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*by*

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# THE SECRET OF THE MASS

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RICHARD GINDER

“SACRIFICE” is a word which will never pass from our language. It expresses an idea rooted in our instincts. We want to do for those we love; in fact, the first demonstration of love is service.

Parents make every possible sacrifice for their children; and patriotism, a high type of love, finds its consummation in the supreme sacrifice; dying in defense of one's native land.

“Greater love than this no man hath, that he lay down his life for a friend.”—Calvary is an everlasting reminder of our Savior's unbounded love for souls.

At the Last Supper, Jesus went beyond

the mere saying of—"This is My body: This is My blood." His words were "This is My body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."<sup>1</sup> The giving of the body and the shedding of the blood are expressed in each instance by a present tense of the Greek verb. In other words, Christ was offering the first Mass at the Last Supper, and commanding His Apostles to represent that sacrifice in their ministry.

His body and blood rested, mystically divided, in His hands. It was the night before He died. He had just finished observing the sacrificial Passover with His little flock, and now He ordained that this should supersede the sacrifices of the Old Law. He had been called by David "a priest according to the order of Melchisedech," that strange figure to whom Abraham gave tithes in return for the offering of bread and wine.

### IN THE YEAR 430 B.C.

Long ago, some 430 years before, the

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1. Lk. XXII, 19

Lord had spoken through Malachy, expressing His disgust at the careless execution of the temple-ritual and, in consequence, rejecting Jewish sacrifice.

“Who is there among you, that will shut the doors, and will kindle the fire on my altar gratis? I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will not receive a gift of your hand.

“For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered in my name a clean oblation; for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts.”<sup>2</sup>

The reference is to a new and a clean sacrifice, taken in the strictest sense, which is to be catholic (everywhere and among all peoples). It could not have meant the sacrifices of the Old Law. They were being reprov'd. Nor the unclean offerings of the pagans. Nor Calvary, which was to be offered in one time and one definite place.

And yet St. Paul speaks of Jesus as a

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2. Mal. I, 10-11

priest "ever living to make intercession for us." A priest is one committed to the altar of sacrifice. Parsons and ministers indignantly reject the title because they not only do not offer sacrifice, but they do not believe in it. They are fundamentally preachers.

But Jesus is a priest, and in the Bible He is depicted as a lamb, standing like one slain from the beginning of the world.<sup>3</sup>

St. Paul's writings show how easily the first Christians made the transition from the bloody sacrifices of the Mosaic Law to the unbloody sacrifice of the New Testament:

"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not the showing of the blood of Christ? And the bread that we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord? Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread. Behold Israel according to the flesh, are not they who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? . . . What the Gen-

3. Apoc. V. 6: XIII, 8—King James Version Rev. V,6: XIII, 8



tiles sacrifice, 'they sacrifice to devils and not to God'; and I would not have you become associates of devils. You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; you cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils."<sup>4</sup>

### ST. PAUL — A PRIEST

This is the language of a priest fully acquainted with sacrifice, warning his congregation not to mix in heathen sacrifice. But notice that both Christians and heathens have sacrifice!

The Christian sacrifice—the Mass—is the renewal of Calvary. We speak of it as the identical sacrifice, not in the sense that Jesus dies again and again, but in the sense that this dying is re-presented, that it is offered again, that it is re-enacted before the eyes of heaven. Jesus Christ, offering the sacrifice of the cross, offers the Holy Mass as our High Priest and the invisible Head of the Church, using the priests of His Church as instruments. Jesus Christ, dying for us on Calvary, is the

<sup>4</sup>. 1 Cor. X, 16-22

same Victim immolated and consumed in the sacrifice of the Mass. On Calvary, He died, the victim of His adoration for the Father, in thanksgiving, in reparation for our sins, and in petition for the graces necessary to His people. Holy Mass is daily offered for these same intentions.

On the Cross there was bloodshed. The Priest-Victim was visible in His sacred Humanity. Golgotha was unique. It happened once in history, and was enough to atone for the sins of a thousand worlds. But in the Mass, this atonement is applied to the souls of men.

In other words, through the Mass, the body and blood of the Son are constantly being mystically sacrificed and presented to the Everlasting Father. It is an everlasting extension of the redemption. It goes on without ending. There are four Masses beginning every second of the day in some part of the world. Four spotless hosts are raised each second—four chalices flash into the morning sun, expressing our adoration of the Father and reminding

Him of our redemption. It is the constant prayer of Christ's people on earth—His never-ending mead of worship given to the Father.

Each Mass is the property of the universal Church, of the whole body. Christ prays not only for those gathered around the altar, but for our Holy Father, who is the personation of our unity, for our bishop, and for all faithful Christians, living and dead.

### **JESUS — A PRIEST**

Jesus is our priest, and one is the priesthood of the New Law. Not that we, who have been set apart and ordained by our bishops, are not really priests; but our priesthood is only a share in that catholic, that universal priesthood, exercised by Christ. He acts through us. What power we have is His. In His coming, He completely absorbed the priesthood of the Ancient Dispensation. He has become the New Patriarch of humanity, the Priest of the race, sharing His priesthood with those whom he foreknew and set apart. It is He

whom St. Paul calls "our Advocate, always making intercession for us."

