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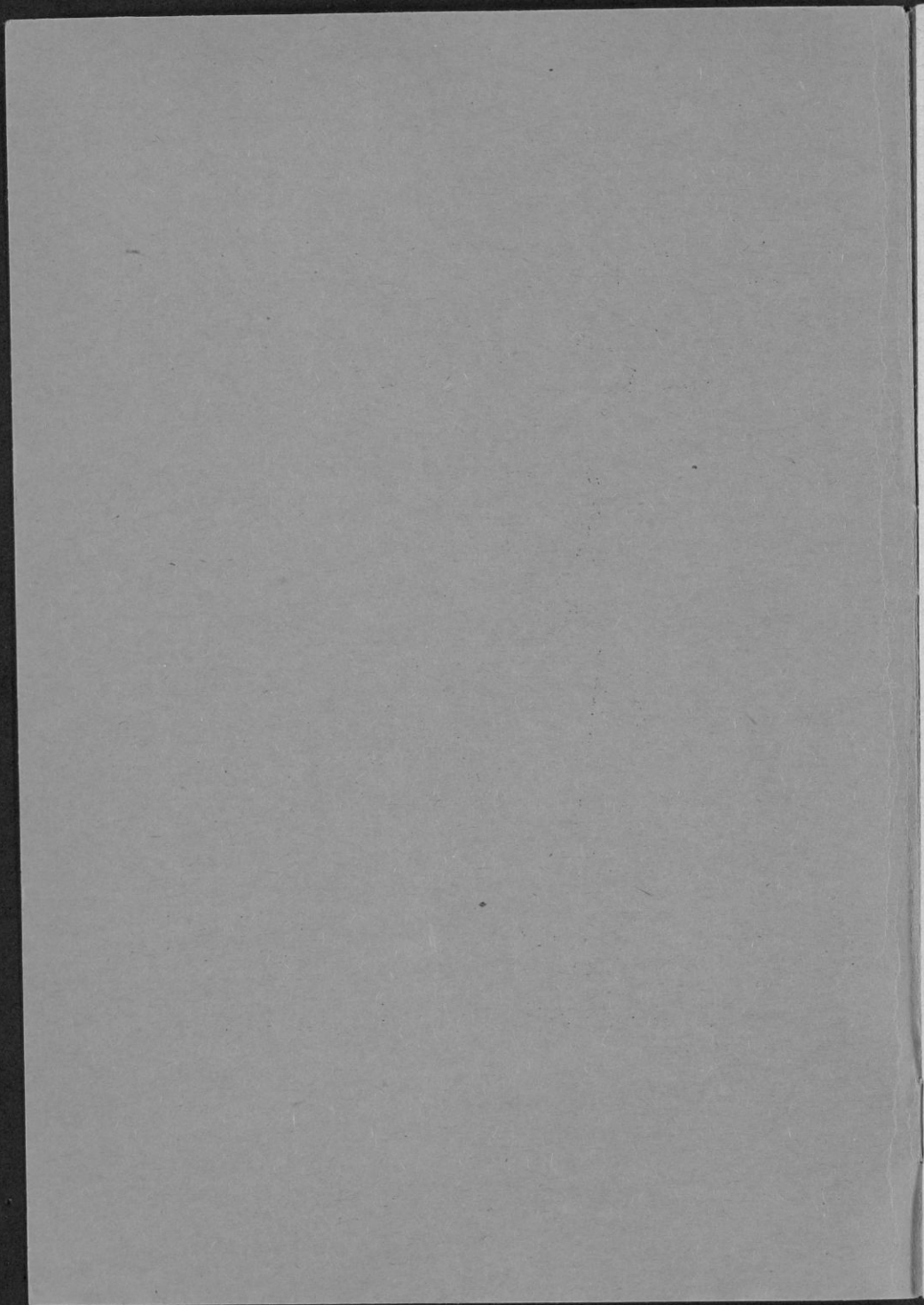
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The Sacramental SYSTEM

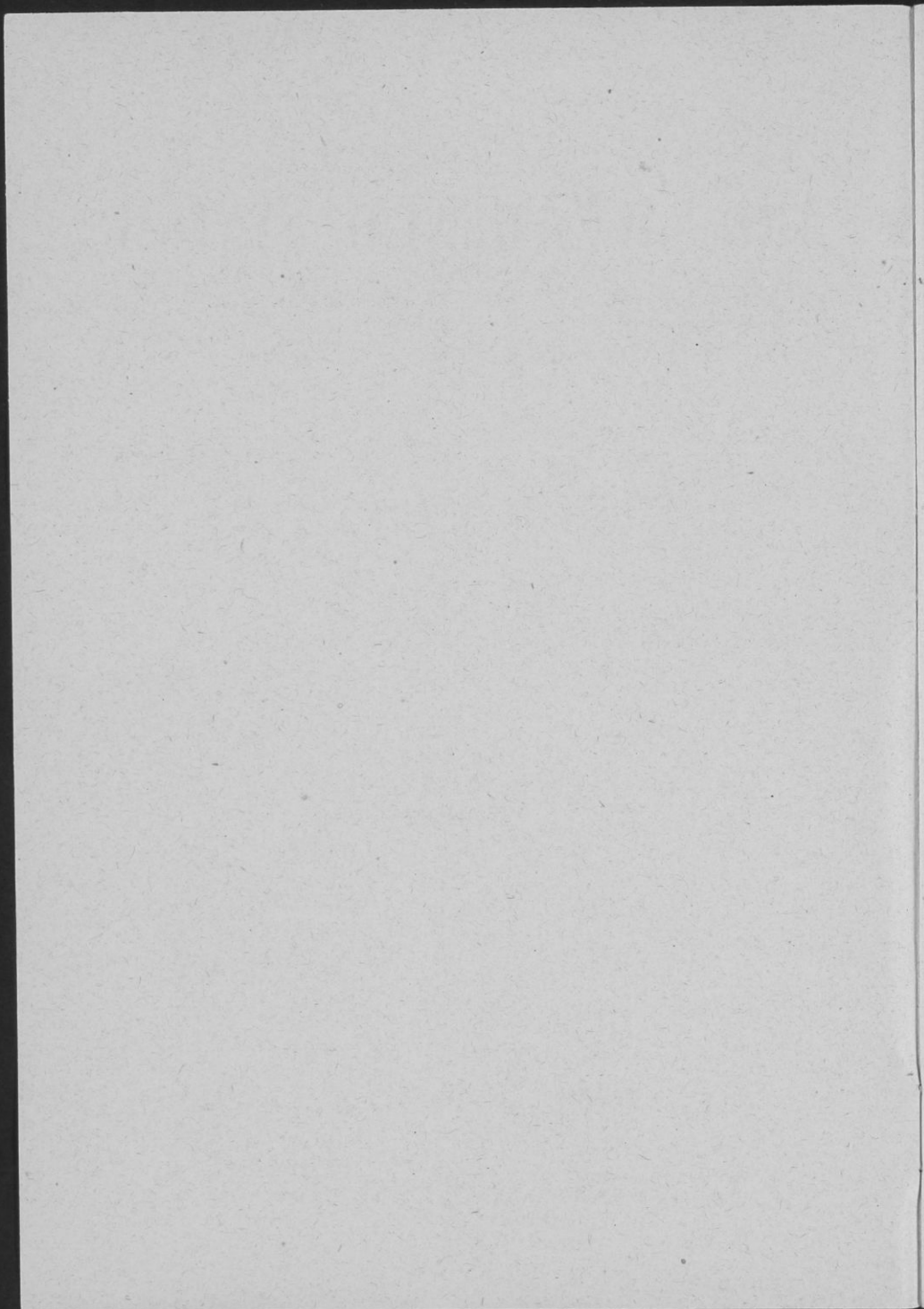


Rt. Rev. Msgr. Ambrose J. Burke
The Catholic Hour

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THE SACRAMENTAL SYSTEM



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Five addresses delivered in the nationwide Catholic Hour, produced by the National Council of Catholic Men, in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company, from October 1 through October 29, 1944.

