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Nothing So Thrilling

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By

MAURICE O'CONNOR

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or

THE BOND OF PEACE

By MAURICE O'CONNOR

AWAY among the pines and lakes of Minnesota's Arrowhead Country is a pine log chapel. For nine months of the year it is padlocked, but during July and August it is packed three times on Sunday mornings with more than a thousand tourists. During the depression, too. The "One World" of the nations is here in miniature at Mass. Among the worshippers you will find scores of young men known by the collective names of 'Joe College' and 'G.I. Joe'. For some of them Saturday night is not the loneliest night in the week; but they believe in God, anyhow. And there they are on their tourist knees doing something about it. There is no preaching and no singing, because that priest at the altar is on vacation, too.

What's So Strange?

What's so sensational about that, you may ask? Anybody who has been around can tell you of the streams of humanity that flow steadily to and from the Catholic churches of

the land from 5 a.m. through high noon on Sunday. Some of them have been working all night, but they have a date with God before they go to bed. Nor do the condition of the roads or the vagaries of the weather keep those Catholic citizens away from their weekly tryst with Christ and His flock. And everybody, including God, expects this from Catholics. Where Catholics are numerous it is nothing unusual to have between 5,000 and 10,000 of them trek to the same parish church of a Sunday morning. A few blocks away a similar number may be headed for another Catholic church in one of our bigger cities.

What Makes the Difference?

But it so happens that there is only 'a baker's dozen' of local Catholics in this particular tourist district, and the non-Catholic natives wonder what that log chapel with the Cross has for the tourists that their own evangelical church doesn't seem to have. Some of them say that it is because the Catholics, even the ones with the big cars, are more *afraid* of God. Would that make all the difference — even if it were the whole truth?

The Ten Commandments

Certainly anybody who believes in God has a healthy fear of ignoring His Commandments. These Commandments are summed-up by *Jesus Christ* as follows: 1. Love God —

more than you love yourself. 2. Love your neighbour as much as you love yourself. Most basic and vital of God's Commandments are the *first three* (first four, if you are a Protestant).

They concern our relations with God. As His children we are to give Him our private devotion and prayerful attention. As members of His human Family we are to take part in His weekly social worship. A lady once told a priest that she preferred to worship God all alone in her garden, because 'Christ worshipped in a garden' she said. The priest asked if she knew that Christ also worshipped on a Cross, and in the Temple cathedral which he called . . . "my house . . . the house of prayer." Her 'come-back' was that there were too many hypocrites in church on Sunday, but the priest suggested with a smile that there was always room for one more. The modern pharisee, he assured her, does not approach church or sacrament. In religion he is an isolationist, or indifferentist. To him all churches and religions are equally unnecessary — especially the Catholic religion. But, he prefers to live where the Church functions freely rather than in a country like Siberia. Yet he never gives a helping hand to that Church which mothered and continues to nurse Christian freedom and civilization for him and his children; and he resents being

called by his proper name of "parasite." He also resents being called an atheist, even though Christ tells him: "He who denies Me *before men* him will I deny before My Father in Heaven." Sunday after Sunday he denies Christ by refusing to join Christ and His Flock. He prefers to be known as a worshipper of "Science"; but he is all confused when he finds professor Einstein admitting to be a refugee from soul-less Science. Quoth Einstein: "Science and the universities turned traitors to mankind in Germany . . . only the Church resisted the Nazi doctrines." The Catholic Church of Christ ever resists, and survives all false prophets and tyrants, because she is the One dynamic spiritual *organism* of Christ (as St. Paul describes her) functioning through the centuries and the nations. And the secret of her strength and unity is in *the Mass*, her central reservoir of Divine Life.

