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Telling secrets
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Reflections on the Secrets of the Sunday
Masses and some of the greater Feast
Days.

by Placidus Kempf, O. S. B.

Price twenty-five cents

a Grail Publication

St. Meinrad, Indiana

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Deacidified

TELLING SECRETS

"Secrets are not for publication," says an old proverb. Doubtless because, once told, a secret is no longer such. The "Secrets" that we publish herewith are the prayers of the Mass by that name. The simple explanation of these prayers should show how "telling," that is, how full of meaning, how "effective" they are.

The Secret is the silent, dedicatory prayer said by the celebrant over the offerings, just after he has invited the faithful to pray with him by his fervent invitation: "Pray, brethren" (*Orate, fratres*). These oblation prayers contain almost the same thoughts as those expressed by the Offerory chant. As in the whole oblation rite, so also in the Secret there are two closely connected petitions: one, that the sacrificial gifts prepared on the altar may be accepted, blessed, sanctified, and consecrated; the other, that the abundant and manifold graces of the sacrifice be bestowed upon the priest and the assisting faithful. The Secrets belong to those changeable parts of the Mass which has an influence on their form. In this the spirit and the sense of the mysteries of the church year are found incorporated and blended in the most beautiful harmony and profuse variety. Hence, in spite of their great similarity in general, the Secrets are not uniform, but present in their arrangement and contents the

most pleasing variety, thereby showing the fruitful elegance of the heavenly wisdom of the Church.

The priest recites these prayers silently, we are told by liturgical writers, in order that the holy sacrifice may not become monotonous, but may offer a certain contrast between instruction and prayer, between solemn singing and silent praying. This praying silently enables the priest to pray with greater recollection, imitating the example of Jesus, Who, in the Garden of Olives, "going a stone's throw off, knelt down to pray" (St. Luke 22:41). It reminds the faithful also of these silent soul-outpourings of Christ in the Garden.

These silent prayers show that a silent, mysterious emotion breathes through this wonderful sacrifice in which Jesus is our hidden God and Savior. They recall the composure and quiet patience with which Christ entered upon His sacred passion.

To the silent prayer of the priest are joined the silent prayers of the assisting faithful. There are secret needs and sufferings that do not come to the surface in life, but are felt all the more keenly in the secret chamber of the human heart. Jesus, Who knows and hears in secret, will hear these silent petitions that are joined to those of the priest and placed into the chalice, as it were, which will soon contain the Precious Blood of Jesus, "the spokesman of the new covenant, and the sprinkling of his blood, which has better things to say than Abel's had" (Heb. 12:24).

THESE HEAVENLY MYSTERIES

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
receive our offerings and prayers, and
through these heavenly mysteries
cleanse us and
graciously hear us.

Our offering will soon be changed into Jesus Christ, Who as an eight-day-old Infant submitted to the painful law of circumcision in order to show that He was truly Man, born of the race of Adam, and that, therefore, the Jews had no cause to reject Him. He did so, to sanction circumcision as a divine law, and to give us an example of prompt and perfect obedience to the law, to show that in His person this law was to have its completion, and to teach us to practice circumcision of heart as recommended in both the Old and New Testaments. "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart, and stiffen your neck no more" (Deut. 10:16). "As for circumcision, it is we who practice it, we who serve God with the spirit, and take pride in Jesus Christ, instead of putting our trust in outward observances" (Philip. 3:). Just as circumcision caused pain in that part of the human body that is so easily dominated by lust, so these mysteries should "cleanse us" from this and all other sins caused by the emotions of our flesh.

Feast of the Most Holy Name

SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

O most merciful God,
may Thy blessing, by which every creature lives,
sanctify this our sacrifice
which we offer Thee for the glory
of the Name of Thy Son . . .

Besides His Holy Name of Jesus, "the name the angel had given him before even he was conceived in the womb" (St. Luke 2:21), our Savior calls Himself Alpha and Omega, "the beginning of all things and their end" (Apoc. 1:8). Of ourselves we may say that "our beginning is our end." By "God's blessing" we live, and we live to "bless God," to give glory to His Name as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. We give glory to the Name of Jesus, our Redeemer, by being redeemed, that is, by accepting the grace of redemption and cooperating with this divine help in leading lives modelled on the earthly life of Jesus, our elder Brother. In this respect we have a simple test for determining whether we are offering God a sacrifice of praise and are striving for our end in the statement of our Lord, Who affirmed: "What I do is always what pleases him (my Father)" (St. John 8:29). It matters little what we do, provided that little is what God expects of us at the moment, and that we do it as perfectly as possible in order to please Him.

OUR GIFT

O Lord, in Thy mercy
look down upon these gifts
of Thy Church in which . . .
He is sacrificed and received
Who is signified by these gifts.

The gifts that the Three Kings from the East offered to the Babe of Bethlehem—gold, frankincense, and myrrh, are symbolical of the three gifts we offer this same Christ Child on our Bethlehem—the altar. We offer Him our soul with its three powers—intellect (incense), memory (myrrh), and free will (gold). As the soul of the grains of incense, released in the fire, soars towards heaven with its sweet odor, so our thoughts today seek their center, the Infant Savior. At His small feet we lay our most precious treasure, the gold of our free will, purified of all the dross of self in the furnace of divine love. Our memory, bitter like myrrh at thought of our wickedness and vileness, finds sweetness and consolation in the Savior, Who, with outstretched arms on the cross of His rough crib, fastened there by the nails of love, already begins to drink the bitter cup that He must drain to the very dregs. Jesus, in return for our offering, gives Himself to us as our personal Gift.

Feast of the Holy Family

PEACE AND GRACE

O Lord,

we offer Thee this Victim of our ransom, and . . .
we fervently implore Thee
firmly to establish our families in
Thy peace and grace.

The Holy Family theme is woven throughout the Proper of today's Mass. This pattern is significant in the Secret where we ask for "peace and grace" for our families. *Peace*, then *grace*. In the middle of the ocean there is nothing but commotion. But in the peaceful atmosphere of your back yard (unless you live in a tenement house), where the sun shines and the rain falls, and peace reigns, flowers and vegetables can grow and mature. God's dove of grace will not alight on the churning waves—it seeks firm soil for its heavenly feet. Perhaps God's grace cannot work in your family because true peace is lacking there. Peace is called the "tranquility of order." The God-willed order for the members of a family is—father, mother, children. This order was strictly observed in the Holy Family, although, according to the worthiness of its members, we think it should have been reversed. This right order should cause each member to "look up" with respect to each higher member, now "down upon" the rest of the family with disdain, the seed of discord, that may mature into hate.

QUICKEN US

O Lord,
may the sacrifice which is offered
To Thee always
quicken and protect us.