BY

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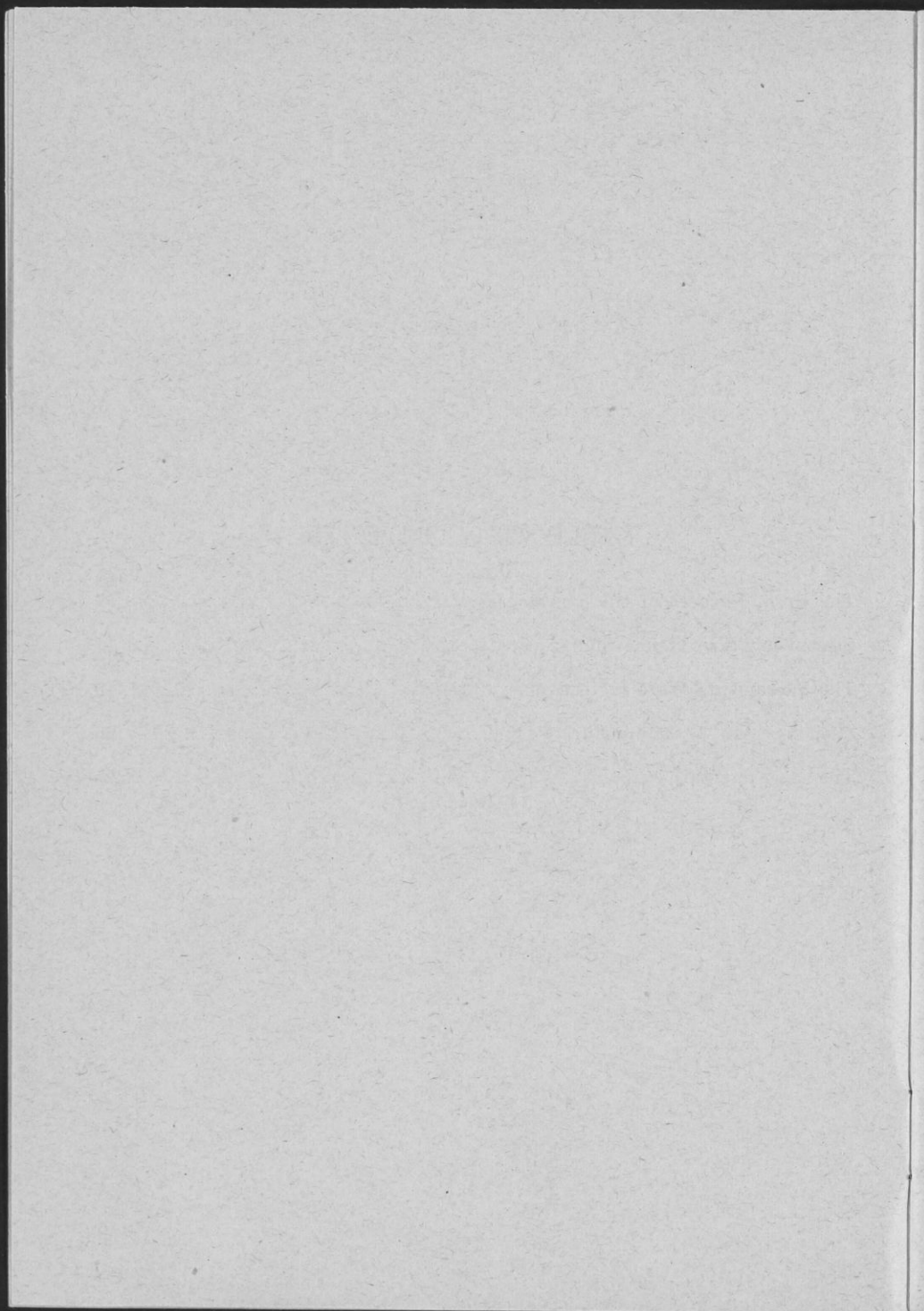
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THE GREAT PURPOSE OF THE SACRAMENTS

Address delivered on October 1, 1944

"I love life" is the title of a semi-classical song often heard on the radio. This sentiment might very well be the "theme song" of every living thing, for every living thing does love life and is intensely and actively interested in keeping itself alive. As different as the three great classes of living creatures—plants, brute animals, and men—are from one another, they all have this in common, the urge above all else to keep alive. If we could assemble all living things and could ask them, "To what purpose do you devote most of your time and energy?" the answer would come back in a unanimous chorus, "Our chief concern is to keep ourselves alive."

"The violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye,"

apparently with no effort, is busy night and day drawing sustaining life from the earth and the sun. While the

"Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night

in a different manner—sometimes cruel, often violent—constantly seeks food to preserve its life. Man-kind, too, is chiefly concerned with this one basic need. At times we resemble the plants, quietly going

about the business of keeping ourselves alive without injury to any other creatures in their pursuit of living. There are other times when we "with souls that cringe and plot," resort to less honorable means to feed the flame of life.

While we have no hope of finding the fountain of youth, we do all that we can to put off death as long as possible. We are grateful to modern medical science both for prolonging life and for making us more healthy while living. We have, in fact, become faddists on the subject of health. We take nostrums for every ill and ache; we swallow capsules to put us to sleep; we eat only food that has been impregnated with vitamins. We are, indeed, serious about this matter of living. We enjoy life, we want a long life, and we desire to get the most out of it.

In the plan of God all men were destined to an eternity of glorious living. We know what happened to that beautiful idea in the mind of God. It is an old, familiar story. The creature rebelled against the Creator. And the result? Human tragedy. Our first parents are driven out of Paradise, man loses dominion over the beasts of the

earth, he is compelled to labor by the sweat of his brow and the toil of his hands, sickness and disease lay him waste, and finally he must die the death. Nor is that all. To the original act of rebellion against God, the children of Adam have joined their own personal sins and are paying the price. Their pilgrimage to the grave is accompanied by heartaches, tears, and bloodshed.

Sometimes in Hollywood, producers of plays are confronted with the problem of a suitable ending for a movie scenario. Should they be realistic and permit the characters of their story to be engulfed in the inevitable consequence of their own misdeeds? Or should they give the hero the means of providing the unfortunate principals an escape from the great fate that should await them? Not infrequently the story is filmed with two endings, the one happy—the other tragic.