Faith Plus Love

The Mass has everything. It has an appeal for the intellectual, the dramatist, the artist, and "the common man." But, above all, it appeals to those whose faith in Christ and His love is not fenced in by the pettiness of man's limited mind and heart. It is not *fear* that makes a Catholic doctor (of our acquaintance) begin his busy day by going to daily

Mass. It took more than fear to bring to Mass the many brilliant agnostics and confused believers who have embraced *the Catholic Christ* in our time — even in Holy Communion. Nor is it fear that brings thousands of the laity to *Daily Mass* and Communion. With people like that the religion of Christ is more than a Sunday affair, or a respectable front. And, tourists who keep their weekly appointment with God, wherever they find themselves, are not without faith in God and His abiding laws. Catholics are choosy about *how* they worship God, and when they want to hear a sermon they make sure that it is the *Voice of Christ* they hear speaking through His own Church set-up and affiliated stations. If any of their priests, no matter how popular, should ever go “off the beam,” and substitute personal opinions for Christ’s infallible Truth, they drop him like a hot coal, because they know that “the beam” is always “straight and narrow,” and sure. They know, too, that along with the inspiration of the spoken Word of Christ they need the supernatural energy that Christ communicates to souls through His own sacraments: And, they know that they can’t find these in their gardens or in a fraternal club, or philosophorum.

Christ at Mass

“What have you Catholics got in that church

to pack in those crowds?" That was the question once put to a friend of ours. "Well, to be frank," was the answer, "it isn't that our priest is so hot as a preacher: Nor is our choir anything to brag about. You see — we believe that we have *Christ at Mass* really present." "You mean to say you believe that Jesus is present in person?" "That is it exactly," replied our friend, "except that He comes in the disguise of bread and wine." The other silently shook his head, not realizing that Christ's own disciples also thought this "a hard saying" when Christ first told them of it. (John VI, 62). His twelve apostles, however, believed it when He showed them *how* they were to "*do this.*" It was the last thing He showed them the night before Calvary. He told them that this is *the way* His Sacrifice of Calvary was to be perpetuated, so that Christians always would have a Sacrifice that would be adequate and acceptable to Almighty God. The early Christians hiding in the catacombs of Rome for 300 years offered this Sacrifice to God. St. Paul's converts throughout Asia Minor offered it, and their descendants continue to offer it to this day. The great majority of the world's Christians continue to offer *it*. Or, rather, Christ The High Priest continues to offer for them and with them His own timeless Sacrifice — in the disguise of bread and wine. The same *God-Man* who gave life to the corpse of Lazarus

gives His own life to perishable bread and calls it — “The Living Bread” (John VI). The Christ who converted water into wine at Cana converts wine into His own saving blood: The ancient English poet Dryden put it this way:

“Can they who say **THE HOST** should be
descried

By sense define a body **GLORIFIED**
Impassible and penetrating parts?

Let them declare by what mysterious
arts

He shot that body thru th’opposing
might

Of bolts and bars

And stood before His train confessed

In open sight.”

The reference is to Christ’s Easter-Day appearance to his apostles who had barricaded themselves in a room.

Dryden continues:

“Could He His Godhood veil with flesh
and blood

And not veil these again, to be our food?”

