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SERIES I

No. 2

WHY DO CATHOLICS ATTEND MASS?

II

BECAUSE THE MASS IS THE SUBLIME SACRIFICE
OF CHRIST HIMSELF

and

BECAUSE THE MASS IS ALSO THE SACRIFICE OF
THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE.

by

DOM LOUIS TRAUFLER, O. S. B.
DOM VIRGIL MICHEL, O. S. B.
St. John's Abbey

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Why Do Catholics Attend Mass?

In another pamphlet we developed the first general answer to this question by showing that the Mass is the sacrifice of the New Law. We there indicated two further answers to the question, which it is the object of the present pamphlet to develop. The first of these we had stated as follows:

BECAUSE THE MASS IS THE SUBLIME SACRIFICE OF CHRIST HIMSELF.

If the Mass is a sacrifice at all, there must be an object offered in it. We shall commence by examining the action of the Mass, in order to see in what way the Mass is a sacrificial offering, and by what right we call the Mass the sacrifice of Christ Himself.

THE ACTION OF OFFERING.

In the Mass prayers there is not merely a single act of offering. The *sacrificial oblation develops in a progressive manner* with increasing beauty and dignity. In it we can distinguish *three separate stages of offering*.

The *first stage begins* with the *Offertory*. Before this, there are various preparatory prayers, which include a general confession of human sinfulness, prayers for forgiveness, and readings from the prophets or the Letters of the Apostles, and the Gospels. These prayers prepare the mind for a better performance of the spiritual offering of the sacrifice of the Mass.

The real offering commences when the officiating priest takes the host, the white wafer of bread prepared beforehand, and offers it up to God in the following words: "Accept, O Holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this host for the all-holy sacrifice, which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, to atone for my numberless sins of wilfulness and neglect; on behalf of all here present," etc. Then the priest pours wine and a little water into the chalice and likewise offers that: "We offer unto Thee, O Lord, the chalice of salvation, humbly begging of Thy mercy that it may arise before the presence of Thy

divine majesty with a pleasing fragrance, for our salvation and that of all mankind. Amen." After two more short prayers, the following one, addressed to the Holy Trinity, is recited: "Accept, most holy Trinity, this offering which we are making to Thee in remembrance of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord," etc.

In the above prayers a complete action of sacrificial offering is contained. In imitation of Melchisedech of old, bread and wine have been offered to God by the priest in the name of all the people. But the sacrifice of the Mass is not thereby ended, for it is a most special type of sacrifice, as we shall see. This first stage of offering is only the beginning of the sacrificial action.

The gifts of bread and wine have by this first offering been set aside for a holy purpose. In the *second stage of oblation* they are again offered, but this time with a distinct mention of the higher, sublime character of the Mass. The second stage of offering begins with the prayer: "And now, most gracious Father, we humbly beg of Thee and entreat Thee, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, to deem acceptable and bless these gifts, now set apart for the holy and all-perfect sacrifice," etc. The second offering ends with the prayers: "We further beseech Thee, O Lord, to receive in atonement this sacrifice Do Thou, O God, deign to bless what we offer that it may become for our good the Body and Blood of Thy dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lorrdr."

THE THIRD STAGE OF SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

With the last words just quoted, which ended the second stage of the offering, the full purpose of the previous action is indicated. They also show us in what the sublime character of the sacrifice of the Mass is to consist. Immediately after them, follow the Gospel words of the Last Supper, and the act of the consecration, in which the priest pronounces the words of Christ: "This is my Body," etc., as mentioned in a previous pamphlet. In the sacrament of Order the officiating priest received the priestly power of Christ, handed down in the Church in an unbroken line from the Apostles. When he says the momentous words:

“For this is my Body For this is the Chalice of my Blood,” he is not speaking in his own private person, but as a priest and in the name of Christ. He is then fulfilling the command Christ gave the Apostles and their successors when He said to them: “Do this for a commemoration of me.”

