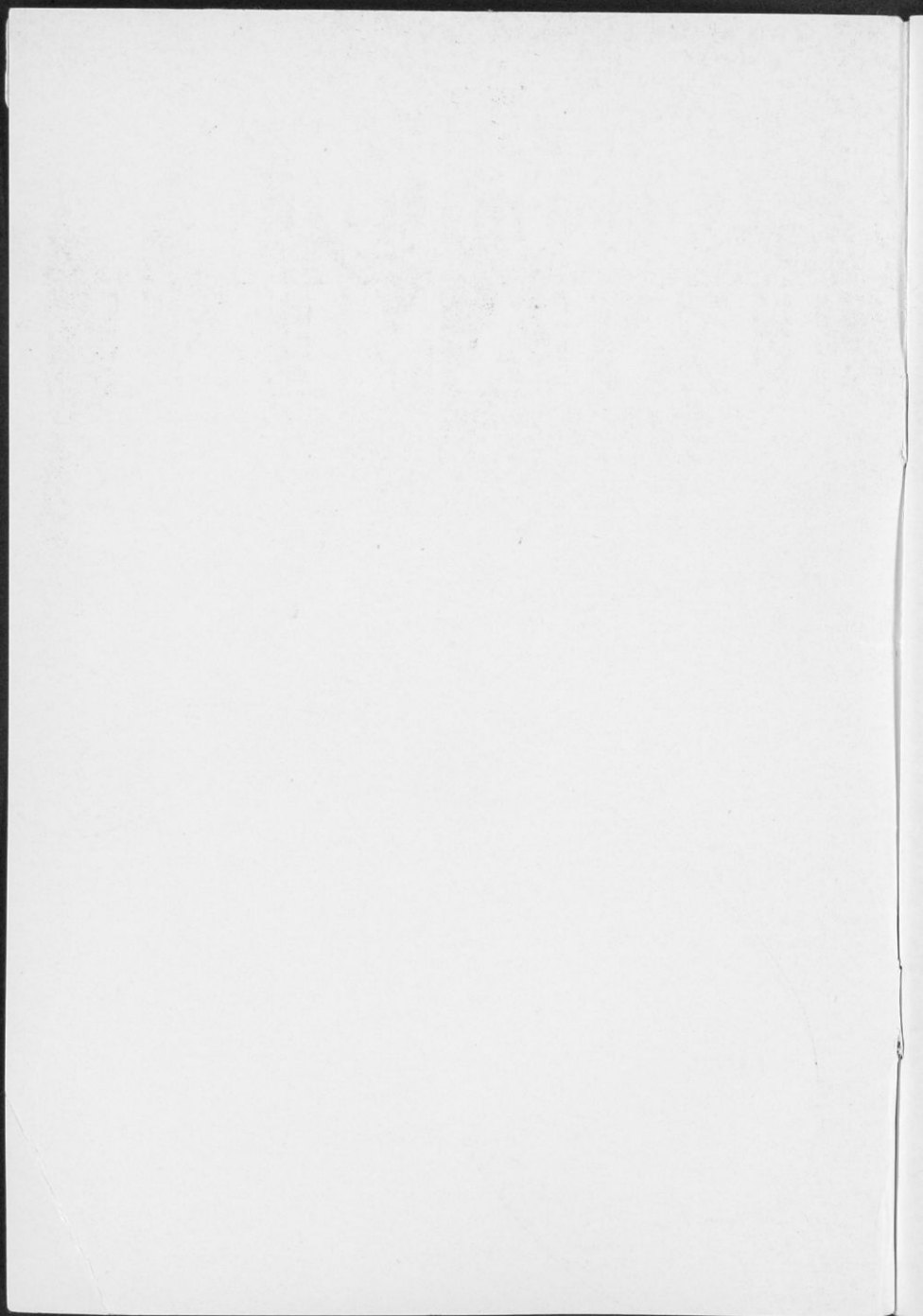


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TESTAMENT
IN
THE MASS

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THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE MASS

By

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Deacidified

The Old Testament in the Mass

Introduction

Ours is an ancient liturgy, more ancient even than the Christian era. In his book on *Liturgical Prayer*, when speaking of the antiphons and psalms used in the Church's ritual, Dom Cabrol remarks:

These reminiscences of the patriarchs and the people of God, so frequently met with in Catholic liturgy, point to its true origin; it goes back in an unbroken line to a time beyond that of our Lord Jesus Christ, beyond the prophets, beyond the patriarchs, even to the very beginning of the world. Christ is indeed connected through Mary and Joseph, through one generation after another, with him who was of David, who was of Noe, who was of Henos, who was of Adam, who was of God.¹

If that be so, we who have inherited the richness of Catholic liturgical life ought to become aware of the ancient origins of our prayers, and particularly of our great collective prayer, the Mass. An understanding of the historical context in which these prayers were first uttered, will endow them with a richness and significance which they would otherwise lack. In the following pages, then, let us unearth these ancient origins, much as archeologists have recently unearthed vestiges of ancient Jewish culture and worship. However, since it would be an almost interminable task to rummage through all of Catholic liturgy in search of these signposts of Old Testament worship, we shall limit ourselves to the Ordinary of the Mass, and select such prayers and phrases as have a clear Old Testament origin or reference. These we shall try to explain in their historical context, and then briefly reflect on the aptness of the phrase or prayer as found in the Mass.

¹ Cabrol, *Liturgical Prayer*, p. 209. Cf. Luke iii. 31, 36, 38.



Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy: deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man. For thou, O God, art my strength: why hast thou cast me off? And why go I sorrowful, whilst the enemy afflicteth me? Send forth thy light and thy truth: they have led me, and brought me unto thy holy hill, and into thy tabernacles. And I will go in unto the altar of God; unto God who giveth joy to my youth. I will praise thee upon the harp, O God, my God; why art thou sad, O my soul, and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God, for I will yet praise him, who is the salvation of my countenance, and my God.

This prayer, which is surely older than 586 B. C.,² is a passionate plea for deliverance from enemies and restoration to the privileges of the Temple worship at Jerusalem. The psalmist, possibly David,³ is in exile amid a heathen people, where his faith has been sorely tried by the mockings of his captors who jeer at him for believing in a God Who has quite obviously deserted him. However, his confidence in eventual rescue overcomes his grief, and excites joy and happiness in his soul. If, as some hold, the psalmist is a priest of the Temple,⁴ we see a man whose love for the Jewish ritual is enthusiastic, and for whom separation from the Temple is exile's greatest affliction. He begs God to send him His light and His truth to guide him, like ministering angels, back to the holy mountain, to the City of David, Jerusalem, and the great Temple of Yahweh. He yearns to enter once again into the close communion with God which the Temple services afford, as he was privileged to do in his youth. There he will sing the praises of God the rest of his days. Buoyed by this thought, he rebukes himself for his loss of hope and confidence in God, his Saviour.

How fitting it is that the Church should select this Psalm

² Boylan, *The Psalms*, Vol. I, p. 149, on Psalm xlii. The English version of the psalm and of the other prayers of the Mass quoted in this booklet, is taken from Cabrol, *op. cit.*, unless otherwise indicated.

³ Gihl, *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, p. 353.

⁴ Kirkpatrick, *The Psalms*, p. 226.

to begin the sacred mysteries of the Mass, becomes clear from a look at several phrases therein:

From the nation that is not holy—As one of a chosen generation and a prince in the holy nation which is God's kingdom on earth, the priest is set apart from the "nation that is not holy" and is ordained a spokesman for the people of God, "thy holy people," as the Canon expresses it. Hence he here begs God to look upon him as disassociated from the world and its wickedness for which Christ Himself in His special prayer would not pray.⁵

From the unjust and deceitful man—Most probably this phrase originally referred to the leader of the heathens among whom the psalmist was captive,⁶ but here in the Mass the meaning has been adapted to refer to what St. Paul calls the "old man": "As regards your former manner of life, you are to put off the old man which is being corrupted through its deceptive lusts."⁷ Hence the priest prays for deliverance from sin, concupiscence, and overpowering temptations, that he might put on the new man "according to the image of his Creator,"⁸ and thus be more worthy to appear before God as the intercessor for His people.

Why hast thou cast me off?—To the psalmist in exile, his faith in God seems to be thwarted by the facts of his daily experience. So, too, the priest, chosen by God to assist in a marvelous way in the work of redemption, finds that his own faults, sinful inclinations and passions, seems to thwart and obstruct the very work for which he was ordained. He often comes close to despairing of ever doing God's work as it should be done, and in such moments of spiritual darkness and dryness, it seems that God has deserted him. Then, weighed down by his sorrow, he cries out, "Why hast thou cast me off?"—even as Christ Himself did on the Cross. "Why go I sorrowful, whilst the enemy afflicteth me?"

⁵ John xvii 9.

⁶ Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁷ Ephesians iv. 22.

⁸ Colossians iii. 10.