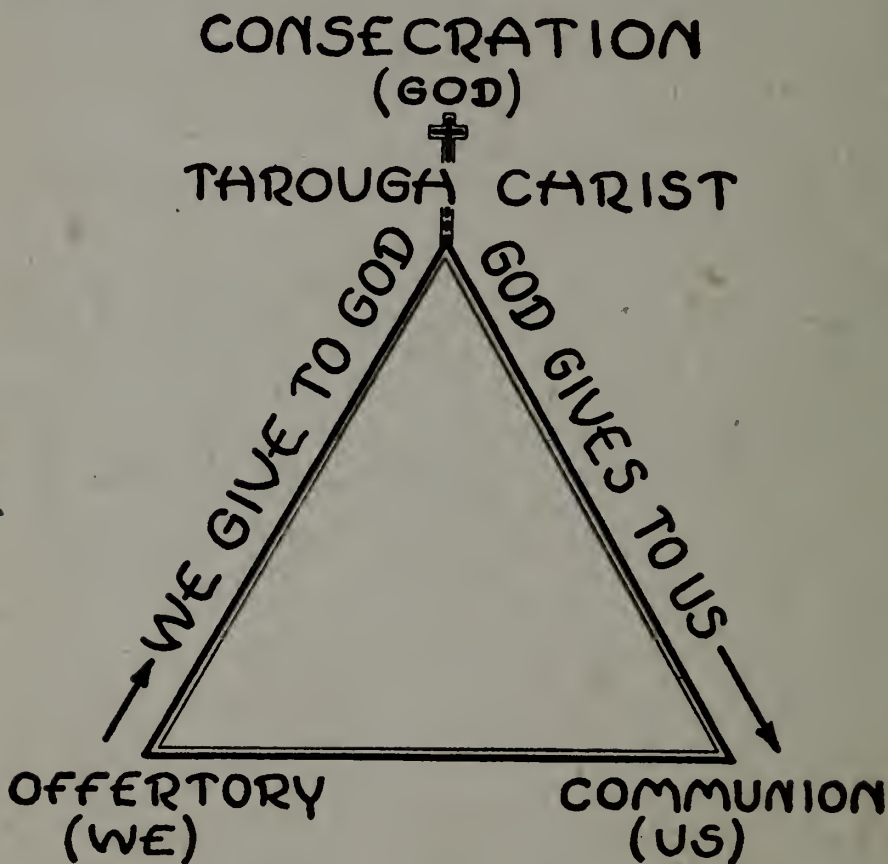
Which means: If He could disguise His Divinity in human flesh and form, can He not also hide His Easter-glorified flesh and form under the *appearances* of bread and wine? The Bible says that He did and does. (John VI, 53-61) (Matt. XXVI, 26) (Mark XIV, 22-26) (Luke XXII, 16-21) (I Cor. II, 27-30).

And to whom did He say “Oh ye of little faith” except to those who are “fearful” and inclined to put their own human and puny

limits to His *Power* and His *Love*? *Power plus Love* is the formula by which Christ produces His Eucharistic *Sacrifice*, an integral part of which is the *Sacrament of Holy Communion*. The former is from us to God, the latter is from God to us.

The Divine Triangle

To understand this let us visualize a triangle. Like this:



The first part of The Mass (consisting of supplications, praise, thanks, Bible lesson, Gospel and sermon), is a preparation for *The*

Offertory, the first essential part of the Mass Sacrifice. At the *Offertory*, heralded by the tinkle of a bell, the priest offers up the peoples' bread and wine, as tokens of their absolute dependence on God for all that they are and have. It is at this time that the ushers take the collection, and deposit it before the altar. Between the *Offertory* and the Consecration the priest and people pray that their sacrifice may be acceptable to God. This thought, coupled with supplications for God's Church and people, is sustained up to *The Consecration*, which is the pivotal point of The Holy Sacrifice. As the priest bends over the bread Jesus Christ, The Invisible High Priest, pronounces with the priest the eternal words '*This is My Body*'. In like manner over the wine: '*This is the Chalice of My Blood*, of the new and eternal testament . . . which is shed for you and for many unto remission of sins.'" During these hushed moments time stands still — The Christ of Calvary is offering His body and blood for His people in His own bloodless but real way — a way that transcends our little minds. He takes over our poor sacrifice — gifts of bread and wine, converts their substance into His own self-substance which He now presents to The Heavenly Father as *our Sacrifice* — *our gift to God*. The Father is so well pleased with The Offering that, in return, He gives to us the most precious gift that even

God can give — the same gift of His beloved Son's Substance and Life Divine — to be the vitamin of our immortal souls in *Holy Communion*. The curtain falls on the Divine Drama. In a few moments the priest turns to the people and says "You may go — *It* is consummated." Complete, now, is the great action of give-and-take between God and His people, with Christ as Mediator. Christ liberates our minds from the slavery of matter-and-motion while we are with Him at Mass. There we do not have to reach back through the arches of twenty centuries to find Christ feeding us and dying for us: Nor do our little minds have to fly up beyond the stratosphere to the regions of "in-accessible light" to find our priestly Christ and Savior: No, because His Love for us brings Him to us on our altar, and banquet table.