Thereupon the *third stage of the sacrificial offering commences*. The words of the consecration, just as at the Last Supper, change the oblations of bread and wine into the living Christ. Christ is as truly and really present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine as He was present in the consecrated bread and wine that he gave to the Apostles at the Last Supper. The Mass prayers now continue the offering in these words: “Wherefore, O Lord, we Thy servants, and likewise Thy holy people, calling to mind not only the blessed passion of the same Christ Thy Son, our Lord, but also His resurrection from the dead, and finally His glorious ascension, offer unto Thy supreme majesty, of Thy gifts. . . . the all-perfect sacrifice the holy Bread of life eternal, and the Chalice of unending salvation.” In the second stage the bread and wine were called holy gifts; now they are more specifically called God’s own gifts, “Thy gifts”; and again, “Bread of life eternal”, just as Christ had said of Himself: “I am the bread of life” (John 6: 48).

The next prayer asks that the eternal Father look as favorably upon this sacrificial offering, as He had looked upon the sacrifices of Abel, Abraham, and Melchisedech. We are now at the height of the sacrificial action of the Mass. Now *Christ Himself is the sacrificial gift which is being offered up to the heavenly Father*. No better victim, no sublimer gift, can be thought of than Christ. He is the universal Mediator between God and man, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, through whom all things are made, as the Gospel of St. John at the end of the Mass so well says. The sacrificial action of the Mass, in this third stage, is at once a grand act of homage to God, and the exercise of Christ’s mediatorship. Both of these ideas are well expressed in the closing words of the action of offering: “Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, is to

Thee, God the Father almighty, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.”

THE MASS AND CALVARY

The sublimity of the sacrifice of the New Law is seen in the fact that the offering made to the heavenly Father is that of Christ Himself. *In every Mass Christ descends upon the altar to be the sacrificial victim*, the most acceptable offering that could be made to the Father, and one indefinitely more perfect and sublime than the sacrifices of the Old Testament. “For,” says St. Paul, “if the blood of goats and oxen, and the ashes of an heifer being sprinkled, sanctify such as are defiled, to the cleansing of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted unto God, cleanse our conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?” (Hebr. 9:13-14.)

By reason of the offering up of Christ Himself in the Mass, and through its connection with the Last Supper, in which Christ spoke of the shedding of His Blood for all mankind, the Mass is most closely connected with the sacrifice of Calvary. *The Mass is in fact a continuous enactment of the sacrifice of Calvary.* Every time that Mass is celebrated the same divine Victim as at Calvary is being offered up to the Father for the expiation of the sins of mankind, and for the glory and honor of God. There is only this difference, that the Mass is an unbloody presentation of the bloody sacrifice of Calvary. Christ does not die again in the Mass; but His death is symbolized by the separate consecration of the bread and of the wine—which is a figure of the separation of His blood from His body.

Yet Christ continues to sacrifice Himself as truly and freely in the Mass, as He had once done on Calvary. Christ’s whole life had been one of a continuous sacrificing of Himself for the glory of the Father in heaven and for the sanctification of man. The bloody immolation on Calvary was the supreme realization of His offering of Himself for all mankind. After this sublime sacrifice Christ did not cease to love man and to serve the needs of man. Hence the sacrifice of Calvary is daily continued in the

Mass. There Christ renews innumerable times the offering of Himself for the glory of God and for the spiritual benefit of men.

A RENEWAL OF CALVARY NECESSARY?

Two questions have perhaps been asked repeatedly during the reading of the above paragraphs. If Christ offered Himself once at Calvary, was that not sufficient? Why should He be offered every day in so many Masses? And again, if Christ is so supremely acceptable to the heavenly Father, why must we pray so earnestly in the third stage of the sacrificial action of the Mass? Why must we ask the Father to accept the sacrificial offering? Christ *was* accepted by the Father on Calvary as a most acceptable gift. God could not refuse this gift, since it is not only human but also divine, and offered by His divine Son. Why should the Mass prayers ask so earnestly for acceptance, as if a refusal were possible?