In the story of the human race the Great Producer has provided, likewise, two endings. Almighty God seeing the misery of man, made to His own image and likeness, has sent us a Hero, His own beloved Son, who has assumed the penalties due to us, and by His passion and death has atoned for the sins of the whole race. But the final curtain to the drama does not fall

upon Calvary. Redemption, for all of Christ's sufferings and death, is not thrust automatically upon us. Every man has an important and difficult role to play. While living in the world and occupied with the necessity of keeping body and soul together, we must seek, possess, and maintain the friendship of God. We have to learn to strike the proper balance between the demands of worldly concern which require our daily, immediate attention, and the larger self-interests which determine our happiness for all eternity. Christ has given us a standard that enables us to observe the right proportion: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's: and to God the things that are God's" (*Luke 20:25*). To that directive He has added a solemn warning, "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?" (*Mark 8:36*). It is a warning that is sadly neglected by the run of men.

The world is too much with us;
late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay
waste our powers.

Long before the poet and philosopher recognized man's absorbing interest in mere physical and social well-being, God foresaw the difficulties that would beset us. His beloved Son has done more than

redeem us, more than show us by His own example how to live the perfect life; He has given us the means of applying universal redemption to our own individual souls.

What are these means? The New Testament abounds with suggestions. The ordinary means recommended are prayer, fasting, penance, almsgiving, and other works of charity. And, of course, supporting these good deeds is the necessary observance of the Ten Commandments. But means were always at the disposal of man. Since the time of Moses, men have always known the Commandments (if they have not always kept them), they have prayed, done penance, and performed acts of charity. Apart from His Sacrifice on Calvary, did Christ provide no new means, more accessible and more efficacious, whereby the grace of His presence, the virtue in His touch, the affection of His glance, and the power of His spoken word might be available to the millions who would believe in Him long after His departure from this earth? We are not disappointed. Christ has left us the seven Sacraments, seven channels of grace flowing from the Cross, seven means ordained by God for particularizing the Redemption of Calvary in the person of every man.

How admirably the Sacramental System satisfies our every need.

There is a striking parallel between life in the natural order and the life of Grace given by the Sacraments. Just as physical life begins with conception and birth, supernatural life is born in Baptism. The helpless infant must be provided for until he can grow sufficiently strong in bodily health to meet physical dangers. Confirmation confers spiritual manhood. In the natural order men must eat if they would live; the Holy Eucharist is the divine food of the soul. When men become sick, they consult a physician and take the medicine prescribed for them; the Sacrament of Penance is the medicine that heals the soul sick from sin. And finally men die. In the natural order the dying man is at the end of his resources. Nothing more can be done for him. Relatives stand helplessly around, awaiting the inevitable issue. Here, thank God, the parallel breaks down, for the supernatural life does not end with physical death. How good Christ has been to give us a Sacrament for this particular moment! Extreme Unction makes us resigned to the death of the body and prepares the soul for its flight to God.

The other two Sacraments, while contributing immeasurably to the sanctification of those who receive

them, belong primarily to the social order. That society may survive through vigorous and wholesome family life, Christ instituted the Sacrament of Matrimony. And finally, that the Church may endure until the end of time and fulfill its mission of bringing salvation to men through the administration of the Sacraments, Christ has given us Holy Orders.

This in brief is the Sacramental System. Take it away, and we are little better off than were the people of the Old Testament. For what would we have that they did not possess? What do they have who reject the Seven Sacraments? They still have prayer, penance, almsgiving, and acts of charity. Are these sufficient? Christ gives us the answer, "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of

water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (*John* 3:5), and "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you . . . Many therefore of his disciples, hearing it, said: This saying is hard, who can hear it? . . . After this many of his disciples went back; and walked no more with him" (*John* 6:54-67).

If we are to walk with Christ, if we are to be saved Christ's way, then we must make use of the special aids that He has given us. The Sacramental System is the merciful provision of Christ for getting and repairing and sustaining the supernatural life of man. Our individual life story can have a happy ending—if we really want

SACRAMENTS ARE VISIBLE SIGNS

Address delivered on October 8, 1944

Men have strange ideas. One of the strangest, because opposed to our very nature, is the idea that since God is a spirit the only religion worthy of Him is an act of pure intellect. Such a theory, of course, presupposes that man's physical nature is essentially evil and as repulsive as the ugly Gargantua, famed gorilla of the circus. Man is not a beast, nor on the other hand is he a pure spirit like an angel. He cannot be expected to act contrary to his own nature. He neither honors God by conforming solely to his animal instincts as do dumb brutes, nor can he worship God in pure abstraction as if he were an angelic spirit. What he cannot do, God does not expect him to attempt. The spirit that is in man is so bound to his physical nature that in his life on earth no truth can be apprehended except through the medium of his senses.

In dealing with man, God has always recognized the two-fold nature of His creature. From the very first God revealed Himself and worked through what struck the senses, a whirlwind,¹ a burning bush,² a pillar of fire,³ a cloud over

the tabernacle.⁴ When in the fullness of time God was ready to redeem men, He established once and for all the principle that God will not save human nature apart from human nature. He might have remained invisible to the eye and inaudible to the ear, but He did not. He became Man like unto ourselves. In Bethlehem we behold a tiny, helpless Babe wrapped in cheap swaddling clothes lying in a manger, and the Infant is the outward sign of a hidden, omnipotent God. What other appearance could reveal so well the infinite love of God? What other manifestation could so tug at the human heart, attracting it to a God who was never so close and lovable as in this outward sign of helpless infancy? The whole man is reached by this sacramental expression of the Incarnation: the affections, the imagination and the senses as well as the mind of man. A rational approach to God is never merely intellectual.

Just as God the Father used sensible objects to reveal His presence, Christ the Son employed the ordinary, close-by things for holy purposes. Hilaire Belloc has express-

1 Job 38:1

2 Exodus 3:2

3 Exodus 13:21

4 Exodus 33:10

ed Christ's use of simple objects in the following verses:

When Jesus Christ was four years old,
The angels brought Him toys of gold,
Which no man ever had bought or sold.
And yet with these He would not play.
He made Him small fowl out of clay,
And blessed them till they flew away:

Tu creasti, Domine!

(*Sonnets and Verses—Sheed and Ward*)

How true and apposite are the words of Holy writ, "For thou lovest all things that are and hatest none of the things which thou hast made; for thou didst not appoint, or make any thing hating it" (*Wisdom 11:25*). Our Lord did not despise the ordinary things of His creation, nor would He have us, His children, despise them. In reprimand to the impulsive well-meaning Apostle, St. Peter, Christ made clear His mind on this point: "That which God hath cleansed, do not thou call common" (*Acts 10:15*).

Page through the Gospel story, just a bit carefully and behold how frequently Christ used familiar objects in His teaching and in imparting grace. Now it is a bit of clay and spittle in the hands of Christ, rubbing sight into eyes that

are blind. (*John 9:6*): Or He forgives a poor woman's sins with a finger stirring in the loose sand at His feet, and advance notice as it were of a merciful forgiveness in the Catholic confessional, "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them" (*John 20:23*). Now it is the slight touch of His shoulder garment by a woman, long sick. Though it was but the edge, and the edge of only a garment that had been touched, yet our Blessed Lord could say, "Somebody hath touched me; for I know that virtue is gone out of me" (*Luke 8:46*). Again it is a coin in the palm of Christ's hand. He had said, "Shew me the coin of the tribute" (*Matthew 22:19*). Think of it, with that penny as a basis, a delicate relationship of tremendous importance was settled for all time. The relationship of Church and State hung on a coin's inscription. Yes, Christ did use simple objects about Him. They became in His hands the physical basis, the symbol, the outward sign, of wondrous effects touching the souls of men.

