayer between priest and people for the Church's needs was kept throughout the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century St. Peter Canisius gave this litany-like prayer a definitive form, as it is still recited in some European churches.

What may have been the reason or purpose for this ancient custom of closing the reading section of the Mass with congregational prayers of petition? It was this, I believe: at the entrance to the sacrificial part of the Mass, the heart of the people, grown quiet and meditative during the readings and the sermon, should be reminded that what now follows is in a way the great reservoir for all needs and anxieties, one's own and especially the greater needs of the Church and of the world. Now One other will pray and petition for us and our necessities, God's own beloved Son who gave His life for us.

The idea this General Prayer wished to convey has, I fear, been lost sight of by many good Catholics. They may have their trials, for example, a child taking ill suddenly. It is indeed a consolation for them to bring their grief to our Blessed Mother or to the Little Flower (surely a real and thoroughly Catholic consolation). But the great source of consolation, to which all devotion to Mary and the saints should lead us, is no longer fully alive and uppermost in their consciousness, namely, the consoling thought that tomorrow morning they

can bring their grief to the one refuge of all affliction that may befall the family of God—the extended arms of our Savior on the altar.

It is gratifying to note that recently various attempts have been made to revive the General Prayer after the Sunday sermon. The best I have seen was in a parish church in Paris. There every Sunday after the sermon the petitions inscribed by the faithful in the course of the week in a large book which lies open for that purpose in the vestibule of the church are publicly read. It was remarkable what was recorded on the two pages open before me, often in crude and faulty lines, of the soul's trials in a large city: That I may find my father again; That a sinner find peace and be converted; That I may not succumb to temptations; Grant, O Lord, that I may see; Have mercy, O Lord, on my poor daughter and provide another job for her unfortunate husband; For the conversion of my husband.

I am sure that when this list of needs is read off on Sunday after the sermon, no one need be told why it is done at this point of the Mass. Each one will feel in his heart how humanity's suffering here flows into the one great saving harbor, into the lovingly extended and mercifully uplifted arms of our crucified Savior.

31 . . . BREAD AND WINE FOR HOLY MASS

That for the sacred mysteries of the altar in which we participate at least every Sunday real bread is required, bread from an oven like the bread on our table at home (only that now for a thousand years it is unleavened), and real wine that comes from cellars and barrels like every other wine—to this we have perhaps not given enough thought. So essential are bread and wine that the priest in a concentration camp, for example, with the best intentions and with all his sacred powers, could not celebrate Mass unless he had somehow secured a little bread and a few drops of wine.

In ancient times the connection between the holy Sacrifice and common bread and wine was much more obvious. Persons still brought bread and wine along from home (there was no difference between the bread for the holy table and the bread on their kitchen table). After the sermon they would carry it in a solemn offertory procession to the altar. They could not forget that real bread (they had baked it themselves) and real wine (they had taken it from their own barrel or had bought it at a local wine shop) belong to the Mass. With profound interior joy they marvelled how the Lord had chosen "bread from our fields and wine from our vineyards" to be changed into His sacred Body and Blood at the mystery on the altar renewing His Sacrifice on the Cross.

But why did our Savior join this mystery so intimately to bread and wine? Many answers may be given, and you can perhaps recall one or the other from your catechism instruc-

tions years ago. Bread and wine are the noblest and most indispensable, the most easily obtainable and most widely found products of the earth. Good reasons surely; but I want to add two more which you hear mentioned less often, yet are worth thinking about.

There is no other product of the earth that embodies more of the hardship and sweat of labor, and at the same time more harvest joy and human gratitude, than do bread and wine. Year after year, when in fall the last load of wheat or grapes is brought home, then we experience that satisfaction anew. We feel as if a part of ourselves were in the sheaves wrung from the earth with so much labor. Every time the priest at the altar reverently lifts up the paten on which lies the white piece of sacrificial bread grown in our fields, or when he raises the chalice with wine from our vineyards at the beginning of Christ's Sacrifice, it is as if he lifted us up and offered us in the bread and wine, together with all our work and hardships, so that we too may be changed and transformed ever more perfectly into the one Sacrifice of Christ.

The second reason.The bread on the altar is kneaded together out of many distinct and separate kernels; the wine on the altar is pressed out of many distinct and separate grapes. So the congregation gathered about the altar, in virtue of the bread and wine which are no longer bread and wine but the living Body and Blood of Christ, should come together ever more firmly in love, forming one great Body of which Christ is the Head. This approach was very dear to the early Christians. St. Augustine never tired of impressing it upon his parishioners. Today, too, our sincerity in going to church and holy Communion must prove itself, not with mere pious sentiments, but by an increasingly unselfish willingness to help one another. Through the Mystery of the altar we must become meshed together ever more closely, not alone with Christ but among ourselves in Christ.

You see, then, the Lord did not select bread and wine from among the thousands of creatures for the holiest act of worship without purpose. Manifold and profound meanings lie beneath the choice; one must only give it a little thought. The bread and wine represent us who should put on the Sacrifice of Christ, the bread and wine represent the community with which we must be identified through the same holy Sacrifice.

Perhaps you now understand a little better what mother meant without saying so (for she had much reverence toward what is sacred) when she taught you to handle table bread carefully and almost with reverence. Deep down in her heart she was thinking of the inexpressibly holy service for which the Lord had chosen this creature. A Christian really should not be able to look upon bread and grapes and wine without thinking of their noble character, their selection for the most sacred Mystery of the altar. There is a little poem by a Flemish priest, Guido Gezelle, that reads:

Who could behold the grain
And not think of It;
What noble food it is,
And not think of It!

Who could behold the wine
And not think of It;
What noble drink it is,
And not think of It!

Who could a Christian be
And not think of It;
That Christ's Flesh and Blood It is,
And not think of It.

32 . . . THE DROPS OF WATER ADDED TO THE WINE AT MASS

You may have been a Mass server once and can easily recall when you were serving alone. In one hand you held the cruet with wine and in the other the cruet with water; and the priest, after pouring the wine into the chalice, cautiously added a few drops of water. Since that time you simply take it for granted Sunday after Sunday that in the sacred drama such should be done.

Yes, I believe there are not many people, even among former Mass servers, who understand the meaning of the action. Does it want to remind us that it was customary in the East and in the West, too, to mix water with wine? Indeed, it tells more. If you are used to following the Mass with your missal and can recall the prayer the priest says when he pours that water into the chalice, then you know: the water is meant to represent the sacred humanity of Christ which was inseparably united with the Second Person of the Godhead, as inseparably as these few drops of water are united with the wine. This is a very good and very ancient answer; it comes from the time when the Church had to contend hotly against the heretics in favor of the two natures in Christ.

But there is a better, more ancient, and truer explanation. The water that is poured into the chalice at the offertory was in the earliest days, like the bread and wine—and in our days the money offering—a sacrificial gift of the people, brought to the altar by the chanters in the choir. It was considered a symbolic offering, a gift in which the people saw

themselves represented. The action had a connection with the figurative language of Sacred Scripture which compares the nations to "many waters" (Apoc. 17:15).

Probably this is not so clear to you at first sight, the figure has to sink slowly into one's mind. Do we not also use the expression "a sea or ocean of people" for an immense crowd; or that they "stream together" and move like "waves"? The people, as it were, by this drop of water bring themselves to the altar. With this last, little gift sunk into Christ's chalice is very clearly expressed what any offering is meant to indicate at this point of the Mass, be it only a nickel or dime placed on the altar or dropped into the collection box. All such offering of the people has only one meaning: to enter into, to be completely united with, to be submerged entirely into Christ's Sacrifice, just as the drops of water are lost in the wine of Christ's chalice.

With this explanation is also related the blessing pronounced over the water. This is not meant primarily for the water, but for the people whom the water symbolizes. This is shown by the fact that the rest of the water is afterwards poured away; blessed water would be treated differently. And it becomes more evident from another fact, namely, that the blessing is omitted at Requiem Masses, just as the blessing at the end of Mass, because all the blessings and prayers in these Masses are pointed toward the departed.