A hint of the answer to the first question, why the sacrifice of Calvary is daily renewed, was contained in the statement, that *in the Mass Christ continues the work He performed on Calvary as mediator between God and Man*. The death of Christ on Calvary, we know, was the acceptable sacrifice that made amends for man's original rebellion against his God. By the atonement of Christ on Calvary, man was redeemed from the effects of this rebellion. He again became acceptable to God. Through the mediation of Christ, heaven was again open to man; it was again possible for man to be intimately united to his heavenly Father, like a child to its parents.

All this was made possible for fallen man through Calvary. However, no man is saved without his own free choice and decision. Man is endowed with free will; and as man freely chose to rebel, so must man freely choose to be saved through Christ, to be united to God.

Now the best way of becoming thus united to God, received by Him as a true child, is that chosen by Christ. On Calvary He offered all mankind to God together with His own divine person. By becoming man He took upon Himself the sins of all men, and thus through their un-

ion with His human and divine nature all men became an offering acceptable to God. But no man is saved except through his own consent and will. Each one of us must freely choose God for himself, and must freely unite himself with the sacrifice of Christ in order to become perfect. Hence the Mass was instituted as a perpetual continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary. The Mass, by being repeated daily all over the world, *gives to all people the opportunity of uniting themselves actively with Christ's own sacrifice.*

Christ descended to the altar in order to put Himself at our disposal, in order to give us a sacrificial gift that can not be refused by His eternal Father. And Christ, as the gift offered, most truly represents us, since He at one time took upon Himself a human nature in order to represent us more fully, and since He Himself was the first to offer all of us up to God in His Person on Calvary. The sacrifice of the Mass thus puts the fruits of the redemption wrought on Calvary within the reach of every man. By taking active part in the Mass, the Christian gives his personal consent to the general sacrifice Christ made for all men on Calvary; and through Christ, he thus offers himself up to God as an acceptable child. The fruits made possible for all by the sacrifice on Calvary, are in the Mass made real for all who offer up the sacrifice of the Mass properly.

With this we also come to the answer of the second question above, why we should pray in the Mass for the acceptance of Christ's oblation, as if the eternal Father could refuse His only-begotten Son, or had not already accepted Him. In the offering of bread and wine, all the people associated with the action of the priest offer themselves up to God. Whether God accepts a person always depends on the good will, the condition of the soul and mind, of that person. When at the consecration Christ descends into our gifts, the chances for the acceptance of the sacrifice have become supreme. But there is always a chance of our not being received with Christ because of our own sins and weaknesses. The more we are freed from them, the more closely can we be united with Christ, and therefore the more completely received by God. It is for

this that we pray, when we beseech God so earnestly in the words of the Mass after the Consecration. Christ then has become our offering, and in Christ we are offering also ourselves. When we ask God to accept our gifts, we mean that He should accept us together with Christ, and it is for the acceptance of Christ as *our* offering, and for the fuller acceptance *of ourselves with Christ*, that we are praying.

* * * *

This brings us to the third general answer that we gave at the beginning to the question, Why do Catholics attend Mass? "The son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister," Christ had said of Himself long ago (Matt. 20: 28). We have seen how Christ continues His ministry in the sacrifice of the Mass throughout all time. He there renews the sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody manner for our sake. But we have also seen that there would be little meaning in the renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary, if it did not give the people of all times an opportunity of actively entering into the sacrifice of Christ. That the Mass is indeed a sacrifice for the people, as well as a sacrifice of the people themselves, has thus been hinted at in the preceding paragraphs. The next paragraphs will try to explain more fully how these characteristics are developed in the action of the Mass, how the very text of the Mass indicates that the sacrifice is intimately associated with the people, and calls for active participation on their part.

BECAUSE THE MASS IS ALSO THE SACRIFICE OF THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE.