This short prayer tells us that we need "life" and "spirit," for, "to quicken" means "to make alive" or "to revive." How slow we are to come to this fountain of life! God must force us to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and Holydays, under pain or penalty of incurring spiritual death by mortal sin, if our absence is culpable. And, what vain excuses we dig up or invent for attending the shortest mass and for leaving the church as soon as possible! We find it hard, perhaps, to push ourselves away from a well-prepared and spread dining room table, or to wean ourselves from a well of bodily pleasures, but our true self, our soul, is left to die of thirst and starvation. What we need is to have our "faith" quickened, that by means of this true light we may be able to evaluate properly the real and necessary things of life. It is at this Sacrifice and Sacrament of Faith that this virtue, infused at the conferring of the supernatural life of sanctifying grace at our spiritual birth, our baptism, is increased and nourished to ever-increasing perfection.

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

SANCTIFY US

O Lord,
sanctify the gifts we offer, and
cleanse us from the stains of our sins.

The Secret today, almost identical with that of the Third Mass on Christmas day, might well be our prayer at every holy Mass we attend. The "gifts we offer"—of bread and wine—surely need no sanctification. In a few moments the words of consecration will change these pure offerings into the true Body and Blood of Jesus. But they are our representatives at the throne of God. We join with them the offering of ourselves. But the change of ourselves into pure and holy children of our Heavenly Father is not accomplished in a moment by a few words, no matter how fervent they may be. It is a slow, yes, lifelong process, but each grace should bring us a step closer to this God-set goal. The grace of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice may be called a threefold grace, as it gives us the model, manner, and means of changing self from sinner to saint. For, because of the consecration there can be a conversion, either actual or at least spiritual, in which Christ comes personally to perform this miracle if we will permit Him and cooperate with Him.

ALTAR PLATE

○ Lord, we pray Thee,
may this Victim take away our sins, and
sanctify the bodies and minds of Thy servants
for the celebration of this sacrifice.

The paten, on which the host is offered and on which the consecrated Host later reposes, is goldplated and consecrated for its exalted use. It can be desecrated by profane use, as the enemies of our faith have done in the past. The same may be said of our bodies. They form the "altar plate" to be used by the "priest" (our free will) in the temple of the soul. Take, for instance, our pliable hands. They can be used to labor, to feed the body, to give alms, to nurse the sick, to be folded in prayer, as the "sacred utensils" of the industrious, mortified, charitable, and pious soul. Again, they may be used by the selfish, lustful soul to steal, to strike in anger, to satisfy lustful desires, and in this way these "sacred utensils" are desecrated. Well do we pray today that our Divine Victim may take away the stain of our vices and reconsecrate our church plate, our bodies, that henceforth they may be used only in His holy service. Only then may they expect an eternal place in the church of heaven with our saved and glorified souls.

PROTECT US

○ Almighty God, we beseech Thee,
grant that the offering of this sacrifice
may ever cleanse and protect
our weakness from all evil.

We are slow to realize that "all evil" comes from ourselves. The only evil is sin. Because of the weakness of our will we today turn to God and ask Him to protect us against sin by a threefold aid. The will, the hand and foot, that do the evil deed are impelled are goaded on thereto by the ear of the memory and the eye of the understanding. Satan loves to make us "deaf," to "forget" God's words of warning and threats of punishment, and makes the "good" or "pleasure" to be gained by the forbidden act to appear so bright a light that for a moment right reason and luminous faith seemed to be dimmed by the glare of this vicious desire. Only after the deed are our ears opened to remorse and our eyes to the truth. The cure lies in our will. Just as the will forces the mind to accept on faith the truths that it cannot understand by its own light, so the will must also keep the ear of the memory open as to the "evil" of sin. Of this the Mass is the best reminder.

OUR STAFF

O Lord,
we offer Thee this sacrifice of reparation,
so that,
taking pity on us, Thou
wilt forgive our sins, and
direct our fickle hearts.

The historic Christ stands before us in the Gospel of the Holy Mass, not merely by His words to instruct us as to the one true way to heaven (which He is), but above all to show us by His example how we must walk upon this road to our true home. Jesus was deeply emotional, but not temperamental, moody. There was no hastiness or excitement in His actions. His was the steady, firm step of the experienced mountain climber. He was motivated by His Father's Will; that was His food. From the clear path, outlined by His Father, He will not swerve an inch. Like the sun He keeps to His charted course. His earthly life, from the crib to the cross, was a straight line—the shortest distance between two points. Praise did not spur Him on. Failure, ingratitude, calumny, did not perplex, disturb, or discourage Him. Undaunted He hurdled mountains of difficulties that beset His path. His encouraging example, brought to our attention daily, must be our staff, our walking stick to help our "fickle hearts" keep to the straight, narrow path that leads—home.

AFTER THE BATH

O God, we pray Thee,
may this offering
 cleanse and renew us,
 govern and protect us.

Spiritual truths and images are hard to grasp by our sense-bound nature. We can best understand the fourfold effect of the holy sacrifice, as expressed in our prayer, by a familiar, daily occurrence. A mother takes her child, soiled at play, and "cleanses" it in a "refreshing" bath, that also "renews" its vigor and vitality. To keep the child from getting dirty again, the mother must "govern" or restrain it, by keeping it away from objects that can soil its clothes and body, and "protect" it against playmates who might lure it into the dirt again. That is just what the "Blood bath" of the holy sacrifice does to our sin-soiled soul. It cleanses it from the last vestiges (dust) of sins repented of, and gives it that tingling sensation of new life. Being both mother and child, the will (mother) must protect the child (itself) against future contamination by locking the door of consent that will keep the "dirty" devil and his enticements safely outside. And when the will does go forth to duty, the dust of the earth can be blown from its sandals by the shortest breath of prayer.

Septuagesima Sunday

ACTIONS SPEAK

○ Lord, we plead with Thee,
accept our offerings and prayers,
and by these heavenly mysteries cleanse us
and graciously hear us.

The church building is not merely a house of prayer; it is, above all, a place of sacrifice. Prayers form part of the sacrificial action, but they are really the outward expression of the interior acts of the soul of the worshipper. Hence, we should not say prayers *at* Holy Mass (and least of all such as take our mind off the sacrificial functions at the altar), but our prayers should “grow out” of the sacrificial action in which we are taking part. Only then may we expect to be heard. God will then be pleased to “listen” to the words of our actions (our offerings) and the utterances of our lips. He will then also “graciously hear” us by granting us the graces we humbly ask for, especially if we ask to be cleansed more and more from the least stain of sin. For, the more we resemble God by purity of soul, the more pleasing we are in His sight and the louder do our actions speak into His eager ear.

PROTECTED

O Lord,
may this sacrifice, offered to Thee,
give us life, and
protect us at all times.