I once read of a chaplain who "hit the nail on the head" in explaining the subject. He impressed the point upon his audience by saying: "The drop of water, that's me." You might well repeat to yourself this revealing little sentence while witnessing the unpretentious ceremony at the altar. And it might suddenly appear crashingly clear what is taking place, viz., each holy Mass should submerge us more deeply into Christ's holy Sacrifice—into the death and into the life of Jesus.

33 . . . THE MASS "COSTS" SOMETHING

The word "costs" is given in quotation marks. This is to show that the question as sometimes put by thoughtless Catholics, "What does the Mass cost?," must not be understood literally. For it would be most unbecoming to speak of the Mass, the most ineffable Mystery of our holy faith, as something we could buy, like a pound of butter or a yard of cloth. Hence this way of speaking is not only improper, it is also incorrect. Who on earth could estimate in human fashion the value of Christ's redeeming Sacrifice, or attempt to pay for it! That would be as if a child should want to reckon up and pay for the love of its parents—only more incongruous and impossible.

"Yes, but it is customary to give the priest some money to have a Mass said," you will say. That is right. It is a custom from early Christian days, only it was not money the faithful then offered the priest but things for his kitchen and for the poor who were entrusted to him. Such items, however, are not considered as payment for the Mass or for saying the Mass, as when you ask a workman what you owe him for his services. It is an offering, and here a special sacrificial offering, by which you express your particular share in this "your" Mass.

The Mass stipend (*stipendium* is the Latin name for the offering) is therefore no payment or compensation, but an

offering first and foremost directed to God. Picture it to yourself in this way: at the Mass being said according to your intention you go up to the altar in person and place your special offering upon it as a sign of your own intimate and devout participation, a gift to God but for the use of the priest (or when he does not need it, for the poor). A poor man is far less ashamed to take a gift from the altar or from a priest than from a neighbor, before whom he would rather conceal his poverty.

One thing is true about this whole problem which I grant you without further ado, and we priests admit it among ourselves when we come to speak about the subject: it is hard to talk about "money" in connection with the Mass. Yet it can be done when the right spirit prevails on both sides; and that is, thank God, present in most cases. I could not well imagine a priest accepting offerings from the faithful and putting it into his pocketbook like any other "well-earned" money, unmindful that a social responsibility is attached to this more than to other earnings. The spiritual implications of the offering are clear in the minds of most lay people. It is best seen when a priest wants to refuse an offering for a Mass. Every priest knows the answer he hears in such cases from the mouths of even the poorest: "No, Father, that won't do. I must give something." How well the purpose of the offering is here implied, for at bottom it does not pertain to the priest at all but to God; or the other equally significant answer: "Please take it and give it to one who needs it."

I shall never forget the picture a confrere once sketched for me. There was a modest widow, a washerwoman, who despite her poverty would not allow her stipend to be refused because she also wanted to "do something" for "her" Mass. Brushing aside all remonstrances, she insisted on paying her "debt" by bringing twenty or thirty pennies at a time. With what com-

passion must God not have looked upon the intention for which this poor widow so fervently united her heart and her sacrifice (in the fullest sense of the word) to the Sacrifice of His Son.

34 . . . HOLDING THE HOST AND THE CHALICE ALOFT

The reason for this is quite simple, you will say. The action belongs quite naturally to the consecration, for the priest wants to show us the Body of Christ and the chalice with the precious Blood. All of us in church should adore the Lord present on the altar. Good, we will let this explanation stand for the moment; it surely is not wrong. Now if you paid close attention, you must have noticed that the priest later on, immediately before the *Pater Noster,* lifts up the Host and the chalice once more, this time not one after the other, but both together; this time not high above his head but only a few inches before his breast. This second elevation cannot be meant for public showing, and still it seems important. In some European countries there is the practice, a very old one, of calling attention to the action by ringing a bell. What may be the meaning, let us ask for the present, of this "little elevation," as it is called to distinguish it from the "great elevation" at the consecration?

We discover it quickly, I believe, if we consult our missal and see what the priest prays. There we read: "Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, is to Thee, God the Father Almighty, in the union of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory forever and ever." And the people respond: "Amen."

The words form the solemn conclusion to the prayers encircling the elevation (with the *Pater Noster* the Communion service begins). Praise is the main motif, just as many of our prayers end with an expression of praise: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." However, these prayers before and after the consecration are more important and greater and more sacred than any other prayer because here we do more than pray; here, in addition to mere prayer, we really and truly present "an acceptable offering" to the eternal and living God. That everybody may be aware of it, the priest at the solemn closing words takes hold of the Gifts, of the Body and Blood of Christ, holds them aloft, and presents them to the heavenly Father as our sacrificial offering. It is as if we said: Behold, Father, here upon the altar we offer not merely our poor human words, here we offer Thee the great Gift of our praise and thanksgiving. Here we offer to Thee the One who, far better than our stammering lips, proclaims to Thee mighty and worthy praise and thanks from eternity to eternity.

This then is the meaning of the "little elevation" of the sacred Species at the end of the Canon. The lifting is not a gesture of exhibiting but of offering; it is the simplest and most significant sign of offering in the Mass liturgy. If this were the only gesture used in the whole of Mass, one could tell what the Mass is.

Now if you would also interpret the "great elevation" at the consecration as a gesture of offering, I would have no objections. Time and again since this elevation was introduced (around the year 1200, many hundreds of years after the "little elevation"), pious Christians have regarded it as a gesture of offering. The priest lifts up the sacred Gifts, so they said, not only that we may see them (that would not be absolutely

necessary); he bears them, as it were, in the name of all, before the throne and to the heart of our heavenly Father.

In this connection the venerable Capuchin, Martin of Cochem, tells his readers the naive but well authenticated story of the pious English king, Henry III (1207-1272), who lived soon after the introduction of the elevation ceremony. With pious fervor the king insisted on going up to the altar at each consecration to support the arms of the priest "to the great joy of his heart." Surely he wanted to say what rings true still today from the heart and lips of every pious layman: I too offer Thee, O heavenly Father, with the priest at the altar "an acceptable sacrifice" in Thy Son.

35 . . . "BLESSING" THE HOST AND THE CHALICE AFTER THE CONSECRATION

If you observed the priest at the altar thoughtfully, would not those crosses over the Host and the chalice after the consecration have prompted the inquiry: Why? That the priest blesses the bread and wine before the consecration is simple and easy to understand; but that after the consecration he continues the action and makes one cross after the other over the Host and the chalice seems strange. For he now no longer has mere bread and wine before him, but Christ's Body and Blood, the living Lord who is sacrificed. Would anyone imagine that the Body and Blood of the Lord still need a blessing? Dare the priest presume to give a blessing to his Lord and God?

The answer is clear to one who knows that these signs of the Cross in the Canon of the Mass before and after the consecration do not at all bless the gifts, but merely point to them. Imagine the priest standing according to ancient fashion behind the altar with his face to the people (as the Holy Father does in St. Peter's and as one sees more frequently nowadays). As always at solemn liturgical prayer, he now has his hands raised to heaven. The prayer he is saying has this distinction over all other prayers that it does not merely rise from the heart of the priest and of all who pray with him to the heart of our Father in heaven. It is a prayer which at the same time presents a Gift to God on high, the most precious we can think of, His only and most beloved Son who died for us.

Now that we may not overlook so unique a distinction and privilege, the priest behind the altar points solemnly to the Gifts with his right hand every time he mentions them, as if to show them to us and to present them to the heavenly Father. But since a mere pointing gesture would look rather common at so solemn an occasion, priests in the course of time began to make small signs of the Cross over both Species together, or over each separately. What gesture could more worthily point out the Body and Blood sacrificed on the Cross?

It is not, therefore, a matter of no importance whether or not you understand the message of these crosses. They want to tell you something worthy of note. They want to tell you that you need not appear empty-handed before Him who has poured out His blessings upon you. (How humiliating to come with empty hands to a feast in honor of a dear friend who has been very good to you!) You have a worthy Gift of gratitude; it lies there before the priest on the altar. Repeatedly he points to it with a reverent Sign of the Cross, as if to say each time:

Look, Father, from Thy heavenly throne,
Look graciously upon us here;
We offer Thee Thy only Son,
A pleasing Sacrifice, most dear.