Unto thy holy hill—God was always conceived by the Jewish mind as dwelling in a high place, and hence their altars and temple were always on an elevation, a mountain or hill. "I will betake myself to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense," cried Solomon,⁹ and Isaias prophesied, "It will come to pass in the days to come that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established as the highest mountain, and elevated above the hills."¹⁰ To Ezechiel the Lord said, "The whole territory around the top of the mountain shall be most sacred."¹¹ It was on a hill top that the Temple at Jerusalem was located. Although there were other places of worship throughout the nation in which the Jewish people gathered for prayer, yet the Temple at Jerusalem was the only place of sacrifice, and this by Mosaic ordinance.¹² It is to this place of sacrifice, not merely of prayer, that the psalmist longs to return. The priest, reciting the prayer of an exile, now prepares to ascend his mountain of prayer, and, in the person of Christ Who Himself often "went away to the mountain to pray,"¹³ to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Into thy tabernacles—A tabernacle is a dwelling, more precisely a tent. The word "tabernacle" is rich in significance for us Catholics since it is the place wherein is kept the Holy Eucharist, Christ dwelling among us. But to the Jews, too, it had deep significance. From the earliest days of recorded Jewish history, the tabernacle was a conspicuous element in their worship of God. Through the long years of the exodus (about 1300 B. C.), the Jews carried with them a place of worship and sacrifice made according to specifications dictated by God Himself to Moses, "so that I may dwell among them."¹⁴ They were not to have the continual real, physical presence of God living among them as we Catholics are privileged to enjoy today. This tabernacle was a sort of meeting place between heaven and earth where God often spoke to His

⁹ Canticle of Canticles iv. 6.

¹⁰ Isaias ii. 2.

¹¹ Ezechiel xx. 40.

¹² Deuteronomy xii. 11.

¹³ Mark vi. 46.

¹⁴ Exodus xxv. 8.

prophets, and thus directed the fortunes of His people, Israel. Thus God fulfilled His promise made to Moses on Sinai: "I will set my dwelling in your midst and never shall my love cast you off, but I will move about among you and be your God while you shall be my people."¹⁵ But this manner of dwelling was only a preparation. The complete fruition of that promise had to wait until the Last Supper and the institution of the Sacrament of Love, the Eucharist. Now truly we have a "tabernacle which the Lord has erected and not man."¹⁶ As the priest mounts the steps of the altar, led on by the light and truth of God, as by two ministering angels, he approaches not merely the place of sacrifice, but the dwelling of the Son of God, the "Light that shineth in the darkness," "full of grace and truth," Who, as St. John says, "has pitched His tent among us."¹⁷

I will go in unto the altar of God—"How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts!"¹⁸ Refreshed in spirit and buoyed by hope of deliverance, the psalmist imagines himself once again participating in the Temple services which so delighted him in his youth. For the Catholic this Psalm acquires new meaning when he recalls that in the early Church it was a song of Baptism, sung by the Catechumens immediately after Baptism as they marched in procession to participate in the Mass and receive Holy Communion for the first time. They had just been made children of God.¹⁹ When they sang, "To God who giveth joy to my youth," youth for them meant their young life of grace which would now be made more vigorous and joyful through their participation in the Mass. At the altar of God, the priest will receive from the Holy Eucharist refreshment for his youth, just as will all the faithful, a youth which is spiritual and interior, ever strengthened and made joyful through grace. God imparts this joy

¹⁵ Leviticus xxvi. 11-12.

¹⁶ Hebrews viii. 2.

¹⁷ John i. 14.

¹⁸ Psalm lxxxiii. 2.

¹⁹ Bussard-Kirsch, *The Meaning of the Mass*, p. 20.

as long as He is served with a joyful and fervent heart.²⁰ This verse, repeated three times during the prayers at the foot of the altar, transforms the Psalm into a song of joy and happiness in God. As such it was sung in ancient days by the psalmist in exile.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

This brief verse is frequently found in the liturgy of the Church, accompanied usually by the sign of the Cross. The Psalm from which it is taken is a song of thanksgiving.²¹ Israel gives thanks for deliverance from a great danger, likened to a raging monster and a great flood. But Yahweh rescued His people as "a bird is delivered from the snare of the fowler." In the final verse, the one used in the Mass, the psalmist attributes the rescue to Yahweh alone Who has employed His omnipotence in favor of the Jewish nation. His people had called upon Him, and He had set them free—He Whose power had created heaven and earth.

Just what catastrophe the Jews were delivered from is not certain. Most probably it was the Babylonian exile. The Psalm, therefore, was perhaps written about 537 B. C. We know from the Hebrew text of this Psalm that the word used for "God" was "Yahweh," the most sublime and awesome designation applied to God in Jewish worship. It was the Covenant-name of the God of Israel, revealed to Moses for the first time on Sinai when God said to Moses: "I am Yahweh. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name God Almighty, but my name Yahweh I did not show them."²² The use of this name was supposed to remind God of his Covenant-love for His people. As Father Boylan puts it in his Commentary on the Psalms, "the loud crying of the name in the presence of the heathen would also put pressure, as it were, on Yahweh to carry out all that His name implied."²³

²⁰ Gihl, p. 351, note.

²¹ Psalm cxxiii.

²² Exodus vi. 2-3.

²³ Boylan, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 295.

The priest, about to ascend the altar, and conscious of his own misery as his foregoing prayers have shown, invokes the powerful name of the Lord to assist him in worthily discharging this sublime function of the Holy Sacrifice. At the same time he makes the sign of the Cross, as if to remind God that the sacrifice of Calvary has guaranteed His loving assistance. Therefore, we ask Him to grant us all that is implied in the new Covenant of Calvary.²⁴

Thou shalt turn again, O God, and quicken us, and thy people shall rejoice in thee. Show unto us, O Lord, thy mercy, and grant us thy salvation. O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto thee.

After the Confiteor, a thoroughly Christian prayer, the priest prepares at last to ascend the steps of the altar. In so doing, he reverts again to an ancient prayer of the Jews which best expresses his interior dispositions of the moment.²⁵

When the Israelites were delivered from their exile in Babylon by the power of God, they had hoped to settle once again in their homeland, and there to enjoy the favor of God and domestic peace. But when they returned and found a ruined city and an impoverished land, and efforts to restore the Davidic kingship proved fruitless, the chosen people seemed still to be a victim of the anger of God which had banished them from home years before. Around them they saw only the wreckage of their world. They had been filled with joy at their liberation, but their homeland promised only years of reconstruction, social unrest, and hardship. Had not God's anger been sufficiently appeased by the sufferings in exile? Would Israel never again regain its greatness among the nations? Would God continue His scourge? Nay! "Thou shalt turn again, O God, and quicken us, and thy people shall rejoice in thee. Show unto us, O Lord, thy mercy, and grant us thy salvation!"

These are the words which the priest says when he has

²⁴ *Loc. cit.*

²⁵ Psalm lxxxiv. 7-8.

completed his great act of sorrow for sin. He prays that the true repentance and acknowledgement of his guilt which he has expressed in the Confiteor, may turn God back to him once again as a dispenser of mercy and grace. This grace, as the life of the soul, will, in turn, revivify his spirit sagging under the burden of sin. It is an act of trust and confidence in the mercy of God. Then, borrowing and transforming another prayer from the lips of the suffering Jews crying for help from their place of exile, the priest begs God to hear his own cries for help: "O Lord, hear my prayer, and let my cry come unto thee."²⁶

²⁶ Psalm ci. 2.

THE MASS OF THE LEARNERS

The Lord be with you! And with thy spirit!

The priest now salutes the faithful for the first time.²⁷ This salutation was common among the Jews centuries before the coming of Christ. "The Jews were very particular," says Father O'Brien in his book on the history of the Mass, "about having the name of God in all their salutations, or at least an allusion to some one of God's good gifts."²⁸ One need not search far in the Old Testament to see that this is true. We recall that when Ruth, the Gentile woman and grandmother of David, went out into the fields to glean the corn, the owner later appeared and greeted his workers with "The Lord be with thee!" They replied, "The Lord bless thee!"²⁹ We remember, too, that Raguel blessed his daughter's marriage with "the God of Jacob be with thee!"³⁰

Originally, "The Lord be with thee!" bore the meaning, "May the Lord be with you as your helper!" This we see from some of the earliest books of the Old Testament. In this sense God used the expression on Sinai, when Moses pleaded his incompetence as a leader of the Hebrew people. Allay your fears, said God, for "I will be with you."³¹ And later when Jeremias protested that he was unfit to be a messenger of God, the Lord said, "Be not afraid . . . for I am with thee."³² In the psalms also, the phrase has the same meaning: "For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils for thou art with me."³³ Our Lord Himself used the expression in His last address to the Apostles before ascending

²⁷ The prayers up to this point have been of a private nature.

²⁸ O'Brien, *The History of the Mass*, p. 208.

²⁹ Ruth ii. 4.

³⁰ Tobias vii. 15.

³¹ Exodus iii. 12.

³² Jeremias i. 18.

³³ Psalm xxii. 4.

into heaven: "Behold I am with you all days"³⁴—you will succeed in the mission I have entrusted to you, because I shall be helping you.

The priest now salutes the faithful with "The Lord be with you!" Before acting as their interpreter, he presents himself to them, begging God to be present in them through His grace. The people reply that they wish God to be with the priest also, helping him to offer their sacrifice worthily. Seven more times will the priest and faithful exchange this greeting, to beg the grace of God for each other as they progress together through the sacred mysteries of the Mass.