The sublime nature of the sacrifice of the Mass derives from the fact, as we have seen, that Christ Himself is offered up in it. It is most truly the sacrifice of Christ. We have also mentioned that only the ordained priest, who received his power from a direct descendant of the Apostles, has the power of consecration, and therefore of celebrating the sacrifice of the Mass. These truths, if considered by themselves, might still make the Mass appear to

us as something very distant from the ordinary Christian attending it. Even if it be known that the priest really represents the people, yet will the distance of the people from the Mass seem great to all whose knowledge of the true nature of the Mass is limited. As a matter of fact *the Mass is a collective act of worship*, in which the faithful have the right and duty to play also an active part. The Mass is in a true sense also the sacrifice of the people.

THE MASS AS A COLLECTIVE ACT.

The text of the Mass, that is, the whole of the prayers which the priest says in offering the sacrifice of the Mass, is set down very strictly by the law of the Church. These prayers are therefore official, and can be taken as a safe indication of the nature of the Mass. Now, according to these prayers, not only is the priest the spokesman of the people that attend the Mass, when he offers the latter; but at times the action of the Mass contains a sort of dialogue, in which the people have their part as well as the priest.

Formerly all Masses were sung; they were what we now call high Masses. In the early times certain parts were sung by the people, and the rest sung or recited by the priest. The parts sung by the people were then not recited by the priest at all. The people therefore took an active part in the very words of the Mass. Today the servers in ordinary Masses answer the prayers of the priest. But these answers are still made by the servers for all the people present. Hence it is even today the intention of the prayers of the Mass that the people join at least in mind if not in word, in the answers of the servers and in the prayers of the priest. *The very words of the text of the Mass show that all present should join their minds and hearts to the action of the priest, so that all offer up the sacrifice together under the leadership of the priest. The people should, as Pius X indicated, not pray in the Mass, but pray the Mass.* And the reason for this can only be, that the Mass is the sacrifice of the whole people.

During the Mass the priest recites certain special prayers of petition. Before beginning them he turns to

the people, spreads his hands to include all present and says: "The Lord be with you." The server or choir answers for the people: "And with thy spirit." Then the priest asks all to pray with him when he says aloud: "*Oremus*—Let us pray." He recites the special prayers, in which he always uses the pronoun *we* or *our*, since he is speaking not only for himself but for all those attending the Mass. At the end of these prayers the server or choir answers "Amen" for the people, which means "So be it." It is the assent of the people to the prayers of the priest.

In the same manner the offerings are made for the people by the priest. At the end of the first stage of the offering, as we have seen, the priest expressly turns to the people to exhort them in these words: "Pray, brethren, that *my sacrifice and yours*," etc. And in the answer, "May the Lord receive the sacrifice at thy hands," the people distinctly indicate that the priest is also their representative and is offering the sacrifice for them. The second prayer of the Canon reads: "Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants and handmaids, N. N. [this refers to the special intention of the Mass], and *of all here present*, whose faith is known to Thee and likewise their devotion, *on whose behalf we offer* unto Thee, and *who themselves offer unto Thee*," etc.

Similarly, at the beginning of the offering of the consecrated Bread and Wine, the prayer reads: "Wherefore, O Lord, we Thy servants, and likewise Thy holy people . . . offer unto Thy supreme majesty," etc. The entire prayer of offering through the three successive stages is a collective prayer, showing that all should together enter into the sacrificial action. The Mass is thus meant to be a collective sacrifice of all united with the priest; and all who attend the Mass should therefore unite themselves actively with the words and sentiments of the officiating priest.

THE ANCIENT OFFERTORY PROCESSION.

The part taken by the people in the sacrifice of the Mass was formerly well shown by the so-called offertory procession. When the part of the Mass preparatory to the

action of offering was ended, the priest turned to the people. The latter came up to him in procession and delivered their offerings of bread, wine, oil, vegetables, or whatever it might be, into his hands. Part of the bread and wine was put on the sacrificial table for the sacrifice of the Mass itself. The remainder of the offerings was set on side tables for the support of the church, and especially for the poor of the parish.