36 . . . THE LAST WORDS OF THE CANON SUNG ALOUD

For somewhat more than a thousand years the decisive, central portion of the Mass, the Canon, has no longer been sung aloud as during the first centuries. It is always recited silently. By the sudden silence of the priest at the altar the faithful are made to feel that they should enter with profound reverence and fervent prayer into this holiest phase of the sacred mystery. Only one small phrase was from the beginning not included under the rule of silence—the final four words with which the Eucharistic praise ends, the words of which we spoke when explaining the "little elevation." These the priest sings aloud after the long silence of the Canon: *Per omnia saecula saeculorum*. Because the singing of the *Pater Noster* follows immediately, one may get the false idea that this *Per omnia saecula saeculorum* serves as an introduction to the *Pater Noster*. The *Per omnia saecula saeculorum* with its *Amen* concludes the Canon; the *Pater Noster* begins the Communion service.

Why this calculated exception for these four tiny words when the Canon began to be said silently? Their message can hardly be an adequate reason. Indeed it is a great and impres-

sive thought that it is to God who rules "from eternity to eternity" that our prayer and sacrifice ascend. But this truth is expressed at the end of any liturgical prayer; and if it were meant to be emphasized, then the whole concluding formula, and not merely the last four words, should be sung aloud.

So we seek another reason. When the change to a silent Canon came, the people were to retain their ancient right of consenting with a solemn *Amen* to what was being done and prayed at the altar. But if this *Amen* was not to hang in the air, then the "signal" upon which it followed had to be sung aloud.

See, our seemingly useless investigation was not a waste of time. Now you understand why the ancients and why our Holy Father in his encyclical on the liturgy spoke so much about that little *Amen* before the *Pater noster*. It is really the most important *Amen* in our whole liturgy. By it the people, to use a famous comparison of St. Augustine, put their signature to the Eucharistic event transpiring at the altar. By it they show that, although the priest is the only consecrator, he is not the only offerer of the divine sacrificial Lamb. Behind him the "holy people of God" not only prayed silently along, they co-offered with him what he held in his hands. That is what they want to express with the loud and solemn cry: Yes, so be it! Your prayer was our prayer, your Gift our Gift.

The early Christians loved to stress this great Eucharistic *Amen*. Already in the oldest account of the Roman Mass, left to us by Justin Martyr (died about 165), we read: "When the thanksgiving is over, the whole assembly present cries out: *Amen*." Several hundred years later we are told how the *Amen* at the close of the Canon re-echoed from the walls of the basilica "like thunder from heaven."

Is it not a pity then that most people know nothing at all about this most important *Amen* of the Mass, and that generally in our churches it is anything but an *Amen* by the peo-

ple, resounding from the walls of the church like thunder from heaven. I cannot help saying this: it always pains me when I am at a High Mass and the "holy people of God" are repeatedly addressed from the altar while they keep mum in their pews—even at this, their most important and venerable *Amen* they allow themselves to be represented by the choir or a Mass server. Must it always remain this way?

37 . . . HOLY COMMUNION DISTRIBUTED AT HIGH MASS

I well remember a beautiful Sunday morning years ago. I was sitting in the office of a rectory when quite unwillingly I became a listener to the conversation between certain men of the parish who were waiting with the collection money in the corridor outside. At first I merely sensed that they were annoyed over something, but soon I caught a few scattered remarks like "never before" and "new-fangled nuisance in the Church"; and in between there was, to my surprise, repeated reference to "lazy women."

On a sudden I had figured out the argument. It concerned the practice, recently introduced at the parish, of affording the opportunity to receive holy Communion during the Sunday High Mass. Obviously the title "lazy women" referred to the few who had responded, little suspecting what grief they caused some other parishioners (imagine! a regular lengthening of the High Mass by three minutes!). They were simply too lazy, so the men thought, to make the sacrifice of getting

up earlier, a sacrifice which had always been associated with receiving holy Communion.

How did it come about that holy Communion is now again distributed everywhere during the Sunday High Mass? First of all, to my knowledge it is nowhere officially stated that going to Communion and rising early belong together. I cannot believe that God would take it amiss if a hard-working man or a sickly woman who perhaps could not fall asleep till early morning would first "sleep over" and then try to celebrate Sunday in the best possible way, that is, by sharing not only in the holy Sacrifice but also in the sacrificial Banquet. It is my opinion, moreover, that God is more pleased with such "lazy women" (and men) than with those who berate them.

Secondly, it was regrettable that formerly at the High Mass, the most important and most solemn sacrificial celebration of the week, the faithful did not realize that the function at the altar was also a sacrificial *meal*. Our religious education gradually remedied this condition. Particularly for those who regularly attend Sunday High Mass, it is a gratifying experience to see how the Mystery at which they assist invites them to enter into its innermost chamber, to approach the ever-ready and richly spread Holy Table of God's children! They catch the soft call of love which comes to their ears at the *Ecce, Agnus Dei* and perceive the comforting Voice that says: "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink!" And in their hearts they know how from this fountain wells forth Sunday's deepest joy.

Thirdly, as regards the lengthening of the High Mass caused by the distribution of Communion, it seems so foolish that anyone should haggle with the Lord about a few minutes (a vice not restricted to men only; there are whole parishes where the new pastor is greeted with the urgent wish to make the services "short and snappy"). Would these impatient men and

women be pleased if their guests to dinner would restlessly eye their watches half an hour after arrival? There *are* certain rules for good behavior.

Surely it is proper that changes in divine services be not made according to whim and fancy. But there are innovations so reasonable that one may ask why it was not always done that way. I believe the distribution of holy Communion at High Mass is one of these.

38 . . . THE INTRODUCTION AND THE CONCLUSION TO THE *PATER NOSTER*

When you intend to pray an Our Father you usually make the Sign of the Cross, you say the prayer with its seven petitions, and after the last you add *Amen*. Then, unless you want to continue with the Hail Mary, you again make the Sign of the Cross and your prayer is finished.

But when the priest sings the *Pater Noster* at the beginning of the Communion service at Mass, he makes it unusually formal. First he addresses the people with the solemn invitation: *Oremus!* Let us pray! Even then he does not immediately begin the Our Father, he inserts a formal introduction: "Directed by saving precepts and schooled in divine teaching, we make bold to say." Nor is the prayer finished after this introduction and the seven petitions are sung; the last petition is drawn out into an after-prayer beginning with the word *Libera*. Only with this prolongation do we have the usual closing (during which the Host is broken). Why this singular formality?

I will explain it by an example. Imagine you had at home a very precious, a very rare gem. It was a very old family treasure and you had the custom at family feasts to pass this sparkling family jewel proudly around among the guests. Now would you let this costly gem go from hand to hand just as it is, bare and naked? Surely not. You would know too well how easily your treasure might be lost; long ago you would have had it set by a jeweler and encased in a fine frame and thus shown to your guests.

In this way one must understand the caution and formality with which the Church surrounds the Our Father. Among her treasures of many thousand years, of which one is more beautiful than the other, the Our Father is the most beautiful and venerable and precious. Jesus Himself entrusted it to His Spouse so that with its simple and yet inexhaustible words she might teach her children in all times and places how to pray to their Father in heaven. Because the Church is so proud of this family treasure, because she esteems it so highly, she is very cautious about it. In ancient times she exposed it publicly only when the family was alone by itself, as at the holy Sacrifice. At the beginning of the Communion service of holy Mass it serves well as the family table prayer of God's children; by it they humbly beg the sacred Food from the altar, saying: "Give us this day our daily bread." Now lest this precious prayer gem be worn thin by thoughtless hands, the Church surrounds it with the "casting" of an introduction and a conclusion.