Christ was not the first nor the last to use symbols. Man has always used signs in communicating with other men. Our everyday life is taken up in observing them. We wait for the traffic light to change from red to green. We see on the

streets a man dressed in a certain uniform and at once recognize an officer of the law. We express our friendship for one another by a hearty shake of the hand. We join civic clubs and fraternal organizations by passing through certain rites of initiation replete with symbolic meaning. We honor all who die in defense of our freedoms by placing a wreath on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We symbolize our love of country by an act of reverence for the flag.

There is, however, a great difference between our everyday use of signs and the employment by Christ of like symbols. If the Son of God had used signs merely to explain difficult truths of religion, we would have been touched at His kindness in accommodating His knowledge to the limitations of our minds. But Christ did more than that; in the Sacraments He pushed His signs on to a divine causality. He used our familiar, tangible, and homely things—like water, bread, and oil—to signify to our minds what He was effecting in our souls. Water cleanses, bread supports life, oil brings comfort to an aching body. But the mystic touch of Christ gives to these simple elements a power beyond themselves. They are no longer mere signs or tokens, but real deposi-

ories of God's grace both signifying what they contain and containing what they promise. The words of absolution pronounced over the palsy-stricken man, "Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee" (*Matthew 9:2*), were not merely a message of encouragement, but an effective cleansing from the sin. So it is always with the Sacraments. It is not so much that the signs are appropriate, but that the will and intent of Christ have endowed them with an efficacy far beyond their nature.

It is through the visible signs of the Sacraments that Christ perpetuates Himself in the minds and hearts and souls of His followers. He does so, not because Sacraments are necessary to God, but because they are necessary for man. The soul of man is always open to God. He is a pure Spirit and can make His approach to the soul silently, directly, without any intermediary means. But man is not a pure spirit; he is spirit and body, and, therefore, he needs something that he can see, or handle, or feel, or hear. If Christ had not given us His Sacraments, we would probably have attempted to introduce some less efficacious symbols of our own, for as St. Augustine has wisely remarked, men cannot be gathered together for any length

of time in the name of religion, whether true or false, without some visible sign or sacrament to unite them. When a sick man is anointed with holy oil, this action can be seen with the eyes; when absolution is pronounced in the tribunal of Penance this can be heard with the ears; when a person receives Holy Communion he can perceive the Sacrament with several senses simultaneously. The adage, "Out of sight out of mind," can never be applied to those who accept and make use of the Sacraments. The sacramental signs are a constant reminder that Christ is ever present in the seven definite channels of grace that He Himself has determined.

But while the nature of man demands these tangible signs of religious practice we never, for one moment, imagine that mere signs could themselves produce any effect on the soul. We do not believe that the water of Baptism, for instance, seeps down through the head of the child until it reaches the soul. Neither do we believe that somehow God hides mysteriously in the water. The sign of water joined with the accompanying action and words are but the instrument

through which God, the only source and cause of grace, chooses to operate. It is God Himself who cleanses the soul.

No well informed man, then, should affect surprise or shock at the Sacramental System operative in the Catholic Church. A sacrament-based religion is nothing other than a religion embodying a divine psychology that recognizes our difficulty in communicating with an infinitely pure Spirit. The principle of sacramentalism is as old as the race; it is the divine law of life. Why the surprise then, and the shock, on beholding sacramentalism as a functioning reality? As a matter of fact, the Sacramental System of the Catholic Church is the highest fulfillment of a timeless reality—matter, action, and words, the outward sign of high spiritual purpose, elevated by almighty God beyond the possible imagining of any man. The Sacraments are fruitful signs, adequately serving the nature and needs of natural man; signs abundantly serving man, so needful of Redemption; signs rich in their bequest to all generations of men; signs straight from the hand and heart of Christ.

THE SACRAMENTS WERE INSTITUTED BY CHRIST

Address delivered on October 15, 1944

Those outside the Church often envy the certainty in our Faith that we Catholics enjoy. Our position is so clear and so positive. We believe whatever the Church teaches us to believe, because we are firmly convinced that Christ Himself instituted that Church and promised ever to preserve her from error: "And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (*Matthew 28:20*). For us the word of the Church is nothing less than the word of God. Once we accept this infallibility, all other doctrines of the Church are embraced without hesitation. Our position may be expressed in one simple question and one definite answer: "What does the Church teach?" "That I believe!"

We may not be able to explain and defend in detail every Catholic dogma; we are not all theologians. Theology is an exact, a complex, a perfect science, and individually we may not have the ability, nor the training, nor the time required, for competent study. Yet one who has had scarcely any formal education may have as strong a faith in the teaching of the Church as the most learned theologian.

We know further that the Church

never takes undue advantage of this immunity from error, promised by her Divine Founder. She is not given to sudden or capricious definition of strange doctrine. In a sense no "new" doctrine is ever defined. What the Church officially declares to be a matter of faith has already been accepted for centuries as a part of Catholic teaching and practice. A dogma requires formal definition only when it is challenged by heretical opinion and there is imminent danger of confusion in the minds of Catholics. When President Roosevelt defined the "Four Freedoms," he was not proposing a new political theory; he was merely giving explicit emphasis to fundamental individual rights that we Americans had always held sacred. His declaration of our liberties was occasioned by the insidious infiltration of philosophy from abroad that denies all rights to the individual. The Church acts in the same way.

The most complete statement of Catholic sacramental doctrine is to be found in the proceedings of the Council of Trent. That particular Council met with the very purpose of confuting the errors that had arisen in the early part of the

sixteenth century. For the first time in the history of Christianity men had challenged the doctrine that Christ had instituted the Seven Sacraments. The subject of the Sacramental System was extensively and thoroughly investigated. Competent and saintly theologians bent every effort to the task. They studied the Holy Scriptures, critically and prayerfully; they examined the writings of the Fathers. In fact, every means known to scholarly research was employed. Finally, the complete evidence was presented to the Bishops of the entire Church, meeting under the leadership of the Holy Father. How diligent and sincere was the deliberation of the Council may be judged from the fact that it was in session, with the exception of necessary recesses, for eighteen years, from 1545 to 1563.

Though the Church in her Councils invariably has recourse to all possible intelligent and prayerful scholarship, she does not rely solely on human endeavor. In the definition of doctrine, far more important is the intervention of the Holy Spirit, whose divine assistance was promised by Christ to His Church. And so, the Council of Trent, after employing the services of learned theologians and Biblical scholars, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, unequivocally de-

clared that the Sacraments of the New Law were all instituted by Jesus Christ.