Take away from us our iniquities, we beseech thee, O Lord, that we may be worthy to enter with clean minds into the holy of holies. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

After inviting the faithful to join him in prayer, the priest begins his climb up the holy mountain to the altar of God. During his ascent, he continues to pray for deliverance from sin, not for himself alone now, but for all who with him are about to offer the sacrifice of the New Law. A prayer for cleanliness in the sight of God also preceded the sacrifices in the Old Law. God had commanded through the lips of His prophet Isaias, "Keep yourselves pure, you who bear the vessels of the Lord!"³⁵ Consequently, when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he had first to spend much time in prayer and in performing the purifications required by law.³⁶ So the priest who is now approaching the Holy of Holies, continues to purify his soul of all that would make him unworthy in the sight of God.

The phrase "Holy of Holies" carries us far back to the days of Solomon's Temple, conceived by his father David, and completed in 961 B. C.³⁷ The designation was applied to the inmost room of the Temple, thirty feet square, which housed the Ark of the Covenant. It was a place of the utmost sanc-

³⁴ Matthew xxviii. 20.

³⁵ Isaias lii. 11.

³⁶ O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

³⁷ Dyson-Jones. *The Kingdom of Promise*, p. 52. note.

tity, and it was considered sacrilegious even to gaze into this hallowed spot. A thick veil separated it from the rest of the building, and it was drawn aside by the high priest only on the Day of Atonement. It was while Zachary was in the Holy that the angel Gabriel announced to him that his wife would conceive and bear a son, whose name would be called John.³⁸ The sacredness of the Christian altar and of the repository of the Holy Eucharist would naturally suggest to the early Christians the august place of sanctuary and sacrifice which was so prominent in their Jewish religious heritage. With these great and solemn reminiscences, the priest refers to his place of sacrifice as the Holy of Holies, the one spot on earth where man stands nearest to God.

*Be thou blessed by Him in Whose honor thou wilt be consumed.*³⁹

As we have already seen, the altar, in Catholic as well as in Jewish rites, is a sacred element in worship. It is only proper, therefore, that it receive some veneration before the sacrifice is begun. The priest, in a solemn Mass, after mounting the steps and kissing the altar stone, places incense on a burning coal as he stands before the tabernacle, and recites the words of blessing.

As the server raises the censer to receive the several grains of incense, we may easily let our thoughts fly back through time to Solomon, the son of David, who had ordered censers to be made of "most pure gold"⁴⁰ for use in the Temple. But long before Solomon incense had been used in the Temple ritual. As far back as the time of Moses (about 1300 B. C.), God had commanded that for His worship, "thou shalt make also an altar to burn incense,"⁴¹ which must be set directly in front of His tabernacle, the Holy of Holies. That God esteemed this mark of adoration and worship, we can gather from His direction to overlay the altar with the purest gold,

³⁸ Luke i. 11-21.

³⁹ Translation from Gehr, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁴⁰ 3 Kings vii. 50.

⁴¹ Exodus xxx. 1.

and to burn incense there morning and evening.⁴² "Most holy shall this incense be to you. You shall not make such a composition for your own uses, because it is holy to the Lord."⁴³ To burn incense was a function reserved to the priest alone: "Aaron was separated to minister in the Holy of Holies, he and his sons forever, and to burn incense before the Lord, according to his ceremonies, and to bless His name forever."⁴⁴

Apart from being an act of adoration, the burning of incense had a propitiatory value in the sight of God. Let us recall that frightening scene from the Book of Numbers in which the anger of God was appeased by the burning of incense. When Moses and Aaron were being threatened by their rebellious brethren, they fled to the tabernacle and prostrated themselves before the Lord. Once they were within, the great cloud, which always indicated the presence of God, covered it over, and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Get you out from the midst of this multitude; this moment will I destroy them."⁴⁵ Quickly Moses turned to Aaron and told him to take a burning coal from the altar of incense, put it in the censer, cover it with incense, and rush out into the midst of the people and pray for them. As he ran into their midst, a fire had come out from the Lord and was already consuming the multitude. But Aaron "offered the incense, and standing between the dead and the living he prayed for the people, and the plague ceased."⁴⁶ Since God looked with such favor on this divinely-appointed rite of incensation, it is easy to understand why Solomon fashioned his "censers of the purest gold."⁴⁷

At the time of Our Lord, the priests were still offering incense, true to God's command. It was while Zachary was offering incense before the Holy of Holies that Gabriel appeared to him "standing on the right side of the altar of incense."⁴⁸

⁴² Exodus xxx. 3, 7-8.

⁴³ Exodus xxx. 36-7.

⁴⁴ 1 Paralipomenon xxiii. 13. Cf. also 1 Kings ii. 28.

⁴⁵ Numbers xvi. 45.

⁴⁶ Numbers xvi. 47-8. Cf. also Wisdom xviii. 21.

⁴⁷ 3 Kings vii. 50.

⁴⁸ Luke i. 11.

As Cardinal Gasquet says, "there can be no manner of doubt that the Christians adopted from the Jews the practice of using incense in the celebration of the Liturgy."⁴⁹ What meaning the Church attaches to this rite can be gathered from her prayer at a later incensation in the Mass: "Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight, O Lord."⁵⁰ Incense is a symbol of prayer. It was in this symbolic significance that St. John saw it in his remarkable vision: "And another angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense that he should offer of the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the hand of the angel."⁵¹

Incense is also a symbol of sacrifice. In the Old Law it was more than a symbol: it was a real sacrifice. The spices which composed the incense were offered to God as a gift, the dedication of which was consummated by burning it in whole or in part. In the New Law, however, the burning of incense is but a symbol. There is only one sacrifice now, consummated on Calvary and repeated in an unbloody fashion in every Mass—the immolation of the Son of God. As "incense exhales and breathes forth its inmost soul when it is consumed in the fire and dissolved in fragrant clouds of smoke that rise heavenward," so man, in a spirit of sacrifice, "consumes himself with all his faculties in the fire of love for the honor and service of God."⁵²

In the Mass, all who are incensed are drawn into a "sanctified atmosphere"⁵³ such as befits all persons and objects connected with the Holy Sacrifice. At this particular incensation, just before the priest begins the Introit, it is the altar which is venerated. The incensing calls to mind that the altar is a sacred place representing Christ Himself. Before it, as before the Holy of Holies in ancient days, clouds of incense now rise

⁴⁹ Gasquet, *Sacramentals and Some Catholic Practices*, p. 63.

⁵⁰ Psalm cxl. 2.

⁵¹ Apocalypse viii. 3-4.

⁵² Gehr, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

to heaven as a symbol of the prayer and sacrifice about to rise from the hearts and minds of the faithful. As the clouds of smoke hover aloft in the sanctuary and surround the altar of God, they may well remind us of the cloud which enveloped the tabernacle so often during the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, as a manifestation of the presence and glory of the Lord. "The cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the Lord appeared."⁵⁴

THE INTROIT

The prayers at the foot of the altar were originally said by the priest in private, before entering the church. Now, although said in the sanctuary before the altar, they are still of a private nature, and not a part of the Mass proper. The introduction to the Mass was the Introit prayer. It is the first prayer which the priest now reads at the altar, and it differs from day to day. In the early days of Christianity, the choir chanted the Introit as the priest entered the church and made his way to the sanctuary. The prayer is almost always taken from the psalms, the ancient prayer-songs of the Hebrews, which, because of their rhythm and balance, could be so beautifully adapted to liturgical chant.

Since the contribution of the Mosaic liturgy to Christian liturgy is largely contained in the various psalms used throughout the Mass, it will not be out of place to insert a word about the psalms into our considerations of the Mass.

David, as we know, reigned over the Jewish people in the golden age of their history, about 1000 B. C. He was a great warrior and an able administrator, but before all else, he was a man of God. It was to David that God made the great dynastic promise: his kingdom would last forever. "And thy house shall be faithful, and thy kingdom forever before thy face, and thy throne shall be firm forever."⁵⁵ It was as "son of David" that our Lord was often hailed by His people.⁵⁶ Yet David's greatness did not rest on his kingship alone. He

⁵⁴ Numbers xvi. 43. Cf. also Exodus xl. 32-36; 2 Paralipomenon v. 13; Leviticus xvi. 2.

⁵⁵ 2 Kings vii. 16.

⁵⁶ Cf. Matthew ix. 27; xx. 30; xv. 22; Mark x. 47.

was a musician and poet, and he united these talents in the composition of songs to be sung in the service of God either by the priests alone, or by all the people together. David appointed special ministers for the Temple service whose duty it was to make the liturgy as solemn as possible by accompanying it with music and song.⁵⁷ When he had prepared a place for the Ark of the Covenant in his city of Jerusalem, "David spoke to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint some of their brethren to be singers with musical instruments . . . that the joyful noise might resound on high . . . And all Israel brought the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord with joyful shouting, and sounding with the sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and cymbals, and psalteries, and harps."⁵⁸

As Father Heinisch remarks, in these songs of David and his followers, "the individual could express his immolation of self to God. These songs filled his heart with joy and trust in God; these songs inspired him with strength in time of need, comforted him in misfortune, misery and persecution, imbued him with trust in God's mercy as he recalled his sins, and taught him to bear patiently the visitations sent from heaven."⁵⁹

"Christians inherited this gift of prayer from the Jews," writes Dom Cabrol. "Never did any people pray as did the chosen people of God. Sometimes their prayer took the form of petition or of praise; sometimes it was the communion of soul with God, expressing its love, its fears, its dread of His judgments, its horror of sin and evil; or, again, its theme was the anguish of a sinner trembling before his God, yet never losing unlimited confidence in the mercy of his Judge. It could find words in which to show forth its hatred against the enemies of God, or its admiration of His works, or its consciousness of the creature's weakness in comparison with the divine omnipotence."⁶⁰ What prayers the Christians composed were infused with the same spirit of dependence, adoration and hope, to which were added the love, confidence and joy that were the

⁵⁷ 1 Paralipomenon vi. 31-2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xv. 16, 28.