Whenever the uninitiated were present—be they even her own candidates for baptism—the ancient Church resorted to the silent Our Father. To our own day we have such *"silent Pater Nosters"* in the liturgy; you must have noticed them at the bier, for example, or at the grave, when only the beginning and end is said aloud. Only shortly before their baptism did

the candidates find out in a special touching ceremony known as the "handing over of the Lord's Prayer" about this family treasure. It was like an initiation into a precious secret; to copy it was strictly forbidden; only on the "tables of the heart" could the holiest of prayers be inscribed. Each Christian had to learn it by heart and on a special, solemn occasion recite it in the presence of the congregation, together with the Apostles' Creed. In the recitation of these two formulas by the sponsors at baptism, we have the last venerable trace of the "handing over of the Lord's Prayer" and of the Apostles' Creed.

It seems to me that all of us would do well to take to heart this careful, reverent manner with regard to the Our Father. First of all, at its place in holy Mass we ought to pray it with a fervent, silent heart as a precious heirloom from our divine Master. We ought to pray it with a heart humble and childlike, and as deeply fervent as the melody to which the priest sings it. (That we are permitted to join in the recitation of the Our Father at a community Mass is excellent; for we must never forget that it is our common table prayer.)

But it would be still better if, from the Church's respectful use of the Lord's Prayer, we would learn something for private recitation. Couldn't we Catholics treat this prayer with more care and tenderness? Haven't we perhaps "worn it thin" by a too frequent, thoughtless repetition, so that for many of us it serves merely as a "form" or as an empty "prayer pocket" into which we can stick anything? Actually each Our Father should be framed in an invisible, reverent setting, after the example of the liturgy of the Mass. Each Our Father from our lips should be uttered in the spirit that prompted the introduction to the *Pater Noster*: "Directed by saving precepts and schooled in divine teaching, we make bold to say: Our Father. . . ."

39 . . . THE *PAX* EMBRACE BEFORE COMMUNION

It is now many years since I was first struck by the sudden pause in the sacred action between the *Agnus Dei* and Communion at a solemn High Mass. When I saw it for the first time, I hardly trusted my eyes. The celebrant turned away from the sacred Gifts upon the altar and did something that seemed so strange and mysterious in this strict and solemn world of sacred ceremony: he actually clasped the deacon in his arms. The latter then left his place and did the same to the subdeacon standing below.

We can better understand this "kiss of peace" (as the liturgy calls it) if we realize that what we see in our day is only a remnant of the full ancient form of the ceremony. The Kiss of Peace before holy Communion was something not only for the clergy, but for everyone present. Not just the priests around the altar, the faithful too back in the church embraced one another in the holy Kiss of Peace, the men by themselves and the women by themselves.

If for a moment you consider at what point in the Mass the Kiss of Peace is given, you will grasp at once its wonderful meaning and validity. It serves as the overture to holy Communion; and each one in church should feel that the sacred Mystery of Christ's love to which he is again invited is not merely the mystery of a more intimate personal union with God, but likewise the mystery of a more intimate communion with all the brethren; for the Lord instituted It as food for a

fraternal Banquet. At any earthly table refined people feel a hearty intimacy with one another. How much more must this feeling envelop the Table at which that Love is shared that made us brothers and sisters in divine Blood.

This profound reality the liturgy of the ancient Church sought to impress upon the faithful through the practice of a mutual embrace before Communion, each with his neighbor whoever he might be, high or low, friendly or unsympathetic. "We who partake of this one Table cannot be indifferent to one another; we are brothers and sisters, God's family, called to the sacred family board. Whatever had passed between us, hatred or dissension, disagreement or coolness, must now cease; it is the hour of peace. Now is the hour when we are in full earnest over our mutual love, just as He loved us."

Quite readily do I see the Kiss of Peace by the people cannot be re-introduced; our varying sensibilities are against it. Therefore it becomes most important to preserve the rite about the altar as a last expression of a grand and profound idea. For us it should mean an examination of conscience on how and in what spirit we approach holy Communion.

Perhaps I am wrong, but I cannot help thinking that not a few good and well-meaning Catholics, when receiving holy Communion, say silently to themselves (perhaps without admitting it): "Those people all around me really hurt the devotion with which I want to receive *my* Savior. I would like it best if I could receive quietly all by myself." If you feel this way, you have not yet grasped how intimately "those people all around" pertain to the Mystery which Christ instituted as a fraternal Banquet. Next time you see the clergy giving each other the Kiss of Peace at a solemn Mass, try to search your conscience to see what is left there of the spirit of the early Christians who embraced their neighbor before going to Communion. Or perhaps have you become one of those who say:

"I am not concerned about the other people, if only I have *my* Savior."

This should really be the test of our frequent reception of holy Communion: not that it fills us with heavenly delights, no, but that it should slowly, slowly make us more unselfish, more kind and considerate. For "by this will all men know that you are My disciples (and are becoming ever more so at My holy Table), if you have love one for another."

40 . . . THE BEGINNING OF ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL AT THE END OF MASS

If you study up on this point in a scholarly volume, you will find a striking statement. There you will discover that the Prolog (so the scholars call the beginning) of St. John's Gospel at the end of holy Mass is no more than a concluding blessing. How did it come about that a Gospel is a blessing, and what connection has it actually with the different conclusions to the Mass?

Where the Mass originally ended can be clearly recognized even to this day. Still at present the priest abruptly calls out to the people after the final oration (the Postcommunion): *"Ite, missa est!"*, which means: "Go, you are dismissed! The Mass is over!" Here is real, old-Roman liturgy. Those old Romans were that way, short and concise; one does not expect it otherwise from soldiers and farmers.

But when the Mass, with its short, military, old-Roman order of dismissal, came northward across the Alps to the newly-

converted Germanic nations, then the abrupt conclusion seemed somewhat harsh and sudden to people of another mould. Would it not be better, they thought, if the priest, after the words of dismissal, would close the holy celebration by blessing them with the Sign of the Cross? And so began the custom of adding the priestly blessing; and it fits as if it had always been there.

But in the course of time even this was not enough. Another sort of blessing, "modern" in its day, was asked of the priest at the end of Mass, the introduction to St. John's Gospel. To this idea the pious Middle Ages were rather attached, *viz.*, that a blessing could be given not merely by a sign or with a picture, but also with Christ's Gospel. This would be, so they said, almost as powerful as if the blessing were given with the Body of Christ in the monstrance; for in the Gospel the living word of the Lord, His living glad tidings, is contained. (Already the ancient martyr, Bishop Ignatius, said: "I flee to the Gospel as to the flesh of Christ.") So they got the idea of using the beginnings of the four Gospels (the whole would have been much too long) as formulae for blessings. A special preference for the solemnly mysterious Prolog of St. John's Gospel can readily be understood.

The whole idea was really not too bad. When, for example, the beginning of St. John's Gospel was read over a very sick person, the underlying message was: from the glad tidings of Jesus Christ, the Savior, with which the Gospel begins, may consolation and strength and blessings come to you in your bitter hour of sickness! When during the Corpus Christi procession the beginning of each of the four Gospels was sung at one of four altars, the purpose was none other than to call down upon an ailing world the blessings which flow from the glad tidings of Christ Jesus, our Savior.

Therefore when the priest, according to a custom originating

in the Middle Ages, concludes Mass by reading the Prolog to St. John's Gospel, he has no other intention than to bless us and his whole world in the name of the Word that became Man and "pitched His tent amongst us" (the literal translation). What a wonderful message immediately after meeting the Word-made-Flesh in person! And what a glorious summary of the entire liturgy: "We saw His glory, glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth!"

One thing more. What is to be said about those "old-fashioned" people who, despite the order of dismissal and the two last blessings, remain kneeling in church to pray privately and to make their thanksgiving after holy Communion? I will tell you with no "beating about the bush." They deserve to be praised and to be imitated. Our Holy Father has heartily and insistently commended the practice in his encyclical on the liturgy. These "old-fashioned" people have a correct sense; this sense tells them not to run away helter-skelter after so holy a reunion (a thing one would never do for a visitor at home). Rather, we should pause and linger with our Guest, just as once she lingered to whom He said: "Mary has chosen the better part; it shall not be taken from her."