In this way the *sacrificial oblations offered by the priest came directly from the people* attending Mass. The *objects offered were directly their own*. The Mass was therefore very truly their own sacrifice, and the gifts offered truly represented all of those who had given anything in the procession.

This custom died out centuries ago. Likewise, after money had come into more general use as a means of buying and selling, and as a general convenient way of carrying around one's goods or giving donations, the custom of money donations at the offertory began to be substituted for that of giving other, bulkier goods. About the same time the custom of a money stipend for Mass came into more general use. These practices, as we have them today, are really not so different from the old offertory procession as they may at first seem to be. They are just as much a way of giving the offertory gifts for the Mass, as was that of the old procession. They are this same procession translated into terms of modern life.

THE MASS AS THE PEOPLE'S SACRIFICE.

It is therefore as true today as ever, if indeed not even truer, that the offerings of the Mass are those of the people. *Not only the offerings, but everything necessary for the sacrifice of the Mass, today comes from the people.*

For the sacrifice of the Mass many things are necessary. There are first of all the properly ordained priests; there are a church building and an altar, altar vessels and vestments, altar cloths, candles, etc. And all of this, everything connected with the sacrifice, comes from the people, is obtainable only through the free donations of the peo-

ple. St. Paul had said long ago that those who serve the altar should live from the altar. The priests, who officially celebrate the Mass, get their support from the people. Without the offerings of the people, there would be no support for the priests. Likewise the church building, the altar, the utensils, the vestments, etc., are obtained only through the contributions and offerings of the people. All of these represent real self-denial, real self-sacrifice on the part of the whole people.

In the same way, as we said above, the bread and wine offered in the Mass are truly given by the people themselves. Hence all who have in any way contributed of their own goods for the support of the church and its sacrifice, have the best right to consider the wine and bread offered in the Mass as their own personal offering. This is not true, therefore, only of the person who has offered a stipend in order to have a Mass offered for his special intention. It is just as true of all those who make their proper offering at the collection taken up at the Mass; and just as true of all others who have in any way contributed to the construction or upkeep of the church and its belongings—and this, regardless of what the amount contributed may have been, as long as it represents any kind of self-denial. The widow's mite, we know, was of the greatest value in the eyes of Christ.

Viewed also from this standpoint, then, *the people have the best right to consider the offerings of the Mass their own offerings.* And they should feel the strict propriety of uniting themselves heart and soul with the prayers of the priest. Especially should they by right consider that *in the offering of the water and wine they are offering themselves to God,* since the offerings so truly represent them. The bread and wine are the truest symbols of the offerers themselves; they have come out of the living energy of the givers, are part of the sweat and blood of their daily toil. In that way the Mass becomes very properly a living oblation of the people themselves. "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and give Him of the first of all thy fruits," the inspired word of God exhorts the people (Proverbs 3: 9). The Mass, because its

offerings come so truly from the labors of the people, is an eminent fulfillment of this command.

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CHRIST AND THE PEOPLE.

Joining the above thoughts with what was said previously of the Mass as the sacrifice of Christ Himself, we obtain some kind of idea of the great value of the Mass for all the people that are in any way connected with it.

It is for the faithful attending the Mass that Christ descends upon the altar at the Consecration. His descent, we can say in a way, happens to the people attending the Mass; it is an event most intimately connected with them. A moment's reflection will make this more evident. We have seen that the oblations offered in the sacrifice of the Mass are the gifts of the people themselves. They represent the people, especially those who by attending the Mass also actively enter into the action of offering, and actively associate themselves with the gifts offered. Now as the Mass progresses, it is into these very gifts that Christ enters. *Christ substitutes Himself for that which was offered by the people as representing themselves, identifies Himself with that which stands for those attending the Mass.* Christ thus enters actively into the action of the Mass, in order to complete the offering of the people in a more perfect manner.