In order to preserve its young life, a fond mother must not only nourish properly the infant to which she has given birth until it can take food of itself, but during its early years must often insist that it eat the right kind and take the proper amount of nourishing food. Food not only preserves the life of the body, but it also builds up and preserves its health. Healthy tissues are the best protection against the carriers of disease. The same is true of the supernatural life of our soul. Like Moses of old, who, at God's command struck the rock with his staff and opened up a fountain of refreshing water, Jesus, with the staff of His Cross opened in the rock of God's mercy the bountiful water of supernatural life that He communicates to the redeemed soul. Not content with giving us life, He also nourishes this life and aims to bring it to its perfection by inviting us to come daily and to drink deeply of the fountain of life as the best protection against the disease germs of sin.

FULL DRESS

○ Lord, we pray Thee,
may this Victim take away our sins
and sanctify the bodies and minds
of Thy servants
for the celebration of this sacrifice.

A delicate sense of propriety makes us appear in the Lord's house with a clean body, dressed in our "Sunday best." The body may be clean physically, but may be soiled morally, being contaminated by a soiled, sinful soul. The guilt of sin is, indeed, in the understanding and the will, yet the body with its senses is the usual accomplice in the crime by lending itself either as the tool for performing the sinful act, or as a purveyor of the sinful pleasure. It, therefore, also needs to be purified from this moral taint together with the real culprit, the soul. The rubbing process of the soiled soul, contrition, which is its part in the purifying process, makes it susceptible to the cleansing sacramental waters. The rubbing process for the body's moral purification is called mortification. It consists in making the body suffer by restricting its wants and by denying it lawful pleasures. Our Divine Victim, Who suffered most in His soul for our sins, also endured indescribable torments in His sinless body to "sanctify our bodies and minds."

FASTING AND FEASTING

O Lord,
we solemnly offer this sacrifice
at the beginning of Lent
beseeching Thee, that
while we abstain from table feasting
we may also refrain from harmful pleasures.

Take the "e" from "feasting" and you will have "fasting." The "E" stands for *EXCESS*. There are two kinds of excess. The one is harmful, the other, helpful. Fasting may be taken as a general term and be made to signify refraining from all things harmful to body and soul, such as "excessive" eating, drinking, "harmful" pleasures, and so on. But there is also a good excess, which consists in "exceeding" the usual (and often very small) measure of good we are accustomed to do during the rest of the year. Thus, attending holy mass more often and more devoutly, praying more often and more fervently, receiving the sacraments of penance and Holy Communion more frequently and more worthily, giving more abundant alms—in a word, being a better Catholic in church, at home, and at work. If we put this "E(xcess)" into our "fasting" it will really be "feasting," for it is more interesting to strive for positive perfection (the acquiring of the virtues) than for negative perfection (the getting rid of our bad habits).

ARE YOU DEVOUT?

O Lord, we beg Thee
to look favorably upon these sacrifices
that they may be profitable both
to our devotion and salvation.

Sincere souls often complain that they do not “feel” any devotion. Can devotion be felt? Can these “devout” feelings or emotions be called up at will? In what does “devotion” really consist? The Latin word from which the English word “devotion” is derived means—“to vow or devote anything to a deity.” By devotion we dedicate to the highest Being, to God, the highest power of our soul, our free will. Now, there is no feeling in the will. You “know” that you have devotion, but you cannot “feel” it. You are devout, are devoted to God, if your will is one with His, if you can truthfully say with the Victim on the altar: “What I do is always what pleases Him (my Father)” (St. John 8:29). In the holy gospels we have the faithful record of that perfect fulfilment of His Father’s will to the smallest detail. The more our devotedness to our heavenly Father’s Will approaches the perfect fulfilment of it by His divine Son, the more we shall feel and enjoy the “effects” of this childlike devotion—peace of conscience and true joy of heart.

CONCELEBRATION

- O Lord, we pray Thee,
may this Victim take away our sins
and sanctify the bodies and minds
of Thy servants
for the celebration of this sacrifice.

A very impressive part in the conferring of holy orders on the ministers at the altar is the act of immediately exercising the power of that order just received. Thus, the porter locks and unlocks the church door, and rings the bells; the acolyte serves the wine and water; the sub-deacon reads (or chants) the epistle, and the deacon, the gospel. As soon as a deacon has been ordained a priest, he exercises his tremendous power immediately by celebrating the ordination mass with the ordaining prelate. This act is known as "concelebration." It is really his "first mass." After saying the secret prayers with the priest, and after receiving its sanctifying effect on your contrite soul and mortified body, you are ready to enter the holy of holies with him to offer the Divine Victim to the heavenly Father. Participation in the holy sacrifice means more than a mere reciting of the prayers that the priest recites at the altar. It means uniting your soul as closely as the priest does to the Victim in order to become "another Christ."

SAFE!

- Lord, we beseech Thee,
give heed and be appeased
by the sacrifices here before Thee
that they may be of profit both
to our devotion and salvation.

During an electric storm we are advised not to seek shelter under a tree, as this might prove to be a lightning conductor—and may conduct us into eternity. In the spiritual life we do just that. Not, that we may die, but that we may live. We seek the highest mountain (Calvary) and the shelter of the tallest tree (the Cross) so that when the lightning of God's just wrath strikes it (and it was erected for that very purpose, like a lightning rod) we may not be killed but live. After the Father's just wrath had struck the Cross on Calvary and killed His Son in our stead, He was appeased. The same is still true today. When God would destroy some modern cities, as He did of old to Sodom and Gomorrhah, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants, His hand is stayed, for everywhere and at every moment of time He sees new Crosses erected on altar-calvaries throughout the world—and He is appeased. Should we not, then, seek refuge under the sheltering arms of the Cross as often as we can? We are always safe there.

TIED HANDS

O Lord, we beg of Thee,
may these offerings loose the bonds
of our wickedness
and procure for us the gifts of Thy mercy.

Our sins tie God's hands. As long as the guilt of sin remains, Divine Justice demands that it be duly punished. By His death on the Cross Jesus atoned for the guilt of all sins. When His infinite merits are applied for the remission of the guilt of original and personal sin, the guilt and eternal punishment due to grievous sin are remitted. When the "bonds of our wickedness" are thus broken, God's Hands are also untied, as it were, and, instead of exercising justice He is free to show infinite mercy to His repentant children. This He does by giving us the special "gift of His mercy"—by making it possible for us to atone also for the temporal punishment due to forgiven sin, which must be endured here on earth or once in Purgatory. The easiest means of making this atonement is to unite ourselves with the Divine Victim. Thereby we put on the garments of the Son of God, and when the Father perceives the "fragrant smell" of His Son's garments, He gives us the kiss of peace and admits us to the beatific vision.

EVERLASTING HAPPINESS

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
grant that this gift, offered
before the eyes of Thy majesty,
may obtain for us the grace of devotion
and the reward of everlasting happiness.