⁵⁹ Heinisch, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 38.

⁶⁰ Cabrol, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

fruits of the Christian revelation. These sentiments of the Old Law the Christian liturgy has, as it were, baptized, and the Church, with her profound sense of continuity, begins her greatest prayer—the Sacrifice of the Mass—with those ancient hymns which form so precious a part of our heritage from Israel.

Lord, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us; Lord, have mercy on us!

The *Kyrie eleison*, a vestige of the earliest Christian liturgy which was entirely Greek till at least the end of the second century,⁶¹ has a profoundly Trinitarian (and hence Christian) significance as found in the Mass. It has, however, Jewish overtones. These words were on the lips of many who approached Our Lord during His public life. The Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, each have instances of its use: "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"⁶² "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"⁶³ "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"⁶⁴ The frequency and spontaneity of this cry of supplication, coming as it did from devout Jews, lead us to suspect that it must have been a traditional, familiar ejaculation in Jewish religious life.

And this suspicion is verified when we turn to the Old Testament and discover that it was the classic supplication of the ancient Jews. The phrase occurs most frequently in the psalms, which, as we have seen, are themselves the outpourings of a prayerful heart offering unaffected adoration to God. "Have mercy on me," cried David, "and hear my prayer!"⁶⁵ "Have mercy on me, O Lord!"⁶⁶ "Redeem me and have mercy on me!"⁶⁷ "O Lord, be thou merciful to me; heal my soul,

⁶¹ Croegaert, *Les Rites et les Prières du Saint Sacrifice de la Messe*, Vol. I, p. 133.

⁶² Matthew xx. 30.

⁶³ Mark x. 47.

⁶⁴ Luke xvii. 13.

⁶⁵ Psalm iv. 2.

⁶⁶ Psalm ix. 14.

⁶⁷ Psalm xxv. 11.

for I have sinned against thee!"⁶⁸ "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us!"⁶⁹ And elsewhere in the Old Testament, the same plea is found. As Isaias so beautifully prayed: "O Lord, have mercy on us: for we have waited for thee; be thou our arm in the morning, and our salvation in the time of trouble."⁷⁰ "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy, for thou art a merciful God!"⁷¹

When we raise our voice with that of the priest as he cries, "Lord, have mercy on us!", we are praying in the company of all these holy men of the Old Law, crying for mercy to the same God Whom they worshiped.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. We praise thee, we bless thee, we adore thee, we glorify thee, we give thee thanks for thy great glory. O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father almighty. O Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son. O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Who takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Who sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For thou only art holy. Thou only art Lord. Thou only, O Jesus Christ, art most high, together with the Holy Ghost, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Just as the *Kyrie* was rich in Old Testament overtones, although profoundly Christian in significance, the *Gloria*, though Christian in origin, derives much of its fragrance from a pre-Christian past. In the early assemblies in which the Christians gathered to worship God, much was left to personal initiative. There were no prayer books nor hymn cards stamped with an *Imprimatur* for the use of the faithful. Much of their song was improvised, a spontaneous outpouring of a joyful and unrestrained spirit. We read in the Epistles of St. Paul how often the Holy Spirit inspired these new-born Christians, just recently come to the altar of God, to give free rein

⁶⁸ Psalm xl. 5.

⁶⁹ Psalm cxxii. 3.

⁷⁰ Isaias xxxiii. 2.

⁷¹ Baruch iii. 2.

to their enthusiasm, which welled up in prayer and song, magnifying the glory of God. To quote Father Cabrol, "The *Gloria in excelsis* is almost the only composition of this remote period which has come down to us in its entirety; it is a liturgical treasure, a precious relic of those early times when prayer must have been so eloquent."⁷² This spontaneous, improvised chant quite naturally fell into the mold of the prayer-songs which the Christians had known before their conversion. It was the psalms especially which formed the model and supplied the structural foundation for the early Christian hymns.

Let us glance, then, at a few of the hymns which were well known to these early Christians, and which afforded them a model when they came to proclaim the glory of God. It would be too great a task here to examine the *Gloria* phrase by phrase, and then to find its counterpart in Old Testament literature. Nor could this be done without forcing the Christian revelation on the Old Testament. For although many of the concepts of God which are contained in the *Gloria* are found also in the Old Testament, yet much of the *Gloria* is exclusively Christian in sentiment. The Jews, for example, had little or no notion of the Trinity. The Trinitarian notion of God was at best only adumbrated in the Old Testament, and hence the acclamations in honor of God (called "doxologies") which we find in the Old Testament are unitarian in concept, while the Christian doxologies are Trinitarian. These differences are obvious. Our purpose is to see very briefly and in a general way how rich in Old Testament ideas is this thoroughly Christian hymn of praise. A few Old Testament selections will reveal this to us.

The psalms furnish us with our first examples: "Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel from eternity to eternity."⁷³ "Thou wilt bless the just: Lord, thou hast crowned us as with a shield of thy good will."⁷⁴ Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised: and of his greatness there is no end!"⁷⁵ "O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name in all the earth!"⁷⁶

⁷² Cabrol, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁷³ Psalm xl. 14.

⁷⁴ Psalm v. 13.

⁷⁵ Psalm cxliv. 3.

⁷⁶ Psalm viii. 10.

“Bring to the Lord glory to his name; adore ye the Lord in his holy court.”⁷⁷ “Praising I will call upon the Lord!”⁷⁸ “Let all thy works, O Lord, praise thee, and let thy saints bless thee!”⁷⁹ “Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise ye him in the high places.”⁸⁰ “Come, let us praise the Lord with joy: let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour; let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; and make a joyful noise to him with psalms!”⁸¹

From another part of the Old Testament comes a beautiful doxology which should not be passed over, one sung by David himself, the master of song and model for generations of Jewish prayer. David has just completed his plans for the great Temple at Jerusalem, and the Jewish people have just brought their beloved king all their treasures to make beautiful the house of the Lord. In his joy, David stands before his people, lifts his arms to heaven, and prays: “Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our father from eternity to eternity. Thine, O Lord, is magnificence, and power and glory and victory; and to thee is praise; for all that is in heaven and in earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art above all princes. Thine are riches, and thine is glory, thou hast dominion over all, in thy hand is power and might: in thy hand greatness, and the empire of all things. Now, therefore, our God, we give thanks to thee, and we praise thy glorious name!”⁸² *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*

Let us pray!

After completing the *Gloria*, the priest kisses the altar, turns and greets the people with “The Lord be with you,” and moves to the Epistle side to begin the *Collect*. This prayer, unfortunately, is not within the range of our study, but we cannot pass it by without recommending it to the meditation and study of the faithful. Its extraordinary simplicity, coupled with its

⁷⁷ Psalm xxviii. 2.

⁷⁸ Psalm xvii. 4.

⁷⁹ Psalm cxliv. 10.

⁸⁰ Psalm cxlviii. 1.

⁸¹ Psalm xciv. 1-2.

⁸² 1 Paralipomenon xxix. 10-13.

great dignity and deep theological perception, make it "the most solemn form of prayer."⁸³ The presence of this prayer affords us the opportunity to comment on the invitation which precedes it, and on the posture assumed by the priest during the course of the prayer.

First, the *Oremus*. It is an invitation, quite obviously to common prayer, *collective* prayer. The Christians pray conscious of their unity in one society, the Church, and hence their prayer is social. When God long ago made His Covenant with Moses on Sinai, He made it not with Moses alone or with any other individuals, but with the Israelite *nation*.⁸⁴ Often God speaks of "my people Israel," and when, through the prophets and leaders whom He had raised up among them, He admonished wrongdoing, it was the *nation* He admonished; the *people* suffered His wrath. His anger with kings and priests was explained in terms of a misled *people*; and it was as father of the *nation*, the God of Israel, that His people prayed to Him in moments of danger, public or personal. At such times, in the face of disaster, they would often invoke Him by His Covenant name, Yahweh, to remind Him of His promises to His *people*. This relationship of God to His people as a nation is reflected in many of His Old Testament titles.

This bond of unity in prayer was a real bond, yet indeed only a shadow of that mystical union of all Christians with Christ, Who called Himself the Vine, and us the branches.⁸⁵ But it is important, at least, to realize that collective prayer has always been high in God's favor, and that the cry "let us pray!" had rung out over the plains and valleys of Juda for centuries before the Christian era.

Let us now notice the priest's posture during this prayer. For those of us who have attended Mass all our lives kneeling in the pews, the natural position for prayer is kneeling with hands folded. However, our spokesman before God, offering our collective prayer at this moment, is *standing* with hands *spread apart!* It is not a question of one method being wrong and the other right; the priest is merely using a more ancient

⁸³ Cabrol, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁸⁴ Deuteronomy xxvi. 18.

⁸⁵ John xv. 5.

posture for prayer. The Roman catacombs have revealed carvings of the early Christians using this posture. Scripture tells us that it was the common position for prayer in Jewish worship. In one of his psalms, David cries, "Let the lifting up of my hands [that is, my prayer] be as the evening sacrifice."⁸⁶ And we are all acquainted from Bible History days with the story of Amalek's war against Israel. During the battle, Moses went up on a hill to pray. "And when Moses lifted up his hands, Israel was victorious, but if he let them down a little, Amalek was victor."⁸⁷ Many years later, Solomon stood before the Temple altar and "spread forth his hands toward heaven."⁸⁸ The priest's posture, therefore, during the *Collect* and several other prayers of the Mass, is a reminiscence of pre-Christian days, when Israel prayed to God with up-lifted hands.