Even though the institution of the Seven Sacraments by Christ is an article of faith, and to be Catholic is to accept it, nevertheless Catholics are not forbidden to ask why the doctrine was defined; they are not denied the right to examine the generous evidence studied at the Council of Trent. It is quite obvious from her insistence on Catholic education, from the courses of philosophy and theology in her colleges and seminaries, from the requirement of catechetical instruction of prospective converts, from the wealth of her apologetic literature, that the Catholic Church encourages her members to see a reason for the faith that is in them. And so we may ask, "What does the New Testament say about the Seven Sacraments?" Do the Four Gospels offer undeniable proof for the divine institution of each of them? Our answer is "No!" There is, indeed, definite and conclusive evidence to show that Christ did directly institute two Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Eucharist. For the other five there are meaningful intimations, but no explicit and absolute proof.

Since Evangelical non-Catholics admit no other rule of faith than

the Bible, since they accept only those Sacraments for which there is explicit and complete testimony in the Four Gospels, they are consistent in allowing only two. We Catholics, however, are not disturbed. We yield to none in our reverence for the Sacred Scriptures, but on the authority of the Bible itself we have access to another authentic source for the teaching of Christ, namely Tradition. In the very last verse of his Gospel, St. John wrote: "But there are also many other things which Jesus did; which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written" (*John 21:25*). These "other things" have been treasured by the Church as a precious legacy of equal value to the Written Word. Received and preserved by the Apostles, handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another, recorded in the writings of the Fathers, jealously safeguarded by the Church, we hold that the teachings of Christ not found in the Gospels have come down to us in their original truth unaffected by heretical opinion, absolutely genuine, and therefore deserving of our acceptance.

The old axiom, "Possession is nine points of the law," is applicable to the Sacraments. No one

doubts that since the Council of Trent, Catholics have believed in the divine institution of the Seven Sacraments. Can we find unanimity of belief before that time? In the year 1521, Henry VIII wrote a treatise entitled, *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum*. Henry, for all his moral weaknesses, was Catholic-minded. His defense of the Seven Sacraments is good theology and, at the same time, historical evidence that before the separation of the Sects, when there was but one Church in Western Europe, all Christian people accepted this article of faith. Going back further, we find in the writings of the great Schoolmen of the Middle Ages rich testimony of the universal belief in Seven Sacraments. At the great Universities of Paris, Oxford, Cologne, Salamanca, Rome, Naples, and Genoa famous scholars, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Albert the Great, Duns Scotus, Peter Lombard, Roger Bacon, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux, taught the universally accepted doctrine of Seven Sacraments, divinely instituted. Turn back the centuries to the time of the Greek schismatic, Photius, who broke away from the Church in 869 A. D. Although separated from the Roman Catholic Church for centuries, the Greek Church, now as then, has always taught the same doctrine of the Seven Sacra-

ments. If we go back still further to the fifth and sixth centuries, we come to the Nestorian and Monophysite heresies. Their adherents erred in other matters of faith, but not in their teaching on the Sacraments, as their liturgical books clearly show.

We are now rather far back in the history of Christian faith. It would be very reassuring, of course, if we could produce unquestioned, positive proof of the belief of the Apostolic Church in the Seven Sacraments. The evidence of that remote time, however, is only implicit. The Fathers of the first four centuries make no formal assertion of our doctrine of the Sacraments. Yet their very silence is eloquent testimony. If the teaching of the Church in the fifth century were something novel, if a radical change in sacramental doctrine had been introduced, there would certainly have been controversy, even spirited opposition that would have left its traces in the records of history. The bishops and the faithful of the first four centuries jealously guarded the purity and integrity of the apostolic deposit of faith and practice. They did not hesitate to shed their blood in defense of their belief in the Trinity and in the nature and mission of Christ. But there were no martyrs, no militant apologists for the cause of the Seven Sacraments

among the Fathers of the first four centuries, simply because the institution of the Sacraments by Christ was never challenged.

On these historical grounds, then, we may legitimately conclude that the Christian Church, from apostolic times down to the Sixteenth Century, constantly and universally taught that Christ instituted Seven Sacraments.

Christ no longer treads this earth. We may keep His memory fresh in our minds by reading His words and the account of His deeds contained in the four Gospels. We may learn more of His teaching in the other books of the New Testament, wherein is recorded the faith and practice of His immediate followers. That knowledge may be increased by an acquaintance with the truths of tradition carefully preserved from generation to generation. From knowledge of Christ we may proceed to a conscious imitation of His example. But for Catholics, Christ is more than a precious memory, more than the perfect exemplar. In the visible society, which is the Church, He lives and teaches and rules and gives life to the world through the special channels of His Grace, the Sacraments. From the dawn of Christian faith down to the present day, Catholics have always believed,

do now believe, and to the end of institution by Christ of the Seven time will continue to believe in the Sacraments.

CATHOLICS ARE A SACRAMENTAL PEOPLE

Address delivered on October 22, 1944

Come with me to a Catholic Church. As we enter, the first object that strikes our eye is the baptismal font. Here the saving waters of the first and most necessary sacrament are poured upon the head of the unbaptized, making him "a son of God and an heir of heaven." Over there against the wall is the confessional, which is really a large cabinet with three doorways opening into separate small compartments. Let us open the middle door and look within. We see a chair placed here for the convenience of the priest when he hears confessions. At ear level, on either side, there is a sliding panel that can be opened revealing a small grille covered with a veil. The other two compartments are identical in appearance. Each has a kneeling bench placed beneath the grille, and an image of the crucified Christ. That is all there is to a confessional. The priest opens the sliding panels alternately, so that the penitents on the other side, one after another, can whisper their sins through the grille and hear in return the words of forgiveness: "I absolve thee from all your sins. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

At the far end of the church we see the altar on which the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered daily. Set upon the table of the altar is a cabinet several feet high with a door in front. This is the tabernacle, wherein dwells the Eucharistic Christ. That woman in the third pew is kneeling in prayer before the tabernacle, because there is Someone here to pray to.

So far, we have seen reminders of two great Sacraments, Baptism and Penance, and on the altar the tabernacle in which the Eucharistic Presence of Christ dwells. This, in turn, reminds us of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, as it is more commonly called.

But if we should make our visit during some church service, we might see the actual reception of one of the Sacraments. Let us say that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is being offered in the presence of a congregation of devout worshippers. At a certain point in the ceremony we notice men, women, and children leaving their pews and going to the altar rail, where the priest places a small white wafer of unleavened bread upon the tongue of each. This is the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life. And

here we may remark the great democracy of the Sacramental System. Before God, all men are equal. At the altar rail there is no distinction of class, race, or color; a millionaire may kneel beside a pauper; a governor of a state beside the humblest citizen.

If the Mass were a Nuptial Mass, we would witness an exchange of vows in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Or again, we might see a Bishop anoint the foreheads of young men and women in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Or perhaps it might be our good fortune to be present when a "man from among men" is ordained a priest of God. There is abundant evidence that the Catholic Church is a sacramental Church and Catholics a sacramental people.

The year 1905 was a turning point in sacramental history. In that year, Pope Pius X issued a decree urging the more frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Immediately there arose a great cry. Many thought that such familiarity with these Sacraments, precious channels of grace, would at the best make them too common and, at the worst, breed contempt. There was a possibility, they thought, that Catholics would become sacrament-minded and nothing else. But the dreaded eventualities have not ma-

terialized. The frequent reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist has not led to any abuse; it has, in fact, been the means of keeping people, especially the young, in the ways of grace.