The inventive mind of modern man has made it possible that, by the mere pressing of an electric button, a mechanical servant will perform a distasteful task in a few moments that formerly consumed several hours of backbreaking labor and profuse perspiration. The wisdom of our Creator infinitely outstrips the darkened mind of pigmy man. He not only makes something out of nothing—ourselves, but He also, so to speak, gives us something for nothing, because the effort of “doing” is so slight in comparison with the ease of “receiving” that it is practically negligible. Yet, it is just that little which receives the “reward of everlasting happiness.” And what is that little? The simple act of our free will in giving back to God all that we have received from Him in the beginning. If Christ was “offered because it was His own will” (Is. 53:7), then we are rewarded if we will it effectually. It is in the school of the Cross that we learn this important lesson for this life on which depends our happiness here and hereafter.

A DAILY DOSE

O Lord, we implore Thee,
receive the prayers of Thy people
together with our offering of sacrifice
so that what we have begun
on this feast of Easter
may by Thy grace become a healing
remedy unto life everlasting.

“Prayers” and “sacrifice”—“beginning” and “end,” seem to sum up the theme of today’s Secret. The stress, of course, is on “sacrifice” and “end.” What we (should) have begun on this “feast of Easter,” is to have risen with Christ to a new life. The fact that such is our desire does not mean that it is an accomplished fact. Only by a daily dying to self will there also be a daily, more perfect resurrection as a new person in Christ. We need, therefore, a daily reminder of our spiritual dying and rising again, and a daily “healing remedy” to accomplish that happy end. Both are given us in daily Mass. For, the consecrated Host is the glorified Body of Christ, and, when receiving His sacred Body in Holy Communion, we may well pray as the priest does: “Grant, O Lord, that what we have taken into our mouth, we may receive with a pure mind; as a temporal gift, may it become unto us an eternal remedy.” Thus we can celebrate Easter each day of our earthly life as a preparation for our eternal Easter.

THREEFOLD REJOICING

O Lord,

we ask Thee to receive the gifts
of Thy rejoicing church, and
even as Thou hast given her cause
for such great joy,
so also grant her the fruit
of perpetual gladness.

“Rejoicing — joy — gladness” — these three words may well remind us of the Church in her threefold stage—triumphant in heaven, suffering in Purgatory, and militant on earth. We, on earth, offer our gifts, ourselves, rejoicing with the risen Savior. His glorious resurrection brought heaven to earth. In a few moments He, Who delights the angels and saints with His presence, will be the delight of our eyes of faith on the altar. To us, the “fighting” members of the Church, it gives the assurance of what will follow our “battle to the death” with the enemies of our salvation. The Church suffering in Purgatory looks longingly to our altar and our gifts, because the fruits of this present holy sacrifice will be applied to some (or many) of that prison of patient purification to enable them to begin their life of “perpetual gladness” in the home of their Heavenly Father, of Christ, their elder, risen Brother, of the Holy Spirit, their Sanctifier, of Mary, their Mother, and of all the angels and saints. What joy their first Alleluia at “home” will contain!

HEALTHFUL BLESSING

Let this sacred offering ever
bestow upon us Thy healthful blessing, and
what it performs in mystery
may it produce in virtue.

Venial sin is a weakness or sickness of the soul that may lead to death, to mortal sin. The antidote to sin and the restorer of spiritual (supernatural) health is the Cross, from which every blessing flows. That this "healthful blessing," the merits of Christ's death on the Cross, may be bestowed on us, our soul must first be capable of receiving it. It must be joined to this source as a hose to a tank of water. In it must be "performed the mystery" that is accomplished in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, that of transubstantiation, the changing of the substance of the "sacred offering" into the true Body and Blood of Christ. This change is effected in us when the substance of sin is destroyed, when our will severs all attachment to the evil (forbidden) object and clings to the Supreme Good. "The innocent in hands, and clean of heart... shall receive a blessing from the Lord, and mercy from God, his Savior" (Ps. 23:4,5). This "virtue" or "power" is offered us in Holy Mass, and it will produce its effect if we are properly disposed.

A LITTLE WHILE

O Lord, by these mysteries confer upon us
the grace to restrain our earthly desires
so that we might learn how to love
the things of heaven.

St. Peter today exhorts us as "pilgrims" to restrain ourselves from "carnal desires." "Spend no thought on nature and nature's appetites," St. Paul advises the Romans (13:14). To the Galatians he writes: "Learn to live and move in the spirit" (5:16). Live *in* the spirit, not *as* a spirit. We may not, by excessive fasts, try to become as transparent as a piece of onion-skin paper. But as "athletes" and "sprinters" we must keep our appetites under control (I Cor. 9:25). The "sprinter" throws off all superfluous clothing and hardly touches the earth as he fairly flies to his goal and prize. Since walking or "sprinting," is no longer fashionable, and as each child is born clutching a driver's license, one may say "shift gears" from reverse into forward, and from low (earthly) into high (heavenly). That's all. You do that simple thing by giving your soul the proper direction ("I am going to the Father")—and the motive power to reach that happy goal and prize quickly and securely ("a little while"). Earthly pleasures last "a little while," those of heaven never end. Bodily pains last "a little while," but the ecstatic joys of heaven will last forever.

ELECTRIFIED

O God, Who by the Communion of this Sacrifice
hast made us partakers of Thy one
and supreme divine Nature,
grant that we who know Thy truth
may also follow it by a holy life.

The Cross on Calvary marks the central point of history. All men look to this sign of salvation. Our Mt. Calvary is the altar in the nearest church where Christ continues, in an unbloody manner, His sacrifice on the Cross. By His death Jesus removed the huge stone from the bottomless well of divine life, that man had placed there by his own perverse will, in order that his soul might drink as often and as deeply as it chooses of this essential Water. For that, contact is necessary. By faith the soul contacts Divine Truth, and by baptism it is coupled again to the Source of all Life. Life flows into and Light floods the soul, showing it the true Way, and causing it to walk thereon. By that it makes us as true Christians, followers of Christ, lead a worthy life. Christ, Who walks the earth no more in visible form, wishes us to take His place and to draw others to the Truth and Life by the light our own good life spreads around us. Yes, we are the ELECT of God, ELECTed to ELECTrify all with whom we come in contact.

DEVOTION

O Lord, receive the prayers of those
who believe in Thee,

together with an offering of sacrifice, so that
through this service of loving devotion
we may enter into the glory of heaven.

Prayer is not a magic formula that will produce magic results merely by the mechanical repetition of certain words and phrases. Prayer is an act of worship of God and, to be performed properly, demands faith in Him to Whom this worship is offered, for it adores Him, thanks Him, asks pardon for offenses committed against Him, and, finally, asks for the graces necessary to serve Him more faithfully in the future. Prayer is not a mere lip-offering, but the offering of the sentiments of the heart in sacrifice. The model for the sentiments for humble and complete subjection are found in the Heart of the Victim on the altar. That is the essence of true devotion, for, according to St. Thomas, the word "devotion" is derived from two words meaning to "vow to." It implies the readiness of our will to serve God. "Those persons are said to be devout," he says, "who, in a way, devote themselves to God, so as to subject themselves wholly to Him." The sensible delight or affection, which we sometimes experience at prayer or during Holy Mass, is only an accidental gift of God. We should seek God for Himself, not for His gifts to us.