THE EPISTLE

The Jewish synagogue service, as distinct from the sacrificial service of the Temple at Jerusalem, consisted mainly in the reading and expounding of the sacred books of scripture. That element of Jewish worship is retained in our Christian liturgy: the scriptures are still read (Epistle and Gospel) and expounded (the sermon). The Church, in choosing the selections from scripture which it uses for its Epistles, naturally has a predilection for the New Testament rather than for the Old. But the author of both Old and New Testaments is the same, God Himself, and His word is eternally true. Therefore, although the Old Law was imperfect and found its fulfillment in the New, yet, as Father Gihl says, "the Old Testament is a great divine testimony to Christ and to His kingdom; everything in it is prophetic of Christ and of the Church . . . Now the Church loves to apply typically (spiritually) the Old Testament. Whenever she found in it some striking prophecy of a New Testament mystery or event, she incorporated it if possible as an Epistle in the Mass, as a supplement and ex-

⁸⁶ Psalm cxl. 2.

⁸⁷ Exodus xvii. 11.

⁸⁸ 3 Kings viii. 22.

planation of the Gospel.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, some of the psalms and lamentations, expressing the timeless religious sentiment of the human soul, are used to awaken in us a penitential spirit during the sombre days of Lent.

ALLELUJA!

The Gradual prayer following the Epistle is usually composed of selections from the psalms. Sometimes selections from other books of the Old Testament are used. Ordinarily this brief prayer is followed by an *alleluja*, a word familiar to us because of its prominence in the ceremonies of Easter. The word is a Hebrew word which figured prominently in the divine worship of the Old Testament. Its original meaning is “God-be-praised,” and it is in this sense that we find it, for example, in the psalms. “Give glory to the Lord [alleluja] and call upon his name!”⁹⁰ “Praise the Lord, all ye nations!”⁹¹ The Apostles adopted the word,⁹² and eventually it slipped into the liturgy in its native Hebraic form, so dear was it to the early Christians, and so perfectly did it express their joy. And since the joy of the Christians was greatest when they were commemorating the resurrection of Christ, it occurs more frequently in our liturgy at the Paschal season than at any other time.

There is another Hebrew word which is often on the lips of the faithful attending Mass—*Amen*. Because of its brevity, plus the fact that Our Lord Himself used it frequently and hence sanctified it,⁹³ the Church has retained its Hebrew form. It is sometimes used as a confirmation: let it be—as at the end of the *Gloria*; sometimes as the expression of a desire: so may it be—as at the end of a petition like the *Collect*; sometimes, finally, as the expression of a consent: it is so—as at the end of the *Creed*. These various uses we also find in the Old Testament, where the word occurs in almost every book. For example, after Moses had received the Covenant for the Jewish people, he commanded them to obey the laws of God,

⁸⁹ Gühr, *op. cit.*, pp. 440-41.

⁹⁰ Psalm civ. 1.

⁹¹ Psalm cxvi. 1.

⁹² Apocalypse xix. 1.

⁹³ Drexel, *Liturgia Sacra*, p. 30.

and after each command the people replied, "Amen."⁹⁴ David sang, "Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel from eternity to eternity. So be it. So be it."⁹⁵ And when Esdras "blessed the Lord the great God . . . all the people answered Amen, Amen."⁹⁶ Frequent in synagogue services of the day, it was only natural for the new Christians to adapt the word to their own liturgy.

Cleanse my heart and my lips, O Almighty God, who didst cleanse the lips of the prophet Isaias with a burning coal: vouchsafe so to cleanse me by thy gracious mercy, that I may be able worthily to proclaim Thy holy Gospel. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Returning to the center of the altar, the priest bows profoundly and begs God to make him fit to announce His holy Gospel. He professes again his own unworthiness, and asks purity of heart and lips in order that he might properly feed the flock of Christ with the words of Christ.

In the prayer above, we have a direct reference to one of the most striking incidents in all Old Testament literature, one which has never ceased to be an inspiration for artists and writers. It is the story of the call of Isaias to the prophetic office. A prophet is "one-who-is-called-by-God." He becomes the mouthpiece of God, His mediator with the Hebrew people, standing by virtue of his call between God and the nation. To him is revealed the Word of God and the command to proclaim it fearlessly. In times of national prosperity, these men of God spoke out fiercely against their own people, warning them to remain loyal to the God of Israel, and not to be turned from Him by their wealth and pleasures. In time of distress, they were the reluctant bearers of bitter tidings, foretelling defeat and exile, but balancing this message of doom with the promise of a remnant which should return. For these solemn responsibilities, God directly commissioned His prophets. Unlike the priesthood or kingship which were conferred on a family or

⁹⁴ Deuteronomy xxvii. 15 sqq.

⁹⁵ Psalm xl. 14.

⁹⁶ 2 Esdras viii. 6.

tribe of Israel, the prophetic office was conferred directly on an individual. In view of the solemnity and importance of the office, it is no wonder that some who were called protested their unworthiness, and balked at the beckoning of God. Such was the case with Isaias, the greatest of the prophets.

Isaias describes for us his call by God. Since he was a citizen of Jerusalem and perhaps a member of the nobility, we may well believe that he wandered often into the Temple of Solomon to pray. One day God rewarded his prayers, and gave direction to his whole subsequent life. The year was 742 B. C. Isaias had gone far into the Temple, and now was standing in prayer before the great veil which blocked the Holy of Holies from the gaze of the multitude. Suddenly the veil seemed to fade away, and Isaias found himself looking into the Holy of Holies, not at the Ark of the Covenant, but at the very throne of God!

“I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and elevated, and His train filled the Temple. Upon it stood the seraphims, the one had six wings and the other had six wings; with two they covered his face, and with two they covered his feet, and with two they flew. And they cried one to another, and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory.’ And the lintels of the door were moved at the voice of Him who cried, and the house was filled with smoke.”⁹⁷

We have already seen that the smoke or cloud which used to settle on the tabernacle which the Jews bore with them during their long trek out of Egypt, was a symbol of the presence and majesty of God.⁹⁸ So now at God’s coming the cloud envelopes the Holy of Holies, and fear seizes Isaias. Besides a deep consciousness of his own sinfulness in the presence of Sanctity Itself, he knew well that no man can look upon the face of God and live.⁹⁹ Hence he cries, “I am lost!”

“And I said, ‘Woe is me because I have held my peace; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst

⁹⁷ Isaias vi. 1-4.

⁹⁸ Cf. Numbers xvi. 43.

⁹⁹ Exodus xxxiii. 20.

of a people that hath unclean lips, and I have seen with my eyes the King the Lord of hosts.' And one of the seraphims flew to me and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: 'Behold this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed.' And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?' And I said, 'Lo, here I am, send me.'"¹⁰⁰

The priest, about to read the Gospel, feels in himself a kinship with Isaias which is not unfounded. He, too, has been summoned to transmit the Word of God to His chosen people, "a holy nation, a purchased people."¹⁰¹ As he prepares to announce to them the good tidings of the Gospel, he protests his own unworthiness as did Isaias, and begs that God make chaste his heart and his lips as He did those of His holy prophet through the ministry of an angel.

THE GOSPEL

The focal point and culmination of the Mass of the Catechumens—that part of the Mass which we have been considering—lies in the reading of the Gospel. Its importance is indicated in part by the fact that it is read from the right side of the altar (the left side as the congregation faces it), which is the side of honor, and from the fact that the faithful stand during its reading. The readings which have preceded, taken often from the Old Testament, are all preparatory to this scriptural reading from one of the four Gospels. As the Gospel is read at Low Mass, there is little about the ceremony that is reminiscent of the Old Testament. However, the Old Testament is partly responsible for the awkward, oblique stance of the priest as he reads the Gospel at the corner of the altar, facing slightly away from the altar itself.

In olden days, Mass was said facing the East, whence, from the Roman and Greek viewpoint, came Christ the Light of the world.¹⁰² Hence, by facing to the left, the priest would be facing north. The Old Testament gives us the reason why

¹⁰⁰ Isaias vi. 5-8.

¹⁰¹ 1 Peter ii. 9.

¹⁰² John i. 4, 5, 9. Cf. Malachias iv. 2.

the Gospel should be announced to that region, for there we find the north pictured as a land of desolation, cold, forbidding, barren. There was the haunt of Lucifer, who said, "I will establish my seat in the north . . . and will be like the Most High."¹⁰³ Against him, the world and the flesh, did Christ preach His message. Isaias again warns us against the north when he says: "A smoke shall come from the north, and no one shall escape his troop."¹⁰⁴ And through Jeremias, His prophet, God warns His people: "I bring evil from the north, and great destruction."¹⁰⁵ Such a land is in dire need of the warmth of Christ's personality, and the salutary power of His word. For that reason the priest is still preaching the Gospel to the nations of the north.