Yes, I do understand how one who was among the first to receive in a long line of communicants may be through with his thanksgiving when the end of Mass has come. But it always pains me to see the church entirely empty right after the Last Gospel, even of those who five minutes before had knelt at the altar rail. It is sad to deprive ourselves of the most precious minutes of the whole week by foolish haste, minutes which permit us to behold and invoke in our innermost heart the glory of the Lord, "the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

41 . . . WHY SALT IS PLACED ON THE TONGUE OF THE CANDIDATE FOR BAPTISM

Didn't it seem peculiar to you the last time you witnessed a Baptism for the priest to put a few grains of blessed salt on the tongue of the persons to be baptized? In any case, since the individual is usually an infant, the ceremony seems surprising to the little creature, who sometimes shows it in its own fashion.

Baptismal salt naturally is a symbol, and one with manifold meanings. Out of the various possibilities I would like to select one which is less frequently thought of, but which was certainly included in the early days when our ceremony originated and when the rite was performed on adults upon entering the catechumenate.

You may already have heard allusions to it; for there still are outlying villages in the Balkans where the woman of the house meets a stranger at the doorsteps with bread and salt in her hands. Only after the visitor has tasted of the bread and the salt does he enjoy the sacred rights of hospitality.

Here also at the church door is a "stranger" being received into a family, the biggest and proudest in the whole wide world. In the name of God's family, the Church, the priest in accordance with the ancient custom of our forefathers comes to the church door and offers him salt.

If you listen carefully you will detect even today how the giving of salt at Baptism (not only, but also) conveys this message. For how could it otherwise be explained that the

priest, after offering the salt, greets the new arrival with the kiss of peace and says to him: *Pax tecum!* Peace be to you! And the prayer said immediately after giving the salt points in the same direction. Let this stranger here—that is the sense of it—when he has become a guest, sit with the children of the house at our holy Table. The accompanying words and action, therefore, originally expressed a yearning for the goal to which the long and arduous road of the catechumenate led, viz., the holy night of Easter when the newly baptized Christian for the first time enjoyed the full right of hospitality at the Table with the children of the house. At the ceremony today we might well think of First Holy Communion, the day when our candidate for Baptism will enjoy the same happiness. "God of our fathers, Thou font of all truth, we pray and beseech Thee graciously look down upon this Thy servant and now that he has tasted the first morsel of salt, let him soon satiate his hunger for heavenly Food."

Do you now understand what this morsel of salt placed by the priest on the tongue of the infant means to tell *you* so many years after your own Baptism? Once you too received the rights to hospitality in the family of God's children and to the family Table; now you no longer need to "hunger for the heavenly Food"; the Table is always spread ready for you. Are you not perhaps a bit thoughtless about this, as if it had been just a matter of courtesy on God's part to let you be born into this world as a child of good Catholic parents? Should you not rather feel ashamed when you see a convert who has found only now what you had from childhood, and cannot adequately express his joy and gratitude? Don't you think we all ought to be more happy and more grateful that God in His unsearchable mercy, without any merit on our part, has called us to the family and to the Table of His children?

42 . . . ANOINTING THE NEWLY-BAPTIZED

One who has followed the rite of Baptism closely will have observed that the priest, in the course of the ceremonies surrounding the administration of the sacrament, anoints the infant twice with holy oil: once on its throat and neck before the actual baptism; and again after the sacramental washing on the top of its head. At first glance it would seem that both anointings belong together and mean basically the same thing. In reality they are to be kept strictly apart; for they are so different that they are even—if you paid close attention you would have noticed it—performed with different holy oils. For the anointing before Baptism the priest used the oil of catechumens, for the one after Baptism the nobler holy chrism (mingled with balsam, and used also for Confirmation).

The first anointing (on breast and back) reminded the early Christians of the athletic field and the arena contests; it taught them not to forget that the life of baptized Christians is an uninterrupted struggle against Satan, who tries with all his power to re-enter "the house swept and adorned" (Luke 11:25).

The anointing on the top of the head means something else, something more important. From olden days kings and priests were anointed on the head. A famous picture shows the prophet Samuel anointing the boy David; he pours the horn of oil over the head of the youth kneeling before him (they had to call him from the sheep pasture; he still holds a shepherd's crook

in his hand). Even today anointing the head is part of the ceremonial at the crowning of Britain's kings, according to the old Catholic rite. And when someone is consecrated bishop and receives the fullness of the priesthood, his head is anointed in the course of the ceremonies.

But how does this practice fit in with Baptism, by which one becomes neither bishop nor king, but merely an ordinary Christian? Much better perhaps than appears at first sight—a fact that becomes apparent as soon as we reflect a little on the dignity of being "merely an ordinary Christian." The infant present now as the sanctifying waters flow over its head and the sacred words are spoken, according to the Savior's promise, is in all truth and reality born anew "by water and the Holy Spirit." It is now become a living member of Christ's Mystical Body.

In an invisible but real manner Christ's Easter life is streaming into it, and together with it something of Christ's kingly and priestly dignity. Every baptized Christian shares in the nobility of this family into which he is enrolled by Baptism; henceforth he may call the only-begotten Son of God "Brother" and address the Most High as "our Father." Every baptized Christian partakes of the priestly dignity of Christ; for he has the sacred right of sharing in Christ's wonderful Sacrifice of the altar, not indeed in the act of consecrating, but by co-offering and receiving its fruits. True, the little child cannot exercise that right before the age of reason, but for many centuries it was a custom to place a drop of the Sacred Blood from the chalice on the infant's tongue after Baptism in token of its Christian dignity. And there are churches today where it is still customary to carry the child three times around the altar so everyone can see that the child now has family rights at Christ's Table.

The newly-baptized child is anointed with holy chrism on

the crown of the head that all may see how, as a member of Christ, it has received a share in Christ's royal and priestly dignity. It is an effect produced by the same Holy Spirit with whom Christ was anointed. St. Ambrose, in explaining the anointing on the crown of the head to his newly-baptized adults, says very plainly: "Through the grace of the Holy Spirit we are all anointed to kingship and priesthood."

Indeed, it is an important sermon this ceremony of anointing wants to give us thoughtless Christians. There is something special in being a Christian, even for those who so heartlessly rattle off the Our Father, who so rarely approach Christ's altar on Sunday. The saintly Pope Leo the Great once summed it up in the memorable words: "Christian, acknowledge your dignity!"

43 . . . A WHITE GARMENT FOR THE NEWLY-BAPTIZED CHILD

The explanation for this ceremony is not difficult. It would come spontaneously if we could witness the Baptism of adults at the restored Easter Vigil, say somewhere in a mission country, and see them enter church clothed in white robes to assist at their first Mass and receive their First Holy Communion. The visible, bright garment symbolizes the wondrous, invisible brightness effected by Baptism and serves as a warning to be most careful with the divine gift, as one is concerned about a snowy white garment. The priest points this out in bestowing it: "Receive this white garment and bear it spotless

before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ that you may have eternal life."

But there is a subtler difficulty. If you last witnessed a Baptism some ten or twenty years ago, you may have trouble recalling how the white garment was given to the child. You may have missed seeing it altogether, for the whole wonderful rite had been reduced to a few, sad remnants. When the moment came, the priest used to place on the child the end of his white stole or even a finger-cloth (often no longer white from much previous use). But this, thank God, is changing in many churches. Since the accompanying words are now intelligently said in the vernacular, would it not be doubly queer to say to the newly-baptized child: "Receive this white garment," while touching it momentarily with the end of the stole?

Many churches now provide a special little garment, embroidered with appropriate symbols, which the priest places on the child. Still better, of course, is the practice of making the baptismal garment the property of the family and using it for all the children. On its hem the mother embroiders the name of each child and the date of Baptism so that with the course of years it becomes a real family treasure, a reminder unto grateful remembrance each time it is used. (The same holds for the family baptismal candle. It is not difficult to select days when it can again be used, e.g., the annual Easter Vigil, the day of a First Mass or profession or wedding, and finally the day of death.)