LIFTED UP

O Lord, accept the gifts that we bring to Thee
for the glorious Ascension of Thy Son,
and mercifully grant that
we may be freed from present dangers, and
finally arrive at everlasting life.

The gifts that we bring to the Heavenly Father in honor of the glorious ascension of His well-beloved Son, the bread and wine, are symbols of the gift of ourselves, our body and soul. We ask that God's grace may transform these gifts. The danger to final perseverance and seeing again face to face Jesus, Who took leave of the world today, is final impenitence, due to "unbelief and obstinacy of heart," of which Jesus reproached the eleven as they sat at table. Faith holds as true what is beyond the grasp of human reason because of the authority of Him Who reveals the true. Unbelief is produced by a certain obstinate clinging to our own opinion, a stubbornness of will that causes the soul, as it were, to become callous, then to harden like a stone, and like it to tend downward, to earth. To ascend to heaven it must be made light. It is faith that gives the soul wings. To fly with these spiritual wings requires daily practice. This is had when we imitate the apostles who, after the Ascension, walked (lived) no longer by sight but by faith.

Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension

PURE AND STRONG

○ Lord, may this Immaculate sacrifice
purify us and
strengthen our souls with grace from heaven.

Jesus became man in order to be able to die for our sins. He assumed His human nature from an "immaculate" Virgin-mother. Hence He did not become heir to Adam's sad inheritance, bequeathed to all his children—original sin. The sins of all men were to be loaded on the back of this divine Isaac as the wood of His sacrifice which He must carry up to the altar stone of sacrifice, Mt. Calvary. Because He is immaculate, His sacrifice for the remission of the guilt and punishment due to sin is always accepted by the Father. Although our sins are very much our own, they are really the abuse of the help given us by God for doing just the opposite. For, when God moves our will, yet freely, that we may make a meritorious choice of the good by serving Him, we reject this grace and choose the evil by rebelling against Him. Hence it is necessary that we not only be freed from our past sins (guilt and punishment) but also have our wills "strengthened by grace from heaven" so as always to choose the good in future.

Pentecost Sunday

HEAT AND LIGHT

O Lord, we plead,
sanctify these gifts offered unto Thee, and
Cleanse our hearts by the light
of the Holy Spirit.

The material sun is not merely a source of light and heat, but also of health and vigor. Its bright rays have healing properties that are utilized by the physician and are imitated by the makers of artificial sources of illumination. On the first Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles, assembled in the Cenacle, in the form of tongues of fire in order to enlighten their dark minds, to warm their cold hearts, and to heal and strengthen their sin-weakened souls. We pray for a repetition of these benefits in our gifts, in ourselves. We ask the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts as gold is purified in the furnace. We ask Him to sanctify us by giving us anew what He is—Charity. Sanctity and charity can and do go together. A man that does not love God and his neighbor is not holy. Charity is the greatest of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now “the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom we have received” (Rom. 5:5).

ETERNAL OFFERING

O Lord, our God, having called upon
Thy Holy Name,
we pray Thee to sanctify the Victim
of this offering, and as a result of it,
make us an eternal offering to Thee.

After washing his hands at Mass, the priest, bowing low at the middle of the altar calls upon God's Holy Name as he prays: "Receive, O Holy Trinity, this offering that we make to Thee..." The true Victim is the all-holy God. The offering of bread and wine, that is to be changed into the true Victim, is materially pure, but it must be raised to a supernatural plane, as it were, to be less unworthy of its sublime destiny. We, whom our offering at the altar represents, are sanctified by the merits of the Victim on the altar, Who there continues His offering on the Cross, and applies to us now, who were not present then, its purifying and sanctifying effects. Just as Christ remains present in the tabernacle as a Victim—the Holy Eucharist is the fruit of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass—so we, following His abiding example, are ever to keep ourselves in a state of willing victims, as "eternal offerings" of gratitude to the three Divine Persons for all the blessings flowing from this individual action in our souls.

UNITY AND PEACE

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
favorably grant to Thy Church
the gifts of unity and peace
which are mysteriously signified
in the gifts we offer.

On the corporal before the priest lies the offered host which "mysteriously signifies unity and peace." The separate grains of wheat have lost their individuality by giving up their soul under the pressure of the millstone. That "one" mass of flour is made still more "one" by the addition of a little water as the binding force of the powdered meal. The paste, then, is given further and constant "unity" by the pressure and heat of the baking iron. Peace is the unity of souls, of wills. Could there be a better symbol of peace and unity than the pure, perfect host that is soon to become the true Body of Christ, thereby losing of its own substance all but the appearance of bread? If we could as completely submerge our own puny, selfish interests and warring elements in us, as the grain of wheat does so generously, into the interests of the other members of Christ's mystical body, and above all into those of its Head, this would be the answer to the prayer of the Secret of today's Mass.

AN ACCEPTABLE GIFT

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
behold the unutterable charity of the Heart
of Thy dearly beloved Son,
so that, what we offer, may be
an acceptable gift to Thee, and
the expiation of our sins.

We ask the Heavenly Father to look upon the Heart of His well-beloved Son, as though already pulsating beneath the veil of the Sacred Host. The burning love of the Sacred Heart, that cold words cannot describe, makes both our gift and us acceptable to our Heavenly Father. It gives Him due and infinite adoration in our name, and makes our own acts of finite, weak love pleasing to Him, because they rise like sweet-smelling incense from the glowing coals of hearts that have been cleansed from all sin. The diastolic and systolic action of the Sacred Heart of Jesus—His filial love of the Father and all-pardoning love of sinners—is also the Model for our own heart's action towards God and our neighbor. Only the gifts of a forgiving heart will be acceptable to God. "If thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (St. Matth. 5:23-5).

HEAVEN ON EARTH

O Lord, may this offering about
to be dedicated to Thy Holy Name,
purify us, and
make us advance day by day in
the practice of a heavenly life.

Our short life on earth is intended to be a course of training for our true life in heaven. We must not only "learn" to do, we must, above all, "do," that is, put our knowledge of God into practice, make acts of love of God. Heaven is not a land of blissful idleness. To say that there our souls will "rest" in God does not mean that they will do nothing. Man will be at rest in so far as he has reached his goal and can never again be separated from his end, the triune God. But, like the "ever-resting" Trinity, he will be intensely active. He will be deified, as St. Thomas says, "by a participation of God's likeness, not by the property of nature." His likeness to God will consist in imitating God, Who is Love. There it will be given to us "to catch the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, with faces unveiled; and so we become transfigured into the same likeness" (2 Cor. 3:18).