Non-Catholics, too, regarded the new legislation with considerable skepticism. What was this running to Confession, but seeking a license to commit sin without fear of consequence? "Catholics have it too easy—do as they please, and then tell it to the priest." Well, that is more than many others do! Going to confession is not easy. It is no trivial matter to appear before any tribunal to acknowledge one's guilt. Even when we are summoned before a city magistrate for a traffic violation, we experience some trepidation. We avoid such an experience if we can. So, too, with Confession. To plead guilty in the confessional to a transgression of the moral law is not an action that we look upon lightly. The Sacrament of Penance is not an empty formula, consisting of a mere recital of sins, followed by an automatic absolution on the part of the priest. Neither is Penance, nor any other Sacrament, a magic charm or sleight-of-hand performance. If Sacraments are to have any effect upon the soul of the recipient, they must be received with certain dispositions of heart and

will. At the very time that the priest, acting in the place of Christ, pronounces the words of forgiveness, the penitent recites a prayer, expressing his sorrow and affirming his resolution not to sin again. The act of contrition is a strong cry from a humble heart:

O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and, I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

Perhaps the best argument for Catholic devotion to the Sacraments is to be seen in their effect upon the lives of those who use them. It is a fact for all impartial observers to see that Catholics are sanctified through the Sacraments. Let us look at three great problems on the social horizon today. We all know that divorce is one of the greatest evils in American life. In England there is one divorce to every fifty-seven marriages; ¹ in Germany one marriage out of every fourteen ends in a divorce; ² in Japan the ratio is one to eleven; ³ while in the United States the proportion has leaped to one in every six! ⁴ This proportion is true of our country as a

whole; the figures do not reveal the ratio of divorces in Catholic families. But we do know that Catholics seldom resort to divorce as a solution to marital problems. Why? Is the answer simply that the Catholic Church forbids divorce? Legislation alone never prevented the breaking of a law. We learned that lesson, if we did not know it before, from our experiment with the Eighteenth Amendment. No, mere Church law would not stop divorce. Catholic husbands and wives encounter the same difficulties in married life as do those outside the Church. Selfishness, bad temper, incompatibility—yes, infidelity—are present in Catholic marriages too. But instead of rushing to a lawyer to start divorce-proceedings, Catholic married couples have recourse to the Sacraments as the means of preserving their marriage. They are aware that at the time of their marriage, they received a title to the actual graces sufficient to see them through all the difficulties that might arise in married life—for with us marriage is not a mere contract, but a real Sacrament. And over and above Matrimony, there are the two Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. When men and women in preparation for Confession examine their consciences and try to see their faults as they

¹ *Statesman's Year Book*, 1942, pp. 19-20

² *Idem.* p. 959

³ *Idem.* p. 1062

⁴ *The World Almanac*, 1944, p. 380

appear before God, as well as their injuries, the solution to marital problems is already well on the way. They make a firm purpose of amendment and are enriched and strengthened by the grace of Penance. Confession is followed by the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, in which they receive not only grace, but the source of grace, Christ Himself. And where Christ is, there must be peace and loyalty, fidelity and understanding.

Another problem causing widespread concern is juvenile delinquency. Our papers are full of reports from many cities of the alarming increase of juvenile crime. The Catholic Church has long had a solution. Just as marriage is safeguarded by the reception of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, so too is the age of adolescence. When growing boys and girls frequent Confession and Holy Communion, there is no juvenile delinquency.

We are now engaged in a horrible war; millions of our young men have left the security of family life to engage the enemy in mortal combat. Beside the physical danger, the opportunity for moral corruption is increased a hundredfold. Juvenile delinquency is now covered with a uniform. Again the Sacraments are the remedy. Catholic

chaplains have many tasks; they do, indeed, censor letters; they help maintain morale by talking to groups and to individuals; they arrange entertainments. But their chief work is to administer the Sacraments. Like other Christians, our chaplains, traversing the battlefields of the world, are ever restoring the friendship of God to the souls of our fighting men through a good Confession, and are reproducing the Christ-life in their hearts through Holy Communion. No American boy can be less a soldier for that.

Catholics are, indeed, a sacrament-minded people, a sacrament-fed people. We have recourse to the Sacraments in every need and in every crisis. As has been said, "from the cradle to the grave," we are accompanied all the days of our lives by the sacramental aids that Christ Himself has left to sanctify us. It is but natural, then, that when the shades of eternal night approach we should desire to die with the same Sacraments sustaining us to the last. It is simply a fact that we Catholics endeavor to sanctify life and death by sacramentalizing them. This is the reason why in time of sudden death we sometimes hear our Catholic people ask, "When was he to the Sacraments?" or, "When did he receive last?" From the morning

watch, in Baptism, even unto night, with Extreme Unction, the Sacramental System is a holy familiarity in lives that are really Catholic. Never need the words in Saint John's Gospel be applied to those who are devoted to the Sacraments: "Sir, thou hast nothing wherein to draw, and the well is deep" (*John* 4:11).

In the treasured heritage of Cardinal Newman's works is to be found a prayer that expresses the Catholic love for the Sacraments.

O my Lord and Saviour, support me in that hour in the strong arms of Thy sacraments, and by the fresh fragrance of Thy consolations. Let the absolving words be said over me, and the Holy oil sign and seal me, and Thy own Body be my food, and Thy Blood my sprinkling; and let my sweet Mother Mary breathe on me, and my angel whisper peace to me, and the glorious saints . . . smile on me; that in them all, I may receive the gift of perseverance and die, as I desire to live, in Thy faith, in Thy Church, in Thy service, and in Thy love. Amen.⁵

⁵ Cardinal Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*, p. 290

THE SACRAMENTALS

Address delivered on October 29, 1944

Only last month there appeared in a popular illustrated magazine two pictures of a doll, placed on an altar, adorned with religious objects, and flanked by lighted candles. The legend beneath read in part: "The most popular religious cult in this part of the country centers around a doll owned by a lady . . . in the hitherto sleepy town of La Coste, Texas. . . . This doll is reputed to have made the blind see, won baseball games and rescued men from the draft. It is also supposed to make all photographs come out blank, but these came out very well . . . The Catholic Archbishop of San Antonio has roundly condemned this as idolatry, but the ranks of worshippers are still increasing."

It is not unlikely that to many people, this devotion to the doll in La Coste, Texas, may not appear any more superstitious than many practices of Catholics. What are rosary beads, holy water, scapular medals, statues of the saints, the ashes distributed on the first day of Lent, the branches blessed on Palm Sunday, the Sign of the Cross, but superstition, pure and simple? It is a fair question to ask

and one that deserves a candid answer.