In the case of the family baptismal garment, the mistake must be avoided which is made by some well-meaning mothers who think in terms of the bridal dress. As the bride is all decked out with the new gown for her march up to the altar, so they put the baptismal dress on the baby for carrying it to church. It may sound reasonable, but it is entirely wrong. The

baptismal robe is a symbol of the baptismal cleansing received and as such is solemnly given by the priest to the newly-baptized during the sacramental rite after the actual washing with water. It would not be right if the little pagan that is carried into church were already dressed in the clean, bright garment by which the glory of baptismal grace is symbolized.

Therefore if it is done properly, the sponsor will carry the baptismal garment on her arm into church. After the final anointing, she hands it to the priest, who places it on the infant with her aid. Even externally the child should return home different in appearance so that all may see more easily what an extraordinary change took place, how its soul was washed white in the Blood of the Lamb. For when the child is again placed in the arms of its mother, she should not only know by faith, but actually see what an inexpressible mystery took place in the heart of her babe, into what glory it has been immersed through holy Baptism.

I could well imagine how a mother, after taking part with a warm heart in this well-arranged and properly enacted rite, would, when alone with the quietly breathing infant Christian by her side after the guests had left, spontaneously recall the words with which Mother Church gave the baptismal robe once to herself and say to her babe: "Yes, that I wish and beg for you, my child, with all my heart on this your day of Baptism, that you bring spotless before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ what you received today, so that you may have life everlasting!"

44 . . . WHY IS THE MOTHER "CHURCHED" AFTER CHILDBIRTH?

Dear Mrs. . . . . :

It was a good idea on your part to send this question "to the right place" (as you put it), for it troubles many mothers. Nor did you need make long excuses for your alleged "imposition." Every zealous teacher welcomes such "imposing" letters in matters pertaining to his field.

I must indeed compliment you on submitting so practical and important a question. For there is hardly a ceremony in our Catholic liturgy which occasions as many erroneous or twisted notions in the minds of people as the so-called "churching of mothers after childbirth." You are definitely not the only young mother who must concede that she looks ahead to this ceremony with a certain embarrassment. Behind this embarrassment lurks the notion that "churching" implies something shameful. You indicate it in your letter, and I am convinced that many mothers also harbor it, consciously or unconsciously. I can only tell you that it is altogether wrong. The Church is not two-faced; she teaches, and no one can doubt it, that Matrimony is holy and a sacrament. And all the acts proper to marriage are therefore holy.

The meaning of the ceremony is simply this: the mother comes to church to express her thanks for the first time with her newly-baptized child in her arms. A Biblical precedent may be seen in Mary's presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple.

And according to our new American ritual, there is even a special blessing for the child after that given to the mother. I am sure there is no need to explain to you or to any mother how proper it is to show gratitude to God on such an occasion.

If, then, a young mother opens her eyes and ears to what she experiences in the house of God, she will realize that Mother Church has no other intention than to rejoice and give thanks together with her. The very fact that the priest in white stole meets her at the church door (so the book directs, and so it should actually be done every time) adds an air of solemnity; otherwise he does this only for the bishop. Isn't this reception at the church door a well-planned form of respect for her? And did you know that this "churching" is a mother's honorable right?

The address which the priest then makes to the mother kneeling before him, the lighted candle he hands her, the solemn procession to the front and the *Magnificat,* together with the special prayers of blessing said at the altar (thank God, they are now said in the vernacular)—all these speak of nothing but grateful joy. Let me quote for you only three little sentences: "Look with kindness," the priest addresses God, "on this Thy servant! Joyfully she entered Thy sanctuary to give thanks. Permit her and her child at the end of this life to attain to the joys of eternal life!"

You see then, my dear Mrs. ....., any embarrassment is altogether unfounded. Indeed, I should imagine that a mother who really understood the ceremony would count among the most precious of her life these moments when with a heart full of grateful joy she knelt before the altar holding in her arms the new-born and newly-baptized infant, so sweetly flooded by the light of the candle. She cannot as yet speak to it about God; the more must she at this hour before the altar begin to speak to God unceasingly in its behalf. And what else could her

motherly prayer be but a repetition of the Church's prayer: "May I and my child at the end of this life attain to the joys of eternal life."

Besides, do you know that the Church holds another, almost more beautiful, "Mother Blessing" in store for the expectant mother? Pardon me if in conclusion my letter gives you a little "lecture" on this "Blessing before Childbirth." It is too bad that most, even good Catholic mothers have never heard about this treasure.

You may be able to imagine what the Church asks in this blessing for an expectant mother. She herself is a Mother who has carried in her womb thousands upon thousands of children. She knows the sentiments of the young daughter kneeling at her feet asking for a blessing, and she helps her to pray for the one thing about which all her thoughts and planning, all her anxiety and hopes revolve during those weeks—a safe and happy delivery.

But her prayer does not rest with this motherly concern. With firm assurance it goes farther and deeper. Mother Church knows that seeing the much-praised "light of day" can be of little good to the tiny creature in its mother's dark womb unless it sees the Light of another Sun. Therefore in one and the same breath she prays for a happy delivery and for a happy admission to the holy font of Baptism: ". . . that the fruit of her womb, by the assistance of Thy merciful hand, come happily to light and be preserved for the sacred rebirth of Baptism."

But do you know what to me always seemed most impressive about this first blessing which Mother Church bestows on the expectant mother? It is easily noticeable that already on this day she is thinking—with a sore heart—of how, according to an inexorable law, the ways of these two persons, now so intimately united, will separate farther and farther; how this

child will slowly but steadily tend away from the heart and the breast, the knees and the home of mother to go its own ways, only God knows how dark and fearsome. Over all this Mother Church already today extends her praying hands, petitioning that at the end child and mother meet again and together enter the holy, eternal Light. I must give you the conclusion to this blessing of an expectant mother, grand and simple as it is, passing unnoticeably from the singular to include both: "Save them both, almighty God, and grant them Thy everlasting Light!"

I hope, dear Mrs. ....., that when the time comes for you to receive these blessings of Mother Church, kneeling with the child under your heart in the sacristy or later with the same child in your arms before the altar, your own joy will prove how your question and my reply were not in vain. That this joy may be yours (and many other mothers-to-be) is the hearty wish of

Yours sincerely in Christ,

.....

45 . . . THE FATHER AT THE BAPTISM OF HIS CHILD

Thus far I have discussed many questions that are not in the catechism, and I have tried to give the answers clear and simple as I thought to be. But to the query, "Why shouldn't the father also attend the Baptism of his child?," I can merely say: That is what I too would like to know! For I dare not assume any Catholic father is so poorly instructed as to con-

sider Baptism unimportant, a kind of "old women's affair" of no concern to an honest man. Much less could I assume that the same person who proudly announced the birth of his child at the rectory and at shop would all of a sudden feel ashamed to cross the village street with his baby.

Listen to what the novelist Alban Stolz had to say on the matter: "In many places the sense and intelligence of some fathers must have struck a leak. When the child dies and the dead body, the empty frame of the escaped soul, is carried to the cemetery, then the father goes along in his best attire. But when the living child is carried to church to be solemnly received and made a child of our Father in heaven, a member of Jesus Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and a claim to heaven is accorded it, then behold, everybody remains at home, and the father . . . well, he sits down and waits till the nurse and sponsors come back from church, as if the whole affair hardly concerned him."

Where such is the case, something must be out of order. For whatever else happens in the life of the child, whether it makes its First Holy Communion, gets married or buried, if the father is not present, everybody will wonder what has happened. But when the one most important thing in the life of the child happens, when it is re-born in water and the Holy Spirit, then the father at times remains home, smoking, watching television, or perhaps napping.

What a wealth of material for him to think about and to pray about during the sacred function—for him, the responsible educator of this youngest Christian in the parish, whose soul will one day be asked of him at the final judgment! All that is there done and said and prayed for has a special meaning just for him. He could very easily think of his own Baptism; he could think of the day soon to come when his crying baby, which now understands nothing of all they do for it, will

open its bright baby eyes and read from his own face the first important lesson in this living catechism, what a baptized Christian looks like.

Truly Christian parents will easily sense how unique an occasion and how important an event a Baptism is in the life of their family.