The procession and incensing of the Gospel book in a solemn High Mass is a reminder of the great reverence for the sacred writings which the Jews displayed in their worship. Sacred scrolls, we remember, were enclosed in the Ark of the Covenant. But liturgists see a greater Old Testament allusion in the simple action of the deacon when he lifts the book of Gospels from the altar, and carries it to the edge of the sanctuary. As Father O'Brien remarks, "The taking of the Book of the Gospels from the altar is intended to remind us, according to Pope Innocent III, that the law has come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, not so much the law of Moses, but the law of the New Covenant . . . Then again, this taking of the book from the altar and reading it aloud in the hearing of the people, forcibly recalls to mind what Moses did of old on Sinai, whence he brought down the tables of the law and read them before the chosen people at the mountain's edge."¹⁰⁶

The faithful show their great reverence and respect for the sacred writings by standing during the reading of the Gospel. The Jewish reverence for their sacred books was shown in a similar fashion. When Esdras brought the book of the law of Moses before the people on the feast of Tabernacles, he "stood

¹⁰³ Isaias xiv. 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ Isaias xiv. 31.

¹⁰⁵ Jeremias iv. 6. Cf. Drexel, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁶ O'Brien, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-37.

upon a step of wood, which he had made to speak on . . . And Esdras opened the book before all the people . . . and when he had opened it, all the people stood.”¹⁰⁷ We read, too, in the Book of Numbers, that when Balaam had heard the word of the Lord, “Balac said to him: What hath the Lord spoken? But he taking up his parable, said: Stand, O Balac, and give ear.”¹⁰⁸

For the Catholic, to stand at the Gospel is a mark of reverence for the message of Christ, and a sign of readiness to do as He commands.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Esdras viii. 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Numbers xxiii. 17, 18.

THE MASS OF THE FAITHFUL

Receive, O holy Father, almighty, eternal God, this spotless host, which I, thine unworthy servant, do offer unto thee, my God, living and true, for mine own countless sins, transgressions, and failings, and for all here present; as also for all faithful Christians, living or dead; that it may avail both me and them unto health for life everlasting. Amen.

We find ourselves now in the second part of the Mass, the Mass of the Faithful. From this part of the Christian liturgy the non-baptized were excluded. Had they remained, they would have recognized little with which they were familiar, for this was the Christian prayer *par excellence*, the supreme act of worship, of which all Jewish sacrificial worship was but the shadow. What, then, can be said of the Old Testament flavor of this distinctively Christian section of the Mass? Very little in fact, at least compared to what has been said by centuries of ecclesiastical writers, scholars, and theologians, about the profound theology and mysticism of its Christian sacrificial aspect. Let us remember, however, that Christ Himself was a Jew, and that the first Mass was said during the celebration of a great traditional Jewish feast. For these reasons the Mass could hardly have escaped some Old Testament coloring. It is this "coloring" that we shall content ourselves with in the remaining pages, realizing all the while that the picture we draw of the Holy Sacrifice will lack the substantial form and the darker, richer hues which only a more theological study could add.

While the priest says the opening prayer of the Offertory, let us see what the significance of sacrifice was in the Old Testament.

It is entirely natural for man to express his worship of God externally. As Pius XII says, "Every impulse of the human heart . . . expresses itself naturally through the senses; and the worship of God, being the concern not merely of individ-

uals but of the whole community of mankind, must therefore be social as well. This obviously cannot be unless religious activity is also organized and manifested outwardly."¹⁰⁹ From the beginning of recorded history, as we know from Genesis, man has expressed his worship in sacrifice.¹¹⁰ Whether God originally demanded that sacrifices be offered to Him, we do not know. We do know, however, that from the time of Abel He accepted them most graciously when they were offered in the proper spirit. God's great Covenant with Israel was sealed with a sacrifice,¹¹¹ and who of us can forget God's vindication of His prophet during that dramatic contest of fire and faith on Mount Carmel when Elias, in the presence of the pagan priests of Baal, laid his bullock on the altar, and called upon God to send fire on his offering as a proof to the heathen people that He was their God.¹¹² There were countless other occasions on which God showed His good pleasure at the offering of sacrifice.

Old Testament sacrifices were effective in keeping before the Jewish nation the fact of its complete dependence on God, the God Who, as He liked to remind them, led the chosen people out of the land of bondage.¹¹³ They benefited the offerers in so far as they awakened in them a consciousness of sin and a desire for forgiveness and amendment. They had no power, however, to blot out the sin itself. At most, they appeased God and staved off the punishment due to sin, and in this sense only did they atone for sin.¹¹⁴ That God was appeased at all was only in view of a later sacrifice on Calvary which would be offered in atonement for the sins of men of all times, past, present, and to come. All the sacrifices of the Old Law looked to that later one as to their fulfillment and completion. They were imperfect, the sacrifice of Calvary was perfect; and all the sacrifices offered previously derived whatever efficacy they had in anticipation of Christ's death on the Cross.

¹⁰⁹ *Mediator Dei*.

¹¹⁰ Genesis iv. 4.

¹¹¹ Exodus xxiv. 5.

¹¹² 3 Kings xviii. 20-39.

¹¹³ Cf. Exodus xx. 2; Micheas vi. 4.

¹¹⁴ Leviticus ix. 7.

The Mass is the continuation of the sacrifice of Calvary, which put mankind back in the good graces of his heavenly Father whence he had fallen through the sin of Adam. The sacrifice of the Mass, then, is expiatory, a sacrifice of atonement. This we can see from the prayer quoted above wherein the priest offers the host "for mine own countless sins, transgressions, and failings, and for all here present." Taken from articles used for our daily sustenance, the bread and wine, like the Old Testament offerings, signify a giving of ourselves to God. By his prayer, the Christian priest, like the Jewish priest of old, removes the offerings from their common use, consecrates them to the worship of God, and thereby sanctifies them. The Israelite prayed thus over his offerings which were the gifts for the sacrifice; the Christian priest prays thus over the bread and wine, not because they are themselves the gifts, but in order to prepare them for their sublime destiny—that of being changed by the power of God into the Christian sacrificial gift, the Body and Blood of Christ.

Let my prayer, O Lord, be set forth as incense in thy sight; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round my lips; lest my heart incline to evil words to seek excuses in sin.

Once again the censer with its burning coals is brought to the priest, who sprinkles grains of incense over them and blesses them. The bread and wine which have just been offered are incensed. Then, while incensing the cross and altar, the priest prays in the words just quoted, taken from the Book of Psalms.¹¹⁵

This prayer fell, most probably, from the lips of David, and hence it is quite likely some 3,000 years old. If we were to read the entire psalm, we would see that the psalmist and his friends were suffering the taunts of their countrymen who had deserted the camp of Yahweh and succumbed to the blandishments of heathenism. These temptations which enticed the faithful Jews were probably to a less strict observance of the

¹¹⁵ Psalm cxl. 2-4.

Mosaic Law. The devil always strives to lead us by small steps. Whatever they were, the psalmist cries to the Lord for a strengthening of his faith, and for divine help to resist the allurements of paganism. He begs that his plea be heard, that it be as acceptable in the eyes of the Lord as the evening burning of incense which the Lord Himself had commanded.¹¹⁶ May his prayer rise as the smoke of incense before the throne of God—incense, the symbol of prayer. May the raising of his hands (the traditional gesture of prayer) be as pleasing to God as the evening holocaust with its accompanying incense—incense, the symbol of sacrifice.

Thus the prayer of the psalmist is a plea that God ward off the temptations besetting him, and keep him clean of sin. In the figurative tongue of the Hebrews, he prays that he may not utter evil words, words that might indicate his sympathy for the heathen cause, nor seek excuses for engaging in evil actions.

The priest begs God that the Holy Sacrifice, mingled with his prayers and those of the faithful, may be acceptable to Him, and rise to His holy throne as the clouds of incense now rise above the altar and fill the entire sanctuary. Then in the picturesque words of the psalmist, he prays, as he has frequently done since the beginning of the Mass, that his prayers might rise from a heart entirely dedicated to the praise and service of God, as the clouds of incense used once to rise from an altar "overlayed with pure gold,"¹¹⁷ and consecrated to the Holy One of Israel.

I will wash my hands among the innocent; and will compass thine altar, O Lord. That I may hear the voice of praise, and tell of all thy wondrous works. O Lord, I have loved the beauty of thy house, and the place where thy glory dwelleth. Take not away my soul with the wicked, nor my life with men of blood. In whose hands are iniquities: their right hand is filled with gifts. But I have walked in mine innocence: redeem me and have mercy on me. My foot hath stood in the right way: in the churches I will bless thee, O Lord.

¹¹⁶ Exodus xxx. 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Exodus xxx. 3.

In the early Christian era, the faithful who attended the Mass brought with them the bread and wine for the sacrifice. During the Offertory, the priest would receive these gifts, and hence it was necessary for him to wash his hands before proceeding to the most august part of the Holy Sacrifice. Out of respect for the Blessed Sacrament, he moves away from the tabernacle, and goes to the Epistle corner of the altar for this rite. The verses of the psalm which he recites during this purification,¹¹⁸ express clearly the deeper meaning of the washing. The priest prays for a great purity of heart as he approaches nearer to the moment of sacrifice.