It is obvious that there must be some difference between the cult of the Texas doll and devotion to genuine sacramentals, for the Church condemns the one and approves the other. The first thing that Catholics must look for in any sacramental practice is the authority of the Church. The faithful know that security in private devotion can be had only when the Church, exercising her prerogative of divine authority, gives explicit approval to definite sacramentals. There is nothing that the Church abhors more than superstition, for superstition is religion gone astray. Superstition attaches more than natural powers to lifeless objects; it makes out of them, as it were, little gods, and claims for them such extravagant influences as those attributed to the unfortunate doll. Man's capacity for being taken in is unlimited. That is why the Federal Government has found it necessary to protect the unwary by passing strict postal laws, so that rogues who wish to fleece the innocent may be apprehended. We expect the Government to protect us from confidence men; with the same

assurance we look to the Church to shield us from charlatans operating in the name of religion.

Even when a certain sacramental has been officially approved, there is still the danger that it may be employed in a manner beyond the intention of the Church. A genuine devotion may be degraded into a magical charm. Suppose, for instance, that a man comes home from work and complains to his wife of a sharp pain in his side. Suppose that, instead of calling a doctor, she administers a teaspoonful of holy water at regular intervals, confident that this approved sacramental will provide a speedy recovery without the expense of an operation. Here we have an example of a superstitious use of a holy thing. Water blessed by the Church is one of the many approved sacramentals. It has its legitimate use, but the Church has never sanctioned holy water as a substitute for medical care. So too with other sacramentals; abuses are possible, just as they are possible with everything that is good. One of the best known sacramentals, the St. Christopher medal, may serve as a case in point. How many people put a metal image of St. Christopher in their cars as if it were a fourleaf clover, or a rabbit's foot! The medal itself is of no spiritual value unless it oc-

casions in the owner an expression of faith in God's merciful providence and protection.

A sacramental is simply anything set apart by the blessing of the Church for the purpose of exciting good thoughts and increasing devotion. It may be an article like a pair of rosary beads, a crucifix, or a medal bearing an image of some saint. The blessing which devotes such articles to religious purposes is also called a sacramental. The name comes from some similarity to the great Sacraments. Like the Sacraments they are outward signs of an inner spiritual significance. But the differences between sacramentals and the Sacraments are greater than any similarities. The sacramentals were not instituted by Christ, but by the Church. Moreover, they do not of themselves confer grace as do the Sacraments. All that they can do is awaken in the user certain dispositions that promote faith, hope, and devotion. There is a strict obligation to make use of some of the Sacraments. If a Catholic wants to save his soul, he must be baptized; if he falls into serious sin, he must seek the opportunity to make a good confession in order to be restored to the friendship of God; if he contracts marriage validly, it must be through the Sacrament of Matri-

mony. But there is never at any time an obligation for a Catholic to make use of sacramentals. He can take them or leave them alone.

Yet an appreciative and enlightened use of the sacramentals is a sign of a genuine Catholic mind. They are delicate refinements of Catholic culture in ordinary ways, available to everyone. They are the fine flowering of high Christian living. The action, therefore, of a Catholic who would willfully ignore all sacramentals out of contempt, is just as reprehensible as that of a Catholic who would attribute to them magical powers beyond their nature and purpose. Both attitudes are contrary to Catholic teaching. Within the limits prescribed by the Church, sacramentals are good for us. Their value lies in the intercessory prayer of the whole Church and in the dispositions rising from the hearts of those who use them. However fleeting or rudimentary such sentiments may be, they are the seeds of faith and hope and love, assisting man in referring his deeds to God.

Rightly understood, then, there is nothing mysterious or superstitious or idolatrous in the use of the sacramentals. As a matter of fact non-Catholics, too, have sacramentals, though they may not call them by that name. Whenever they say grace before a meal, they are

using a sacramental; whenever in their own churches they receive the "Lord's Supper," they partake of a commemorative ceremony designed to awaken sentiments of faith and love; whenever they breathe a prayer asking God's blessing upon themselves and upon any project in which they are interested, they do the very same thing that the Church does in her sacramentals.

In recommending the sacramentals to us, the Church has good authority and an excellent motive. Her authority rests on the example of Christ. Did not the Son of God bless the little children who gathered about Him (*Mark* 10:16), and the loaves and fishes before He fed the multitude (*Matthew* 14:19)? That the example of Christ in using sacramentals was to be imitated by the Church may be seen from the observation of St. Paul, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected that is received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (*I Timothy* 4:4-5). The Church's motive in devoting certain articles to sacramental use is as excellent as her authority. We are not unaware how many things, good in themselves, are perverted to evil purposes. The food that we eat, the dwellings in which we live or visit, the clothes that we wear, the conveniences of modern living

that we enjoy, the entertainments that we patronize, can all become instruments of wicked influences if misused. The munificent hand of the Church reaches out to bless and elevate all that pertains to the life and surroundings of the Christian. But instead of talking in generalities, let us observe how the Church sanctifies the ordinary things of daily life by imparting to them a sacramental blessing.

It has been said that "a man's home is his castle." It can also be his sanctuary if the sacramental, known as "the blessing of a house," be conferred upon it. While sprinkling the dwelling with holy water, the priest implores God "to send an angel from heaven to guard, cherish, shield and defend all who live in this home." Many of the household articles can be sanctified through the sacramental prayers to be found in the ritual. There is a blessing for the fire, or fireplace—whether it be the open hearth-stone, a modern range, or a furnace. Among other furnishings of the home for which there are sacramentals, suppose we select but one, the radio. How modern the Church is in sanctifying this invention through which we are afforded so many hours of entertainment, relaxation, and instruction. In this blessing the Church asks:

O God, who walkest on the wings

of the wind, and who alone dost wonderful works; grant, that as by the power implanted in this instrument Thou dost bring quicker than the lightning-flash absent things hither, and dost speed things present hence away; so we, taught by new inventions, and supported by Thy grace, may be able more easily and quickly to come to Thee. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The hours spent in the home are brief in comparison with the time that man must devote to earning his livelihood. There is scarcely any trade or profession for which the Church has not provided some sacramental. There are special blessings for factories, mills, shops, libraries, schools, railroads, ships, telegraph lines, printing presses, ambulances, and fire-fighting apparatus. For those who live in the country there is an equal number of sacramentals dedicating the farm and all its produce to the service of God. The fertile fields are the subject of several blessings; the seed, the growing crops, the first fruits, and the harvest are all commended to Him who alone can give the increase. The swarming bees, the poultry, the flocks, and the herds, may be assigned to the protection of God by appropriate prayers. There is a sacramental for the stable that shelters the draft horses and the herds, recalling how, on the night that Christ was born, "the ox knew its Master and the ass the

manager of its Lord." It reminds the owner that he should not become like the horse and the mule, that have no intelligence, but should recognize God as the sole author of all good things and should render thanks for the gifts that he has received.

One more example may serve to show the purpose of all sacramentals. In the blessing of an aircraft the Church prays:

O God, Who has made all things because of Thyself and hast destined all the elements of this world for human use, bless, we beseech Thee, this aircraft, in order that it may serve to facilitate the more speedy transaction of human affairs with perfect safety, and also that it may foster heavenly aspirations in the souls of those who use it, all for the increase of the praise and glory of Thy name. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

By these sacramentals, then, the Church wishes to relate man's environment and his every activity to Almighty God—from visible things to those invisible, from natural to the supernatural, from earth to heaven. This is the justification for and the purpose of all sacramentals. They are minor agencies of grace, assisting man in his quest of the supernatural life.