SAVED AT LAST

Look upon the offerings
of Thy praying Church, and
grant that they may ever be received
unto the perpetual sanctification and
salvation of those who believe.

When Jesus sent His Apostles out into the whole world to preach the Gospel, He laid down two essential conditions for salvation. "He who believes and is baptised will be saved" (St. Mark 16:16). Faith and baptism, however, are but the beginning of salvation, the entrance fee, as it were, to the kingdom of heaven. The purchasing of a ticket to a grand opera gives assurance of admission to the performance, if the holder comes in person to present it. The personal effort of going to the theatre, entering the door, and taking the assigned seat is required before he can enjoy the presentation. Today's Secret reminds us of our "perpetual" sanctification, the bringing in ourselves to ever fuller maturity and perfection the seed of sanctifying grace or divine life, implanted in our souls at baptism, by faithful cooperation with God's sacramental and actual graces. Only by our personal effort is our salvation assured. This does not take place until we actually enter the gates of heaven and take our appointed seat in God's throne room. For, all Christ's merits and our own good works can be made useless by a wilful turning away from God as we breathe our last.

OUT OF JOINT

O Lord, we pray Thee,
be pleased to accept these our offerings, and
in Thy mercy compel our rebellious
wills to turn unto Thee.

Like a solicitous nurse Holy Mother Church today asks the Divine Physician gently yet firmly to press back into place the dislocated members of our souls—our rebellious wills. There is a great amount of stubbornness in rebellion. Look at the little rebel in his high chair, who refuses to eat because his little will has been crossed! We do not say: "I'll go to the banquet to show my respects to the host, but I'll not eat or drink of the good things served." Yet, we may do just that when present at Holy Mass on Sundays. Our bodily presence and distracted attention to the holy action at the altar may cause us to fulfil the letter of the law. The offering of the bread and wine may symbolize our material offering of a tenth of our income, a day's wages, or a slick nickel hiding in a numbered envelope, but God wants especially the spiritual offering of our rebellious will, our dear Isaac, that we alone can slay to the honor of the Lord. Perhaps it is still so rebellious because we refuse to do just that, to "attend" rather than merely to "assist" at Holy Mass.

EACH AND ALL

○ Lord, be merciful to our humble pleading, and
receive kindly these offerings of
Thy servants, both men and women,
that what they have each offered
for the glory of Thy Name
may be of profit to the salvation of all.

The Secret today gives the answer to Cain's question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) The answer is an emphatic "Yes!" We are all relations of Cain, for we have slain our Elder Brother, the eternal Son of God, by nailing Him to the Cross on Calvary. But by His very death He appeased His Father's anger and changed us from accursed murderers and deicides into blessed children of God. In a few moments each one of those assisting at the Holy Sacrifice will offer up anew this same Son on the cross of the altar in an unbloody manner to the Heavenly Father in atonement for his personal sins as well as for the sins of all the other members of Christ's mystical body. Thus the offering of "each" is profitable to the salvation of "all." What joy and consolation for me! Whilst I am here making my personal offering, I, too, am sharing in the personal offering of each of my brethren the world over and that, too, without interruption. Could more be done for my salvation?

SKYROCKETS

O Lord, be appeased by our
humble pleadings, and
 please accept these offerings
 of Thy people, and that
 no one's prayer go in vain,
 no one's petition go unheard,
grant that we may actually obtain
 what we ask in lively faith.

Adam invented and used the first skyrocket in the first prayer that he sent from this land of exile to the throne of God. Each of his children has used it ever since. Judging by tangible results, we often claim that our "rockets" do not reach their goal. The fault may lie in the matter of the prayer of petition, or in the petitioner himself. Usually it is not in the matter asked for. God wisely withholds what would be hurtful to us, and generously gives us something better instead, and always more than we ask for. Usually the rocket sender is at fault. His prayer lacks "humility" and "faith." Humility is truth. In this bright light we see our utter helplessness and complete dependence on God. But this light of truth comes only from the spark and fire of faith. It is this God-infused spark, our faith, that makes our prayer rocket reach its goal. Faith attains to God, not in the clearness of vision, but it makes us adhere to the uncreated, revealing Divine Truth, and thus it "gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of things we cannot see" (Heb. 11:1).

7th Sunday after Pentecost

TYPE AND REALITY

O God, Who didst permit a variety of sacrifices under the Old Law awaiting the One

Perfect Sacrifice,

receive this sacrifice from

Thy devoted servants, and

sanctify it, as Thou didst sanctify

the gifts of Abel,

so that what each one has brought

here to the glory of Thy Majesty,

may be of profit to us all.

In the Secret for the Feast of the Most Precious Blood (on July 1st) we pray: "Upon Thine altar may we renew the sprinkling of that Blood which speaketh better than that of Abel." Today we are reminded of the gifts that Abel offered to the Lord. Being a shepherd, and feeling the need of showing his adoration and subjection to His Creator he offered "of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat in his name" (Gen. 4:4). Because of the sincerity of his sentiments the Lord "looked favorably upon his offerings." When God did not do the same to Cain's offering, Cain slew his brother in a fit of anger and jealousy. Thus Abel became the prototype of the "Lamb of God" Who offered His Blood and life on the altar of the Cross to appease the offended Majesty of God. God looks with pleasure on our own material offerings, but the offering of ourselves, although we do not shed our blood, is the voice of praise that thrills Him more.

FIRE PASSING THROUGH

○ Lord, we beseech Thee,
receive these gifts, which, out of
Thine own generosity we bring unto Thee,
that these most holy Mysteries,
by the working power of Thy grace,
may sanctify our conduct in this life, and
bring us to joys without end.

Man "will be saved though only as men are saved by passing through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). God, in His boundless generosity, has given us the material gifts (bread and wine) that we may offer them to Him on the altar. Christ will "sanctify" or "deify" them by changing them into the true substance of His Body and Blood. The offering of ourselves, symbolized by the material gifts, is made that the Divine Victim "may sanctify our conduct in this life." This is a long, yes, a lifelong process. It begins with the infusion of God's life (sanctifying grace) and the spark of Divine Love into our souls at baptism. This divine spark, slumbering till the age of reason, is thereafter, by every thought, word, and action, either fanned into a brighter flame or smothered. In God's plan our life's work is to cause this divine fire to spread over the whole terrain of our soul, destroying both the undergrowth of brambles and the giant trees of every species of sin, leaving in its wake only the bright flowers and luscious fruits of virtue, a land that belongs completely to its real owner—God.

FREQUENTING THESE MYSTERIES

O Lord, we beseech Thee for
the grace of worthily frequenting
these Mysteries, because
every time this memorial sacrifice is offered up
the work of our redemption is carried on.