The Mosaic liturgy prescribed a purification of hands and feet before the priest approached the altar of sacrifice. God had commanded Moses, "Thou shalt make also a brazen laver with its foot, to wash in, and thou shalt set it between the tabernacle of the testimony and the altar. And water being put into it, Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet in it, when they are going into the tabernacle of the testimony, and when they are to come to the altar, to offer on it incense to the Lord, lest perhaps they die."¹¹⁹ This washing was symbolic of an interior cleansing of heart, a purity of soul that would find favor in God's sight. Pilate, when he washed his hands and proclaimed himself "innocent of the blood of this just man,"¹²⁰ used a rite which the Jews knew well to be symbolic of innocence. The psalmist, probably David, pictures himself as approaching the altar, not alone, but in company with the whole Jewish nation. For this is a communal psalm,¹²¹ and is meant to be sung by all the people. The "I," therefore, is meant to refer to the faithful as a group. It is a song of thanksgiving for God's wondrous mercy toward the people of Israel, who have been protected from the godlessness of the pagan peoples about them, and favored with God's special predilection. It is a song of intense joy, too, at being able to share in the services of the Temple "Where thy glory dwelleth."

¹¹⁸ Psalm xxv. 6-12.

¹¹⁹ Exodus xxx. 18-21.

¹²⁰ Matthew xxvii. 24.

¹²¹ Boylan, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 92.

But aware, as we all must be, that there is always the danger of a "falling out" with God, he begs that God preserve him in love and loyalty to the mandates of Yahweh, and keep him from suffering the fate of the wicked. As in the past, so in the future will he walk in the way of the Lord and join in the praises of God.

The psalm, therefore, is a protestation of innocence and loyalty which the priest at the altar attributes to the grace of God, and a declaration of his confidence that God's bounty toward him will not be exhausted.

THE PREFACE

The Jewish overtones in this prayer, which comes to us from the time of the Apostles, have faded during the course of the centuries, but it will aid our devotion if we try to revive them.

The early *Prefaces* of the primitive Christian era were adaptations of a psalm which the Talmud required the head of the family to say before all partook of the Paschal feast. The psalm recounts the favors which God has bestowed on His chosen people through their long history, from Adam down to their final settlement in the Promised Land. In the early Christian *Prefaces* of the Mass, the celebrant thanked God for the benefits and glories of the ancient Covenant, but then pointed out emphatically that he was celebrating the *true* Pasch, not the symbolic one of the Old Law. He then enumerated the benefits of the new Covenant, the Incarnation, Redemption, and Eucharist. Unfortunately, the *Preface* as we read it today is somewhat altered. Rather than a litany of God's favors to man, each of the thirteen *Prefaces* found in the Roman Missal today mentions but one of those benefits, a different one in each *Preface*. Each is a prayer of thanksgiving, and it is truly meet and just that it should be, for Our Lord Himself gave thanks just before He changed the bread and wine of the Last Supper into His Body and Blood.¹²²

The exultant cries at the end of the *Preface* announce the proximity of the Consecration, at which moment Christ Him-

¹²² Mark xiv. 23.

self will become present on the altar. The shout, "Holy, holy, holy!" is taken from the sublime vision of God which Isaias had in the Temple at Jerusalem, when he received his divine vocation as a prophet in Israel. He saw the seraphim hovering about the throne of God, and crying to one another, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory."¹²³ By "hosts" were meant the angelic choirs which fill the heavenly court, and which the Old Testament mentions frequently—as, for example, in the vision of Micheas: "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the army of heaven standing by Him on the right hand and on the left."¹²⁴ With the choirs of angels, the priest unites himself in singing the praise of God.

The phrase, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord," is from a psalm which was arranged to be sung on a great feast of thanksgiving, the feast of Tabernacles. As the long procession wound its way through the city, the people chanted the first part of the psalm, giving voice to their pride and joy over the good fortune which Yahweh had granted to His people. As the procession entered the Temple gates, the priests within took up the chant as they received the procession. Then all together offered a prayer for the continuance of Yahweh's manifest providence over Israel, after which the High Priest imparted his solemn blessing. The formula he used is the formula now used by the priest at the altar: "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."¹²⁵ The Christian liturgy refers to the advent of Christ on the altar so soon to occur. Then in the words of the people who so joyously greeted Our Lord on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday, the priest cries, "Hosanna in the highest!"¹²⁶

THE CANON

As the bells in the sanctuary ring, the faithful fall to their knees in expectancy of the coming of their Christ. A great silence descends over the church as all present become ab-

¹²³ Isaias vi. 3.

¹²⁴ 3 Kings xxii. 19. Cf. also Psalm cxlviii. 2; Josue v. 14.

¹²⁵ Psalm cxvii. 26.

¹²⁶ Matthew xxi. 9.

sorbed in profound meditation on the great mystery about to ensue. At this point we make the words of Cardinal Wiseman our own: "Here we must pause; because the subject becomes too sacred for our pen; the ground upon which we are about to tread is holy, and the shoes must be loosed from the feet of him who will venture upon it."¹²⁷

The Canon has no roots in the Old Testament, although in general form it follows closely the Jewish Paschal ritual. But it is the uniquely Christian part of the Mass, culminating in the uniquely Christian sacrifice. The most we can hope to do in the following few pages is to skip lightly, though reverently, over its surface, and select a few phrases which may be better understood if they are viewed against an Old Testament background.

We therefore beseech thee, O Lord, to be appeased, and to receive this offering which we, thy servants, and thy whole household do make unto thee; order our days in thy peace; grant that we be rescued from eternal damnation and counted within the fold of thine elect. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The first specifically Old Testament reference which we meet in the *Canon* occurs in this prayer. The phrase "this offering which we, thy servants" is more strictly translated from the Latin as "oblation of our service." It indicates that the offering we make to God is made in recognition of His supreme dominion over mankind, and of our utter dependence on Him at every level of our being. This was the most profound theological significance of all Old Testament sacrifices, and was the lesson which the prophets continually sought to impress upon the Jewish mind.¹²⁸ The absolute transcendence of God over all men is now a dogma of our Catholic faith.¹²⁹

The action of the priest during this prayer has an evident Jewish liturgical antecedent. In sacrifices of the Old Testament, before the animal was slain, the offerer would lay his

¹²⁷ Quoted by Gehr, *op. cit.*, p. 578.

¹²⁸ Cf., for example, Osee i.-ii.

¹²⁹ Cf. Denzinger-Bannwart, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, n. 1782.

hands on the sacrificial gift. This gesture accompanied, according to the prescriptions of Leviticus, all sacrifices of expiation. "He shall put his hand on the head of the victim, and it shall be acceptable, and help to its expiation."¹³⁰ The sins of the ones making the sacrifice were thus laid upon the victim symbolically. As Father Heinisch says, "By sin man had deserved death, but out of mercy God allowed Himself to be appeased with an animal's life and blood."¹³¹ Concerning the priest, God spoke to Moses in these words: "Let him offer the living goat, and putting both hands upon his head, let him confess all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their offenses and sins; and praying that they may light on his head, he shall turn him out, by a man ready for it, into the desert."¹³² By his action during the Mass, the priest signifies that it is an expiatory sacrifice which is to be offered. By anticipation, since the Lamb of God, the Divine Victim, is not yet present on the altar, the priest lays on the offerings before him his sins and those of the faithful.

Vouchsafe to look upon them with a countenance merciful and kind, and to receive them as thou wast pleased to receive the gifts of thy just servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our father Abraham, and that which Melchisedech thy high-priest offered up to thee, a holy sacrifice and spotless victim.

With a reverential awe at the power which God has bestowed on His priests, we pass by the solemn prayers of Consecration, and consider now the presence of Christ on the altar, under the appearances of bread and wine. It is no animal that we offer to God—an offering which in Jewish worship was most acceptable—but the Son of God Himself. His sacrificial Blood is now in the chalice before us as the priest raises it above his head for our adoration. The sacrifice has been accomplished. The Blood shed for the remission of our sins, poured out once for all on Calvary in atonement for the sins of all mankind,

¹³⁰ Leviticus i. 4.

¹³¹ Heinisch, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

¹³² Leviticus xvi. 20-1.

is offered once again on the altar. In Jewish sacrifice, the pouring-out of blood was the real sacrificial act, the essence of the bloody sacrifice. The blood of the victim was the means of expiation, since, as St. Paul tells us, echoing the Old Testament, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." ¹³³ Speaking to Moses, God had said, "The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you that you may make atonement with it upon the altar for your souls, and the blood may be for an expiation of the soul." ¹³⁴

We have already seen that there was no true expiation, no blotting out of sin, by virtue of the sacrifices in the Old Testament. They appeased God only in view of the sacrificial Blood that would be poured out by Christ on Calvary—the Blood in the chalice on our altar. It is the most perfect sacrifice conceivable, thoroughly effective, and eminently acceptable to God the Father, not only because of the Victim offered, but also because of the principal offerer, Christ Himself. He is both Victim and Priest. The sacrifice is offered by Christ in the person of the priest, and, in a correct sense, by the faithful united with the priest. Speaking in his own name and that of the people, the priest asks God to accept this oblation in the same favorable way in which He received sacrifices offered through the course of history by other weak humans.

He recalls the sacrifice of Abel, devout, simple, full of faith, and reminds God that He "took notice of Abel and his offering." ¹³⁵ And there was the sacrifice of Abraham, "the father of all who . . . believe," ¹³⁶ whom God had commanded to sacrifice his only son. Unquestioningly, he took the boy into a high mountain, bound him, laid him upon a pile of faggots, and had raised his sword to slay him when an angel stayed his arm. God had had sufficient proof of his heroic obedience and faith. Instead, a ram was given him as an offering in place of his son. The dispositions of Abraham and Abel must also be ours as we join with Christ Himself in offering His Body and Blood in atonement for the sins of the world. They were dis-

¹³³ Hebrews ix. 22.