One question remains. What re-

lation do sacramentals have to the seven great Sacraments? They are merely subordinate aids. Except that both are outward signs, no comparison worthy of the name can be made. The Sacraments are beyond measure superior to the sacramentals, and no Catholic would ever make the mistake of substituting the less for the greater. But sacramentals are not to be despised on that account. They serve to prepare the individual for a more worthy reception of the Sacraments. Owing to the exigencies of this life we cannot always be in church, where normally the sacraments are administered, but through the sacramentals we can always live in the presence of God. They remind us of our obligations, they dispose the will, and enkindle the affections of the heart. Their influence in relation to the Sacraments is like the feeble light of the candle in the full blaze of the mid-day sun. Still, in the dark, how far a candle throws its beam! The sacramentals in a world darkened by sin are beacons of light, pointing the way to complete union with God through the great channels of grace flowing from the Cross of Christ, the seven Sacraments.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from the address of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes at the inaugural program of the Catholic Hour in the studio of the National Broadcasting Company, New York City, March 2, 1930.)

Our congratulations and our gratitude are extended to the National Council of Catholic Men and its officials, and to all who, by their financial support, have made it possible to use this offer of the National Broadcasting Company. The heavy expense of managing and financing a weekly program, its musical numbers, its speakers, the subsequent answering of inquiries, must be met. . . .

This radio hour is for all the people of the United States. To our fellow-citizens, in this word of dedication, we wish to express a cordial greeting and, indeed, congratulations. For this radio hour is one of service to America, which certainly will listen in interestedly, and even sympathetically, I am sure, to the voice of the ancient Church with its historic background of all the centuries of the Christian era, and with its own notable contribution to the discovery, exploration, foundation and growth of our glorious country. . . .

Thus to voice before a vast public the Catholic Church is no light task. Our prayers will be with those who have that task in hand. We feel certain that it will have both the good will and the good wishes of the great majority of our countrymen. Surely, there is no true lover of our Country who does not eagerly hope for a less worldly, a less material, and a more spiritual standard among our people.

With good will, with kindness and with Christ-like sympathy for all, this work is inaugurated. So may it continue. So may it be fulfilled. This word of dedication voices, therefore, the hope that this radio hour may serve to make known, to explain with the charity of Christ, our faith, which we love even as we love Christ Himself. May it serve to make better understood that faith as it really is—a light revealing the pathway to heaven: a strength, and a power divine through Christ; pardoning our sins, elevating, consecrating our common every-day duties and joys, bringing not only justice but gladness and peace to our searching and questioning hearts.

92 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

In 39 States, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii

Alabama	Birmingham	WBRC*	960 kc
	Mobile	WALA	1410 kc
Arizona	Phoenix	KTAR	620 kc
	Tucson	KVOA	1290 kc
	Yuma	KYUM	1240 kc
Arkansas	Little Rock	KARK*	920 kc
California	Fresno	KMJ	580 kc
	Los Angeles	KFI	640 kc
	San Diego	KFSD	600 kc
	San Francisco	KPO	680 kc
Colorado	Denver	KOA	850 kc
District of Columbia	Washington	WRC	980 kc
Florida	Jacksonville	WJAX	930 kc
	Miami	WIOD	610 kc
	Pensacola	WCOA	1370 kc
	Tampa	WFLA	970-620 kc
	Georgia	Atlanta	WSB	750 kc
	Savannah	WSAV	1340 kc
Idaho	Boise	KIDO	1380 kc
Illinois	Chicago	WMAQ	670 kc
Indiana	Fort Wayne	WGL	1450 kc
	Terre Haute	WBOW	1230 kc
Kansas	Wichita	KANS	1240 kc
Kentucky	Louisville	WAVE*	970 kc
Louisiana	New Orleans	WSMB	1350 kc
	Shreveport	KTBS	1480 kc
Maryland	Baltimore	WBAL	1090 kc
Maine	Augusta	WRDO	1400 kc
Massachusetts	Boston	WBZ	1030 kc
	Springfield	WBZA	1030 kc
Michigan	Detroit	WWJ*	950 kc
	Saginaw	WSAM	1400 kc
Minnesota	Duluth-Superior	WEBC	1320 kc
	Hibbing	WMFC	1240 kc
	Mankato	KYSM	1230 kc
	Minneapolis-St. Paul	KSTP	1500 kc
	Rochester	KROC	1340 kc
	Virginia	WHLB	1400 kc
Mississippi	Jackson	WJDX	1300 kc
Missouri	Kansas City	WDAF	610 kc
	Springfield	KGBX	1260 kc
	Saint Louis	KSD*	550 kc
Montana	Billings	KGHL	790 kc
	Bozeman	KRBM	1450 kc
	Butte	KGIR	1370 kc
	Helena	KPFA	1240 kc

92 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

In 39 States, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii

Nebraska	Omaha	.....	WOW	590 kc
New Mexico	Albuquerque	.....	KOB	1030 kc
New York	Buffalo	.....	WBEN	930 kc
	New York	.....	WEAF	660 kc
	Schenectady	.....	WGY	810 kc
North Carolina	Charlotte	.....	WSOC	1240 kc
	Raleigh	.....	WPTF	680 kc
	Winston-Salem	.....	WSJS	600 kc
North Dakota	Bismarck	.....	KFYR	550 kc
	Fargo	.....	WDAY	970 kc
Ohio	Cincinnati	.....	WSAI*	1360 kc
	Cleveland	.....	WTAM	1100 kc
	Lima	.....	WLOK	1240 kc
Oklahoma	Tulsa	.....	KVOO	1170 kc
Oregon	Medford	.....	KMED	1440 kc
	Portland	.....	KGW*	620 kc
Pennsylvania	Allentown	.....	WSAN	1470 kc
	Altoona	.....	WFBG	1340 kc
	Johnstown	.....	WJAC	1400 kc
	Lewistown	.....	WMRF	1490 kc
	Philadelphia	.....	KYW	1060 kc
	Pittsburgh	.....	KDKA	1020 kc
	Reading	.....	WRAW	1340 kc
	Wilkes-Barre	.....	WBRE	1340 kc
	Rhode Island	Providence	WJAR	920 kc
	South Carolina	Charleston	WTMA	1250 kc
Columbia		.....	WIS	560 kc
Greenville		.....	WFBC	1330 kc
South Dakota	Sioux Falls	.....	KSOO-KELO	1140-1230 kc
Tennessee	Kingsport	.....	WKPT	1400 kc
	Memphis	.....	WMC*	790 kc
	Nashville	.....	WSM*	650 kc
	Amarillo	.....	KGNC	1440 kc
Texas	Dallas	.....	WFAA	820 kc
	Fort Worth	.....	WBAP*	820 kc
	Houston	.....	KPRC	950 kc
	San Antonio	.....	WOAI	1200 kc
	Weslaco	.....	KRGV	1290 kc
	Salt Lake City	.....	KDYL*	1320 kc
Utah	Norfolk	WTAR*	790 kc	
	Richmond	WMBG	1380 kc	
Washington	Seattle	KOMO	950 kc	
	Spokane	KHQ	590 kc	
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(Revised as of October, 1944)

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