To "frequent these mysteries" does not merely mean to visit the church often whilst Holy Mass is being offered up there, but, above all, to "associate" ourselves with the sacrificial action at the altar. At His first Mass on the Cross on Mt. Calvary, Jesus made satisfaction for all sins of all men of all times. Thereby their eternal salvation is assured, if they permit these healing remedies to be applied to their souls. We are not saved against our will. We must freely accept Christ's satisfaction. It is especially at Holy Mass that this is applied to our soul and in this way the "work of our redemption is carried on." For this the obstacle of sin must be removed, for water cannot flow through a pipe clogged up by rust and filth. Then, the coupling must be made by an act of free will, the union of our will with that of the Victim upon the altar. Only then will the water of grace flow into the land of our soul, making its soil fruitful in every good work.

GIVING MEDICINE

O Lord, let these appointed sacrifices
be paid back unto Thee,
since Thou hast given them to be offered
for the honor of Thy Name,
so that at the same time they might
become a remedy for all our ills.

A fond mother may take a dose of bitter medicine in order to show her tight-lipped child how "tasty" it is, but the medicine that she takes will not cure her child. Christ, our Elder Brother, has drained to the dregs the cup of bitter medicine offered Him by His Heavenly Father, which we deserved because of our inherited and personal sins (the maladies of our soul). He thereby restored our souls to supernatural life and vigorous health. More than that, He has made it possible for us to "give" instead of "taking" this medicine by means of the Holy Sacrifice. Instead of drinking the cup of suffering and punishment due our sins, we offer this "tasty" cup to the Heavenly Father. Thereby His just anger is appeased, and we are healed of our soul's weakness. Holy Mass will thus "become the remedy for all our ills," if we will but offer it in the right spirit and open our souls to its healing and purifying effects. What could be easier, simpler, and more pleasant?

11th Sunday after Pentecost

PROPPED UP

O Lord, we plead with Thee,
look down graciously upon our service,
that our offering may be a
gift acceptable to Thee,
and a support to us in our weakness.

The word "support" calls up before our mind's eye Moses praying on the mountain, and the great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul. When Moses lifted up his hands in prayer Israel overcame Amalec, but if he let them down a little, Amalec overcame. So, "Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands on both sides. And it came to pass that his hands were not weary until sunset. And Josue put Amalec and his people to flight, by the edge of the sword" (Exod. 17:12-13). Our arms are apt to grow weary by being raised in prayer or from fighting against the enemies of our soul. We need a support until we win the victory. What should this be? St. Paul gives the answer when he says: "With Christ I hang upon the Cross" (Gal. 2:19). By an act of the will we can nail ourselves to the Cross of Christ, that is, unite ourselves with the Victim on the altar each moment of the day, thus offering to the Father a gift most acceptable to Him and keeping our souls united "to the Source of every grace."

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

O Lord, we beseech Thee, in Thy mercy to
behold the sacrifice which we
lay upon Thy sacred altars,
so that, while they obtain pardon for us,
they may also give honor to Thy name.

Too often we take a selfish view of sin, how it affects us, not the infinite offense we thereby give to God. If there were no personal punishment for sin, would we avoid committing it? If attendance at Holy Mass on Sundays and Holydays were not an obligation binding under grievous sin, how often would we come to assist at the Holy Sacrifice? Perhaps our own need, and misery caused by our sins, would drive us to this source of supernatural strength and graces. Yet, the first and essential part of sacrifice is adoration, not petition, or the asking of favors. So, whilst we put our need first, and ask that our sacrifice may "obtain pardon for us," we should remind ourselves that, after all, our petition will be readily granted if we have first placed an act of adoration, have thereby, through the Divine Victim on the altar, given back to God the "honor" we stole from Him by placing self on the throne erected in the soul by pride, and demanding that creatures serve us to do our own sweet (?) will.

CONTACT

O Lord, look with favor upon Thy people,
look with favor upon their gifts, and
being appeased by this offering,
mercifully grant us pardon of our sins
and the blessings that we ask.

Man can sin by his own power, but he cannot forgive his own sin, or remedy its effects. By wilfully and knowingly overstepping a grave commandment, he commits spiritual suicide, as it were, by cutting off his soul from the source of supernatural life. His soul will live on forever, but separated from God, unless again united to Him before leaving his mortal body. Contact of the waterpipe with the reservoir of water, and of the electric wire with the dynamo are necessary for the transmission of water and light or energy. Man holds up his "severed" soul to God by humble confession of his sins, God makes the contact by pardoning the sins, and then His greatest blessing, sanctifying grace, a sharing in His own divine Life, flows into the lifeless soul. The same is true of His other blessings. Contact is necessary, but this is impossible as long as grave sin keeps the soul from God. If it is the basest ingratitude to use God's past gifts to offend Him, it is the height of folly to remain in that state and to make it impossible for Him to give any blessing in the future.

BLOOD CRIES OUT

O Lord, grant, we plead with Thee,
that this saving Victim may both
cleanse our sins, and
appease Thy Power.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, writes: "Here is Jesus, the spokesman of the new covenant, and the sprinkling of his blood, which has better things to say than Abel's had" (12:24). Abel's blood cried to God for punishment by his brother Cain, his murderer. Our sins have slain Jesus, the new Abel, the "eldest born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). But His Precious Blood cries out to His Heavenly Father asking for pardon for all His murderers, all sinners. God's power, which we may liken to "powder," is set off by the spark of love or justice. Love directs the force of His power in bestowing blessings; justice turns it to punishment, but even this is tempered by mercy. What we ought to fear, then, is not God's power, but rather our weakness, that despising His untold goodness, we use His grace to strike Him in the face, as it were, by our sinful deeds, and thus call forth His justice that must strike as long as this state of rebellion lasts. Cleanse us, O Precious Blood, from our sins, and we shall not have to fear our Father's power.

BEWARE!

O Lord,

may Thy Sacraments be our safeguard, and
ever defend us against the
attacks of the evil spirit.

The sacraments are God's channels of special graces to the soul. The fountain of these graces is Christ's death on the Cross, continued in each Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On Calvary Christ overcame Satan, so that he is now, as the saints tell us, like a "chained dog" that can go only as far as his chain will permit. We need not fear his power nor our weakness, but only our pride and folly. He can hurt us only if we permit him by going too near to him, or by heeding the suggestions of the father of life, instead of following the urgent pleadings and warnings of Eternal Truth. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "I myself, wherever I have shown indulgence, have done so in the person of Christ for your sakes, for fear that Satan should get the advantage over us; we know well enough how resourceful he is" (2 Cor. 2:10-11). Like the Archangel Raphael, who "took the devil, and bound him in the desert of upper Egypt" (Tob. 8:3) we must do the same to the evil spirit and his suggestions with the cords of our firm will.