46 . . . THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON THE FOREHEAD AT CONFIRMATION

At our first meeting with Mother Church, one of the first things she did was this: by the hand of the priest she made the Sign of the Cross on our forehead, at the very beginning of the Baptism ceremony. This was meant to show that she took possession of us. Just as many establishments carry the name of the owner over the front door, so are we to carry all life long the victorious sign of Him who in the sacrament of Baptism claimed us as His own. To make the Sign of the Cross meant nothing else to the early Christians than to renew with one's own hand this claim of possession; to cross oneself meant to mark a cross with the thumb on one's forehead; only later did it become customary to add a second and a third on the lips and breast.

What we experienced at Confirmation was basically the same ceremony, and yet we felt that here it had special rank and significance. For it was the hand of the bishop that made the cross, using at the same time the noblest of the three holy oils, holy chrism. Moreover, what pertained to ceremony at

Baptism (and in case of necessity could have been omitted) was here an essential part of the sacrament.

With the new rank came new meaning. To be confirmed means to be anointed in the power of the Holy Spirit as a full-fledged citizen of God's kingdom; from then on he is to share the responsibility for the fortunes of this kingdom on earth. Therefore he is to carry, one may say, the "national emblem" on his forehead. Wherever he goes it should be known that he professes and stands up for Him who died on the Cross and overcame death by death. Through Confirmation one dedicates himself as a soldier of Christ to this glorious insignia of the holy Cross: proudly he bears it on his forehead, ready to stand up fearlessly for his Leader whether in attack or defense.

Not without reason did I mention attack first. For the Church is like a country at war: mere defense is not enough. On her flags is imprinted the order for world conquest, the most decisive and yet the most peaceful ever planned by any power on earth. Do not say that here we have the task of the clergy. Only a person who for the last decades had isolated himself in an ivory tower could still talk that way. Again and again have recent Popes emphasized that every baptized and confirmed Christian shares in the fortunes of God's kingdom upon earth; in the lay apostolate, in Catholic Action laymen must march shoulder to shoulder with the clergy as servants and soldiers of Christ on all fronts. A sad army indeed, if only the officers' corps had the spirit of attack!

You see, then, that the cross of Confirmation on your brow means something that enters deeply into your life. It was not said unwisely that Confirmation is the sacrament of Catholic Action, the anointing unto the lay apostolate. What are you doing on your part, confirmed Christian, to help conquer the world for Him whose emblem was sealed on your forehead? What interest do you show and how do you help along when

the missions, home and foreign, are mentioned? How do you stand in your parish? Are you just another name on the files, or one who shares the cares of the pastor? What steps do you take when you notice a brother or a sister in Christ growing cold in faith and love because of the icy winds of our times? What do you do in your business, in society and politics, in public life and in education, to uphold respect for God's Commandments and for the Cross of Jesus Christ?

More than ever before in the Church's history does the fortune of God's kingdom depend today on the support of the laity. We must pray earnestly that the Spirit we have received in Confirmation may make us realize ever more vividly the high purposes to which Confirmation and the cross on our foreheads have destined us; to a fearless, aggressive support of Him who in this sign overcame death and redeemed mankind.

47 . . . THE RAISING OF THE PRIEST'S HAND BEFORE ABSOLUTION

Nothing simpler, you say. He wants to make the Sign of the Cross over the penitent, and for that he must raise his hand.

The explanation sounds plausible, yet it is wrong. If you pay close attention, you will see that the priest does not raise his hand at the moment he makes the Sign of the Cross over you, but already at the beginning of the long formula of absolution. Hence this lifting of the hand must have some other meaning.

Scholars tell us that the raising of the hand was not intro-

duced as an elevation of the hand, but is the remnant of an ancient *imposition of hands*. As long as confession was made in the open choir, kneeling down beside the confessor's chair (it was done that way through the Middle Ages), the priest laid his right hand on the head of the penitent at the absolution. When after the Reformation our modern confessionals were introduced, with a grill between priest and penitent (St. Charles Borromeo was mainly responsible for this), the imposition of hand became impossible—the grill was in the way. But not to lose sight entirely of the ancient gesture, the raising of the hand at the absolution was retained.

Good and necessary as is the present arrangement of the confessional, it is too bad that this wonderful priestly gesture had to be sacrificed. In it the faithful could see directly what confession is, what consoling and soothing and healing power here flows from the Cross of Christ into the sinful heart of man. Indeed, the gesture of imposing hands tells us still more. Once Christians spontaneously felt that the priest did not do it in his own name, but in His Name who, according to the Bible, "imposed hands on the sick and possessed, and they were cured." When the bishop imposes hands on a young deacon in priestly ordination, we likewise sense that it is only done in Christ's Name. Thus the gesture of the imposition of hands at the absolution expresses the most important thing that can be said of confession.

To go to confession does not mean to take one's spiritual ailments to human physicians (with varying degrees of skill and tact); to go to confession means to come to the Physician of souls whom the ancients called "Arch-physician"—the One who knows our heart because He made it. Of this we must be absolutely convinced every time we enter the confessional. We should close our eyes to "the human side" of the sacrament and say quietly to ourselves: I will now contritely kneel down,

not before any mortal's hand (it is wholly inconsequential to which priest I confess or who gives me absolution), but beneath the healing hand of my Redeemer. No matter how much our heart may be weighed down with anxiety and fear, we will nonetheless have an experience similar to the Evangelist John's when he fell down on his face before God's majesty with the feeling of sinful unworthiness: "And he (the Lord Jesus) laid his right hand upon me, saying: 'Fear not!'" (Apoc. 1:17).

48 . . . ANOINTING THE SICK

In spiritual books and periodicals you may have noticed in recent years a tendency to translate the name "extreme unction" into more understandable English by calling it "last anointing." Some writers, in fact, feel that an even better name for this sacrament would be "anointing of the sick" or simply "holy anointing." Why so? Because an unfortunate misunderstanding has come about and settled in the hearts of Christians, the false idea, namely, that this sacrament is limited to the moment when a person is about to breathe "his last." As a result the name of the fifth sacrament conjures up a fearsome picture to many; a great number of the sick and a still greater number of unreasonable relatives will wait and wait—till often it is too late—to call the priest for administering this sacrament, believing that after the anointing death "must" necessarily follow.

However, things are quite different once you quietly listen

to what the Church herself says on the topic. Not only is she the competent minister but also the competent interpreter of the seven fountains of salvation issuing from the Cross of her Spouse. The Church does not simply identify this sacrament as "the sacrament of the dying"; rather, it is the sacrament for the benefit of those who are seriously ill. In compassion toward those suffering from a disease that threatens life, Christ instituted a special sacrament. By a special means of grace He wants to extend His pardoning, strengthening and consoling hand to His brothers and sisters who are gravely ill. Not without reason did He make soothing and invigorating oil the sign of the sacrament. Yes, according to the express teaching of the Church, not the least purpose of this sacrament is that Christ by means of it grants to the sick person's body mysterious powers of recovery.

God be thanked that now when the prayers surrounding this sacrament are said in the vernacular, everyone can hear that there is scarcely a word about death in them, but rather repeated references to healing and to getting back to work. Of course, for everyone the hour will one day arrive when according to God's will, determined from eternity, the physical healing power of this sacrament will not be realized. Then the sacrament for the seriously ill becomes the sacrament of strength and encouragement for the dying, safely steering the soul into its eternal harbor.

There would seem, therefore, to be some reason for naming the sacrament "holy anointing" or "anointing of the sick" rather than "last anointing." But even if we use the latter term, we should not associate it exclusively with the Christian's "last hour"; rather, this anointing can rightly be called the "last" by comparison to the anointings that usually precede it in the life of a Christian, i.e., those of baptism and confirmation.

In any case, we must do away with unreasonable fears

associated with this sacrament. And we must do all in our power that it be conferred in due time so that it can unfold its healing power if such be God's will: for we have no right to expect God to work an outright miracle. All life long we should pray that as our dying hour approaches we may in full consciousness be strengthened with the graces of this consoling sacrament and with Holy Viaticum, and so be privileged to pass from this land of exile into our heavenly fatherland.