Now perhaps you can understand the crowds surging in and out of Catholic churches. Every morning brings its multitudes of devout believers to assist at this Holy Sacrifice. Around the altar they gather to see, with eyes of faith, the opening of the Heavens, the majesty of the Trinity, and the dew of grace dropping upon the earth; there they join with our Lady, with St. Joseph and the Apostles, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with all the holy martyrs and spotless virgins, in offering this sacrifice of God to God.

There is no sound other than the tinkling of a bell. The drama begins and is consummated in half an hour. But the faithful are appropriating the sacrifice and offering it for their needs; they are uniting their hearts and minds with the High Priest, and by giving glory to God, they intensify their own supernatural life and merit an increase of God's love and help for themselves. For the Mass is more than

a prayer; it is an efficient action—"efficient" in the sense that it is bound to have an effect. It is Jesus Christ who is praying with and for us. The Everlasting Father cannot refuse the prayer of His Son and the re-presentation of that love-offering first consummated on Calvary.

### PERFECTION

This is our perfect sacrifice: perfect, because it was bequeathed to us by an all-wise and an all-powerful God; perfect, because it is offered by Jesus Christ, our Link between heaven and earth, uniting in Himself the human with the divine; perfect, because God will never refuse it, for as Man, our God knows our needs from direct experience, and as God, he is able infallibly to please the Father.

In the Mass we give God perfect adoration—for we are bound to adore Him. It is not so much a part of His law, the requirement of that adoration, as it is ordinary common-sense. He made us. He keeps us in existence. It took His command to begin the world, but we tend to forget

the constant command which keeps it moving. We cannot raise our arms, we cannot so much as blink our eyes, without the divine assistance; and were God to withdraw His support, we would vanish instantly into the nothingness whence He first called us. It is for us to acknowledge that fact with genuine humility.

Considering the dignity of our Priest and Victim in the Mass, we see that there could be no more exalted expression of adoration. And because of the fact that we have been made one with Him in baptism, we share in that sacrifice just as, through Adam, our common father, we shared in original sin.

Thanksgiving is so closely related to adoration that we sometimes find it hard to tell them apart. We owe God adoration because He is what He is. Every created thing, from angels down to stones, and on down to the most abandoned soul in hell, owes God adoration, because He is the infinite Creator. But thanksgiving is an appreciation of His kindnesses to us.

He made us. We have our life at His

hands. He chose good parents for us. His goodness has given us work, a home, food and family life. Who can tell what calamities His hand has spared us?—it is always possible to imagine a worsening of our condition. We have no ground for smugness. What we have comes from God, and if we want His kindness to go on in our behalf, we must thank Him. We know how we ourselves hate thanklessness! And as it is, God is so good to us that we could never give him enough thanks, even though we spent our lives in prayer, because during our very moments of prayer His blessings would be multiplied over us.

In spite of God's many favors, we are not only ungrateful, but often sinful. Some of us are always rubbing elbows with the devil; others never commit a serious sin, but often commit deliberate smaller sins. In any event, we are, all of us, constantly involving ourselves more and more deeply in a debt of satisfaction to God. We are forever slighting His law, forever preferring our own interests to His, and con-

sequently running up a fearful bill to be settled sometime, either here or hereafter.

### THE ASKING OF FAVORS

We must ask God for our needs, too. At Mass our Lord prays for those who are taking part with Him. He joins His prayer with our feeble request, raising up our arms with the strong arm of His might, so that if we ask at Mass, we are bound to be heard, and although we cannot be sure that what we ask will be granted precisely as we have asked it, we may be sure that our prayer has not been lost and that something will be given us, something better for us.

Of course, the usage of centuries has greatly ornamented the sacrifice. There is a richness of ceremonial, the reading of psalms and scriptural lessons, many prayers addressed to God on behalf of the Church, and prayers of thanksgiving; but essentially there is an offering, a conversion of the bread and wine into our Lord's body and blood, then the communion, i.e.



the consuming of them by priest and people.

Looking back through history, deep into the ages of faith, we see a time when there was not a Christian who did not make this sacrifice the center of his life. The priceless vestments, the fabulous chalices and sacred utensils, the gold and silver thuribles, the richly ornamented ritual, the chaste sublimity of the music; these were the lavishments of medieval society on the Mass.

### **WHEN CAESAR RULED**

Pushing back still further, we reach the age of the Caesars—those 300 years during which the Church faced alternating liberty and persecution. Why do we have candles on our altars, if not in remembrance of those first three centuries when Christians, worried and hunted by Roman law, dug their chapels underground and held divine services under the soft light of tapers? Why is every Mass offered over the remains of some saint? — because in their underground churches, the Christians could think of no better altar for the Mass

than the coffin of one who had poured out his blood for Christ—a custom which we Catholics have to this day.

“For I myself have received from the Lord (what I also delivered to you), that the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and giving thanks broke, and said, ‘This is My body which shall be given up for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In like manner also the cup, after He had supped, saying, ‘This cup is the New covenant in My blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until He comes’.”<sup>5</sup>

We have gone back from the present day to the time of St. Paul. In every age we have found men at Mass. How, then, can anyone say that the Mass is wrong, or unscriptural, or un-Christian? No — it is rather for the Church to ask outsiders—“Where is your Mass? How can you be Christians without a Mass?”

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5. I Cor. XI, 23-27





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