No wonder that such converts to The Catholic Christ as the great English Cardinal, John Henry Newman, wrote: "To me nothing is so consoling, so piercing . . . *so thrilling* . . . as The Mass . . . I could attend The Mass forever and not grow tired."

The 'Clean Oblation'

The Bible, both old and new testaments, emphasizes that God ever demands the worship of *Sacrifice Offering* from His people. It is *the* way to express our dependence on God for everything we are and have. All the olden

Sacrifices that He enjoined were but shadows of and preambles to the *Infinite Sacrifice* of His only-begotten Son on The Cross. Malachias, the last of God's olden prophets, proclaims the approach of the time when God would reject the olden Sacrifices, and would accept, in their stead, a '*clean oblation*' which would be offered to Him *everywhere* from *Gentile* altars, and continuously . . . "from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof."

What is this Clean Oblation on which the sun never sets? Have you a soldier friend somewhere . . . anywhere . . . in this global war? Ask him what Malachias meant. From the Aleutians through Australia, from Britain through Burma, and from the Rockies through the Rhineland . . . everywhere our men have been they have seen the same 'Clean Oblation' that the marines co-offered on Iwo Jima — namely, The Holy Sacrifice of The Mass. Every moment of the day and the night somewhere around the Globe this Sacrifice of Christ at Mass is being offered to God from gentile but Catholic altars. This is one thing we do not have to "tell the marines." Most of them know that *The Mass is the Sacrifice of the Cross projected* and made present (to all time) and to all nations and generations of God's people. Through The Mass Calvary comes to us as *our Sacrifice* and our Salvation.

The Bond of Peace

During the centuries that The Mass united the peoples of Europe there was no "Thirty Years War," and no thirty nations at war. Their "family quarrels" were of brief duration, and when Knighthood was in flower, there was no massacre of the innocents and the helpless like there are in this dark age of the twentieth century. The Middle Ages gave birth to science and the universities, but they wedded them to Jesus Christ, the Teacher of teachers, until the divorce that was begun in the XIV century was made final in the XVIth. And then came the 'thirty years war' — the father of all our modern wars . . . bigger and better and more frequent. But, it may well be that God's Providence allowed this rebellion to run its course to a dead end, so that men may again listen to Christ's plan for 'One World,' One Faith, one Baptism into that Faith, and *One Sacrifice* of The Mass as the heart of that Faith, and that Love. Today there is only one *Social Function* where axis peoples and allied peoples may and do fraternize, without an interpreter. And, that is when they co-mingle (as prisoners of war do with their captors) around the altar of *The Catholic Christ*. There is only one *Peace Table* where they sit down to the same banquet, without furtive diplomacy: And, that is when they kneel at the Holy Communion table and eat

together the "*Bread which came down from Heaven.*" (John VI). What more can Divine Providence do to let men see that *The Holy Eucharist* of His Son . . . The Prince of Peace . . . is The Sacrifice and the Food of Peace? What more can Christ do to show them that when they all learn to '*do this*' they will have won the victory over the "four horsemen" of these apocalyptic times — isolationism, sectarianism, rugged individualism, and ruthless regimentation?

Even atheistic agnostics seem to feel now that Christ is The Answer to the world's woes. The Mass is Christ . . . not in splendid isolation . . . but among His people as their High Priest and Sacrifice, their Chief Shepherd and Sacrament, their infallible Teacher, Leader and Savior. By such intimate contact with His Flock and apostolic agents does Christ bind men to Himself, to one another, and "*to Our Father Who art in Heaven.*"

Let us pray . . . all together . . . at Mass . . . in, with and through Christ, our Lord, and Savior.

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