The thought is sublime in its meaning, and inexhaustible. St. Paul has told us that we were baptized with Christ, buried and risen with Him in the same death and resurrection, that we must live with Christ (Romans, Chapter 6). This is most fully realized in the sacrifice of the New Law. In the Mass Christ Himself takes the first step towards a most intimate union with us, and makes it possible for those who attend the Mass with proper disposition to become true sharers in Himself. This is indeed the further living-out of the great event that occurred when Christ first took upon Himself a human nature and came upon this earth.

When the chalice is being prepared for the offering, wine and water are mixed. The wine represents Christ, and the water the people, according to the accompanying

prayer, which reads in part: "O God, who hast established the nature of man in wondrous dignity and still more admirably restored it, grant that through the mystery of this water and wine, we may be made partakers of His divinity, who has deigned to become partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ," etc. It is through the Consecration, when Christ enters into the gifts of the people, that this prayer is realized in the Mass. Christ one time deigned to partake of human nature, to take upon Himself the "form of man". The further purpose of this was, that men might become partakers of the divine nature of Christ. The sacrifice of Calvary made this possible for all men once for all. In Baptism we realize this possibility the first time. But it is the daily sacrifice of the Mass that continues ever to turn this possibility into greater reality for all who enter properly into the spirit of the Mass.

CONTACT WITH THE DIVINE

As we have said, it is Christ who in the Mass takes the first step by descending into the gifts of the people. Thereby it becomes possible for the people to unite themselves to Christ in an intimate spiritual union. Thus *united with Christ, they can now through Christ offer themselves to the Father* with a much better assurance of being accepted by Him. In Christ they have an offering of infinite value, and by uniting themselves with Him, they are offering themselves in the very manner chosen and perpetuated by Christ Himself for their salvation and redemption.

The deeper spiritual part of the people in the Mass is manifold. By participating in the offering, the people become the offerers of the sacrifice with the priest. Blessed Albert the Great said many years ago: "Those who bear themselves and their gifts to the altar make the offering with special intention. And therefore they are in a special manner contained in and offered in the oblation of the altar. . . . Therefore we must exhort the people to participate in the offering, for he who offers in the oblations unites his own self to the victim by a special intention."

And the great Bishop Bossuet said: "Not only do we offer the gifts with the priest, but with the gifts we also offer ourselves. . . . When the real body of the Savior is actually offered to God, there is a new reason for offering up anew the entire Church, which is His body in another sense, and the faithful who are the members of that body. . . . Thus the mystery of the mystic body of Christ is fulfilled, when all the members unite to offer themselves in and through Him."

The sacrifice of the Mass begins by an offering to God by the people, which represents the giving of themselves to God. With the descent of Christ into the gifts of the people, a deep spiritual union between people and Christ is effected. Thereafter the people and the priest offer themselves together with Christ, they in union with Him are the oblation offered. And Christ is united with the priest and the people in offering the sacrifice to the Father. Christ therefore both offers and is offered in the Mass, and through Christ all the people become more efficacious offerers and at the same time more acceptable offerings. In other words, the Mass is a sacrifice that gives the people intimate contact with God. And this contact is perfected sacramentally in another part of the Mass, which we have not discussed in these pages. In the sacramental Communion this intimate union of people and Christ is perfected. *In both of these contacts with the Divine, the sacrificial and the sacramental, lies the sublime and inexhaustible spiritual value of the Mass for all the people.*

Through this contact in the Mass the whole life of the Christian is influenced. In the Mass the people offer themselves. From the very beginning the gifts offered truly represent part of their own lives. In return they receive of the divine life. They receive ever greater spiritual strength to live the life of Christ at all moments of the day. By offering themselves in the Mass, therefore, they receive the grace to fulfill the words of St. Paul also outside the Mass; "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God" (Rom. 12: 1).

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