¹³⁴ Leviticus xvii. 11.

¹³⁵ Genesis iv. 4.

¹³⁶ Romans iv. 11.

positions which, in the past, had evoked the favorable acceptance of God.

To the company of these Old Testament saints is added the name of Melchisedech, priest and king. In one of the psalms, David tells of an oath of Yahweh spoken to the Messiah, promising that he will not only be a divine king, but an eternal priest: ¹³⁷ "Thou art a priest forever after the manner of Melchisedech," ¹³⁸ the mysterious king of Salem who offered bread and wine in celebration of Abraham's victory over his enemies.¹³⁹ That the Messiah would be of the house of David, and hence a king, was commonly accepted among the Jews. But here the psalmist says he will be more than a king—a priest, too, and forever. The Messiah, Christ, is still a priest, and will be forever, offering Himself daily to the Father in the Mass in atonement for sin, and, according to the manner of Melchisedech, under the appearances of bread and wine.

OUR FATHER

The sacrifices of the Old Testament which were known as "peace-offerings" were offered not in atonement for sin, but as an act of thanksgiving and praise. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is also offered in thanksgiving and praise. It is the most perfect act of adoration, since the more perfect our sacrifice, the more perfectly is God adored and praised.¹⁴⁰ But what sacrifice could be more perfect than that in which the Son of God is both priest and victim? That the Mass is also an act of thanksgiving is clear from several of the prayers accompanying the Holy Sacrifice.

These peace-offerings of the Old Law had as one of their characteristic features a communal sacrificial meal. After the food which had been laid on the altar was separated from profane use and dedicated to God, it was immolated in whole or in part as a sacrifice. What remained of it was received by those offering the sacrifice as a sign of friendship with God, and

¹³⁷ Boylan, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 222.

¹³⁸ Psalm cix. 4.

¹³⁹ Genesis xiv. 18-20.

¹⁴⁰ Gehr, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

eaten by way of a participation in the Divine repast. God, as it were, returned a portion of the sacrificial offering as a token of the peace existing between Himself and those who had offered the sacrifice. This participation in the sacrificial banquet was not essential to the sacrifice, but was considered an integral part thereof.

On the altar is the Holy Eucharist, a sacrificial Food, present now by reason of "the unbloody immolation at the words of consecration."¹⁴¹ Holy Communion gives us the opportunity to partake of the divine feast in which God gives us His Divine Son as our Food. It is *par excellence* the sign of His love for those who have been redeemed through the sacrifice of His Son. Pius XII, in his encyclical on the liturgy, prays thus: "May God grant that [the faithful] participate even every day, if possible, in the divine sacrifice, not only in a spiritual manner, but also by reception of the august sacrament, receiving the body of Jesus Christ which has been offered for all to the eternal Father. . . . The Church of Jesus Christ needs no other bread than this to satisfy fully our souls' wants and desires, and to unite us in the most intimate union with Jesus Christ, to make us 'one body,' to get us to live together as brothers who, breaking the same bread, sit down to the same heavenly table, to partake of the elixir of immortality."¹⁴²

The preparation for this sacrificial banquet begins with the Lord's prayer, the *Our Father*. It is the prayer which Christ taught His followers to say, and in so doing gave the world a new concept of God. To the Mosaic religious conscience, God was an almighty God Who showed Himself in deeds of wisdom, anger, and omnipotence. When God promised David that his kingdom would last forever, He said in reference to Solomon, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son."¹⁴³ But that seemed to be a special relationship between Himself and Solomon. Now Christ has established that relationship between God and all men. Before His coming, men

¹⁴¹ *Mediator Dei*.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ 2 Kings vii. 14.

were the subjects of God; now they are also His sons. "In this manner, therefore, shall you pray: Our Father."¹⁴⁴

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us! Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us! Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, give us peace!

The prayers from the *Our Father* to the Communion itself are preparatory; those following the Communion are prayers of thanksgiving. Shortly before receiving the Sacred Host, the priest strikes his breast three times, each time repeating the prayer above.

John the Baptist, who stands at the end of the Old Testament and on the threshold of the New, pointed out Christ to a multitude of his followers as the Lamb of God "who takest away the sins of the world," when Our Lord first appeared in public after His long hidden life at Nazareth.¹⁴⁵ Strange as the phrase may sound to us, it was not foreign to his hearers. A lamb was a common sacrificial animal in the Temple. When offered, it took away, in a sense, the sins of the offerer who symbolically transferred his sins to the lamb by laying his hands upon it. In their scriptures, too, the Jews had read that the Saviour of the world, the long-awaited Redeemer, would be in some mysterious sense a lamb. "Send forth the Lamb, the ruler of the earth!" Isaias had cried,¹⁴⁶ and in one of his servant-songs he had prophesied: "He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer."¹⁴⁷ The sacrificial Lamb, awaited and longed-for by centuries of faithful Jews, now lies before the priest on the altar, the Lamb who, in no symbolic sense, but in fact has taken away the sins of the world. To Him the priest whispers his prayer, "have mercy on us, give us peace!"

¹⁴⁴ Matthew vi. 9.

¹⁴⁵ John i. 29.

¹⁴⁶ Isaias xvi. 1.

¹⁴⁷ Isaias liii. 7.

What return shall I make to the Lord for all he has given to me? I will take the chalice of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord, and shall be saved from my enemies.

After several prayers for peace and mercy, and after a declaration of his own unworthiness, the priest consumes the Sacred Host. Before consuming the Precious Blood, he recites the verses from the psalms just quoted.¹⁴⁸

These verses are taken from a hymn of thanksgiving, the occasion of which was the recovery of the psalmist "from a dangerous illness, or his rescue from a deadly peril."¹⁴⁹ It is a song of thanks for an escape from death because of the intervention of Yahweh. He lifts his "cup of rescue" as part of his thanksgiving offering, and calls the name of Yahweh loudly so that all may know that it was Yahweh who had rescued him. How appropriate are these verses for the priest as he reflects on the liberality and mercy of God in rescuing him from death through the sacrifice of His Divine Son! The "chalice of salvation" which he grasps contains the sacrificial Victim which has wrought his rescue from eternal death. In partaking of this cup of the Blood of the Divine Victim, the priest attains an intimate union with Christ, and there is poured forth in his soul abundant graces—a pledge of the eternal union with God in heaven, which is the goal of every Christian soul.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . .

In the last Gospel, too familiar to require a complete citation, we find our final reflection of the Old Testament in the Mass. It lies in St. John's frequent contrast between light and darkness. Centuries earlier, in his marvelous Messianic prophecy, Isaias had painted the Messianic picture as a picture of light: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death,

¹⁴⁸ Psalm cxv. 12, 13; xvii. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Boylan, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 245.

light is risen.”¹⁵⁰ Surely St. John had in mind these words of the great prophet whom he so often quotes in his Gospel,¹⁵¹ when he wrote: “In him was life and the life was the light of men and the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness grasped it not. . . . It was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into the world.”¹⁵²

EPILOGUE

And thus we come to the end of the Mass.

We have tried to re-discover and examine whatever is reminiscent of the Old Testament in the rites and prayers of the Mass. We have tried to see the mark left upon our Catholic liturgy by the Mosaic worship which it supplanted. The picture we have drawn is an entirely inadequate picture of the Mass, since it sketches only in passing the ineffable Christian mystery which is the heart of the Holy Sacrifice, and has entirely neglected many of its most beautiful prayers. However, if it be true that the more we know about a thing the more we appreciate it, then the writer feels that both he and the reader have profited from this study of the Mass in the light of the Old Testament. We who live in the “fullness of time”¹⁵³ should strive to deepen our appreciation of the Holy Sacrifice. We shall do this not only by knowing the Mass in its tremendous fulfillment, but in its providential preparation in the Old Testament as well.

The following words of Father Lebreton summarize well what we have seen in the preceding pages:

The strong imprint of Jewish tradition on Christian prayer the Church will never try to efface; she is conscious of being the *true Israel*; whatever was divine in the Jewish past is now her own; she recognizes in the Old Law the preparation for and symbol of what she is, in the prophets the distant vision of what she possesses; in the psalms her prayer; all that is her heritage, and as mistress she disposes of it freely, as Jesus Himself did in the Gospel.

¹⁵⁰ Isaias ix. 2.

¹⁵¹ Cf., for example, John xii. 38-41.

¹⁵² John i. 4-5, 9.

¹⁵³ Galatians iv. 4.

But if she is the foremost of creatures, older than the prophets and the patriarchs, she is also the spouse of Christ, as young as He, and capable of rejuvenating and transforming all she touches. She loves to repeat the Jewish prayers, the prayers of her cradle, but she gives them new meaning. . . .

Thus the Christians who were born in Judaism or who had felt its effects, loved to repeat, in the bosom of the Church, some prayers which in many respects were like those which the synagogue had taught them to love; but the new faith, which had transformed their life, transformed also their prayer. It mounted higher and nearer to God Who had become their Father, carried there by His beloved Son Who had made Himself their High-Priest.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Quoted by Croegaert, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 72. Translation by the writer.

Texts from the Old Testament throughout the booklet are quoted from the Douay version of the Holy Bible. Texts from the New Testament are quoted from the Confraternity edition of the New Testament.

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