49 . . . ANNOUNCING A CANDIDATE TO THE PRIESTHOOD

When grandmother returned from High Mass one Sunday morning, she was mumbling to herself indignantly on entering the front door. "Such a thing is a bit too much; it has not happened before during all my 73 years." Urged to tell what really had happened, she grew quite angry. Was she, with her old deaf ears, the only one in the house who had listened to what was announced! Didn't they realize that it meant the end of all the town's preparations for their neighbor son's First Mass? To think that this young man was going to get married! Because of her deafness, she had not been able to catch the name of the girl—but she could state solemnly that *his* name was announced from the pulpit, the very seminarian who in his long black cassock had for several years been helping the priest around the altar. "One should not think it possible!" It took a long time to convince grandma that a candidate for the priesthood must also "be announced" in

church; and finally she wanted to know why such a "new-fangled custom" was introduced. Here the wisdom of the household was exhausted.

So we must try to find the answer. Someone might say: When a person gets married or becomes a priest, that is his own business and it should concern nobody else. This sounds all right, but it is absolutely wrong. Could you imagine parishioners to whom it would be altogether a matter of indifference what kind of families and what kind of priests their church produced? Canon Law provides that the sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony are administered solemnly and publicly before the assembled people, and that the names of prospective recipients be announced to the parish a good time in advance. Everybody in church should know: someone of the community wants to start a family, or someone of the parish wants to become a priest. This concerns everybody. Yes, all of us here in the parish—and who should be better informed—are regularly asked by the Church concerning those about to get married or preparing for Holy Orders.

For priests it begins already with the first decisive higher Order, the subdiaconate; it is repeated again before the diaconate and the priesthood. The primary purpose of the announcement is that if anyone is aware of something weighing seriously against the reception of Holy Orders (or some impediment to marriage), he would be obliged in conscience to report it. Yes, even when at the point of ordaining, the bishop does not begin with the ceremonies without once more addressing the assembled faithful and asking if there be any reason militating against the candidate; because those who travel in a ship, he says, cannot be indifferent about the man at the helm.

To be sure, it will happen rarely—God be thanked—that anyone must bring an accusation against an ordinand after the

announcement in church or in the cathedral. But the declaration serves a good purpose, even when everything is in proper order. That one of your parish is to be ordained to the holy priesthood should certainly affect you in this sense that you rejoice over the honor coming to your community; that you feel partly responsible and want to pray along that your candidate will become a good priest; and that, if possible, you attend the ceremonies when the bishop amid solemn silence imposes his consecrating hands upon your deacon. And also for the others whom you do not know personally, you can pray; they too will be your priests, helmsmen of the ship in which you sail; who knows but that one of them one day will stand at your death-bed endeavoring to conduct you into heaven's holy harbor.

In ancient days when dioceses were no bigger than the episcopal city, such participation on the part of the faithful came easy. The whole congregation could pray and fast with their bishop during all of Ember Week for the priestly candidates (fortunately the prayers for good priests in Ember Week have been retained to our day). When the ordination night between Saturday and Sunday had arrived, all would be present in the cathedral; and every time a name was called off, all gave their consent with a joyous shout—as a great peal their acclamation would resound from the walls: *Dignus est!* He is worthy!

When you next assist at an ordination ceremony, I hope you will experience a faint glimmer of that wonderful scene of early Christian days. Your heart will expand—and I think grandmother's too, in spite of her old, deaf ears—when you hear the whole assembled church pray as with one voice for the candidates to the priesthood. There they lie humbly prostrate in their long white albs on the floor of the sanctuary while the whole congregation sings over them the Litany of

the Saints, calling down upon them the protection of the saints in heaven, and upon all who in the ship of the Church are sailing towards the haven of eternity. *Omnes sancti Dei, intercedite pro nobis!* All ye Saints of God, make intercession for us!

50 . . . THE NUPTIAL MASS AFTER HOLY MARRIAGE

I know there are plenty of weddings with no Nuptial Mass. Yes, there also are weddings that for good reasons cannot have a Nuptial Mass, such, for instance, at which one of the contracting parties unfortunately is a non-Catholic. It must nevertheless be remembered that these "quiet weddings," even when they become frequent and seem "in style," are actually only tolerated by the Church. If you inquire how the Church wants a wedding performed, every priest will unhesitatingly give you the answer: *together with* the Nuptial Mass. Why has Mother Church introduced this sequence of marriage and Nuptial Mass, and why is she so concerned about retaining it?

The answer is not difficult. The bridal couple have now, after administering the sacrament of Matrimony to each other, embarked timidly upon a new course. Naturally they will ask themselves what the first thing is that they should do in common. And without hesitation their Christian heart will tell them that they can begin their married life in no more beautiful and worthy way than with a united offering of Christ's holy Sacrifice.

To whom should they have recourse in this great and anxious hour but to their Lord and Savior who has created and disposed their hearts for each other and now united them by the holy seal of the sacrament! With Him alone lies the answer to the anxious question that fills every serious human heart in that decisive hour. To Him alone can they address the words that are sung at the Nuptial Mass Offertory, in which all human anxiety finds its solution:

> In Thee, O Lord, I trust.
> Thou art my God:
> In Thy hands my days rest secure.

On the threshold of married life the newly-weds want their Lord and Redeemer to unite them by His holy Sacrifice. All life long this Sacrifice will be for them the lofty school of matrimonial and parental love. Here they will have to learn to dedicate themselves ever more completely and selflessly and silently with Christ and like Christ to the holy will of the heavenly Father, in holy service to each other and to the children God may entrust to them. The strength of self-surrender, learned and begged for at the altar, they will have plentiful occasion to exercise.

But the Nuptial Mass would not be truly a Nuptial Mass without the newly-weds receiving holy Communion together. For in the most perfect manner possible to Christians, they should permit themselves to be taken up into Christ's own self-surrender; now for the first time as husband and wife, they approach the holy Table at which the sacrificial Body of Christ is received as Food. Even before sharing a common table at home, they share in the heavenly Table of Christ's love and suffering. And it should remain that way all their lives. All of their matrimonial and family life should come under the law of "the two tables," with priority given to the

Lord's. (How poor the family where every thought and care is for the one table at home, where everything circles about earning and eating and spending.) Naturally they will rejoice over the growing group around the family table at home; and naturally they will work hard, not that this table should offer superfluity and luxury, but the necessary items (and sometimes a little more).

Nevertheless, the happiest hours of family life will ever be those when they can conduct another child for the first time to the holy Table of Christ's love. Blessed indeed will be the Sunday mornings, when surrounded by the circle of their children, they kneel down together at the holy Table where once they began their married life; its festive splendor they take along to a joyful Sunday breakfast at home—an inspiration for the joys and sorrows of the ensuing days. And when father and mother are resting under the sod, the grown-up children will say to one another: What wonderful Sundays those were at home when father and mother first went to holy Communion with us and when we took breakfast together in holy peace!

Don't you agree that if all Christian couples would understand this approach and begin their family life with the Nuptial Mass and continue to live it out, then we would not need to be concerned about the spirit of joyful living with the Church and with its liturgy, objectives which these instructions have attempted to rouse anew. In the bosom of such a family, children inhale the Christian spirit naturally, like the air they breathe. In the bosom of such a family they receive the first and the most important "catechism lessons" of their lives. No one in the world can teach as impressively and unforgettably what is in the catechism and what is not in the catechism as the heart of a truly Christian mother and the example of a truly Christian father.

HOW TO make "participation"

INTELLIGENT and SPIRITUALLY FRUITFUL—

GOD'S PEOPLE ABOUT THE ALTAR

THE VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL
AT THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

by Dr. Balthasar Fischer

Writing to provide special pedagogical helps for the Munich International Eucharistic Congress in 1960, Dr. Fischer concentrates on those parts of the Mass liturgy that belong primarily to the people—particularly the simple responses. Familiarity and repetition have seemingly made these parts commonplace and shop-worn; here the profound spiritual doctrine and practical moral values of the people's responses and functions are set forth simply, clearly, convincingly.

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