CLEAN VESSELS

O Lord, we implore Thee,
cleanse us by the effect
of the sacrifice here present
and in Thy mercy make us worthy to share in it.

Before the priest prepares the chalice, and vests for mass, Holy Mother Church prescribes that he wash his hands and say a prayer for cleansing. After he has offered the host and the chalice at the altar, he again washes his fingertips whilst praying verses 6 to 12 of Psalm 25. These bodily purifications are a reminder of how pure his soul and the souls of those who assist at the holy sacrifice should be, for the God of all purity will not merely come in contact with their bodies, but will enter into their souls. The soul must be clean from the taint of mortal sin in order to share in "the effect of the sacrifice," because it breaks the contact between the soul and the Source of all supernatural life. Although venial sins and faults do not prevent the soul from sharing in the effects of Christ's death on the Cross, these salutary effects are hindered by this soul-constricting element of self-will and "littleness." By ridding the soul as much as possible from selfishness and expanding it by generosity, the fuller will it share in the sacrificial effects.

OUT OF LOVE

○ Lord, we humbly implore Thy Majesty
that the holy mysteries we are celebrating
may free us from our past sins and
keep us from future sins.

The Holy Spirit admonishes us: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. 7:40). Our last act in the drama of life is death, followed by judgment, and the final irrevocable verdict of heaven or hell. Whatever motive will keep us from committing sin is good. In the "last things" of life we have the motives of both fear and love. Fear may be twofold: fear of punishment, which is a selfish fear, or fear of offending God, because of His infinite goodness and holiness. This latter is a purer and more powerful motive, because true love of a loving parent is more powerful than dread of the rod of correction. The latter lasts as long as the threat of punishment lasts; the former exists and endures even if there should be no threat of punishment. It is the motive of love that will most effectually "keep us from future sins," and this motive receives a new stimulus each time we assist at the Holy Sacrifice, the supreme act of unselfish love of God for His sinful, rebellious children.

LIGHT FROM LIGHT

O God, Who dost make us partakers of Thy
supreme Godhead by means of the communion
in this adorable Sacrifice,
grant, we pray Thee, that since
we know Thy Truth
we may live up to it by a worthy life.

From your illustrated Bible History you will remember the picture of God in the act of creating the lights in the heavens. The index finger of His creative Hand serves as the spark conveyor that sets on fire the vast, celestial ball of light and heat, the sun, that has not ceased burning from that day to this. On Good Friday hatred and deicide had apparently snuffed out the Light of the World, but It was merely dormant in the grave until Easter morning. The Easter sun that gilded the Cross on Calvary was but a sign of what takes place at the unbloody renewal of Christ's death on our altars. Christ, risen, Who dies no more, becomes present on our altars that He may "make us partakers of His supreme Godhead" by actual contact with our souls, wherein He kindles the light of Divine Truth more fully and makes the fire of Divine Love burn more ardently. How then, can we leave the altar without showing this "Light" and spreading this "Fire" in our daily lives?

HELP ALONG

O God, we implore Thee,
grant that these gifts
which we offer up in the sight of Thy Majesty
may be helpful to our salvation.

This season of the solar year, when the hard labor of spring and summer pays dividends in bountiful crops, recalls the words of the Prophet Jeremias: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (8:20). The days of our earthly life pass rapidly. On the last day we shall reap what we have sown. If we have idled away precious time and wasted bountiful graces, there will be a harvest of cockle and weeds—for the fire. Christ is working every moment for our soul's salvation. From the day of His death on the Cross on Mt. Calvary to its continuation and application of its effects in the Mass every moment of each day and night, Jesus does all He can to help us to attain that happy end. It is up to us to grasp His extended, helping Hand by our voluntary and wholehearted cooperation with His grace. The Mass is, therefore, not merely a reminder of the "one thing necessary," but also the means to reach that end. If, when the summer of life is ended, we are not saved, we shall have to blame only our own sinful sloth or hard-hearted malice.

EVIL ROOTS

O Lord, we beseech Thee, let these Mysteries
be our heavenly remedy and
root out all vice from our hearts.

Sin is sometimes called the "cancer" of the soul. Rather, it is the spiritual disease or even death of the soul, due to the cancer of evil, untamed passions. These evil roots, inherited from Adam and increased by personal sin, are never totally removed by the most careful and repeated surgery of the sacrament and virtue of penance. But each "cutting and scraping" reduces their malignancy and makes them less to be dreaded. The greatest difficulty is not so much in applying the healing remedy, which is always at hand in greatest abundance, as rather in not being aware of the necessity of using drastic measures until these evil roots have become so strong that our weak (or rather, cowardly) will is overpowered by them. It is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that reminds us of the malady of sin, that shows us the measures to be used to conquer it and to cure its ill effects, and also reminds us of the necessity of a "fight to the death" against this deadly "cancer" in our souls. We must, therefore, cure not the effect but the cause of our spiritual disease.

LOVE'S REVENGE

Mercifully accept these victim offerings
by which in Thy mighty Love Thou hast willed
that atonement be made unto Thee and
salvation restored to us.

Through the mouth of the Prophet Isaias the Lord declares: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways, my ways" (55:8). His ways are shown by the master's action in the parable of today's Gospel; ours, in that of the pardoned servant. By the deluge God once destroyed the perverse human race, with the exception of a few just souls. After that He promised: "I will no more destroy every living soul as I have done" (Gen. 8:21). Now, to revenge the innumerable sins that rise up to Him from the earth at every moment of the day and night, He lets loose the floodgates of His infinite Justice and boundless Love. In the sinless flesh of His well-beloved Son, His Justice is appeased and "full atonement is made" for all sins for all times, whilst "His mighty Love restored salvation to us" for the price of accepting it. There is no hardship, no suffering connected with receiving the fruit of redemption, merely a turning and cleaving to the Cross on Calvary, the new Ark of Salvation on our Mt. Ararat—our altars.

OUR SHIELD

O God of mercy, grant unto us
that this sacrifice may forever
free us from our guilty deeds
and shield us from all harm.

In the days of the old Greeks and Romans the shield was an important weapon for the footsoldier. It was to be used defensively and offensively. With it he would protect the vital parts of his body against the arrows, spear, or sword of the enemy. With it, also, at close quarters, he could batter down his luckless foe. Christ on the Cross is our Shield against the most bitter and cunning enemy of our soul and its salvation. His Body was unprotected against the arrows (nails), the sword (scourges), and lance of the enemy. He endured these fatal wounds that He might thereby become our life-preserving and strengthening Shield. Not only do we have the metal image of Christ crucified to lift up against our enemy, but we have the real Christ, hanging on the Cross in the Holy Sacrifice, being celebrated continuously on our altars. We have but to use this shield defensively and offensively. We use it offensively when we imitate the example of our General during His temptation (attack) in the desert—by doing just the opposite of what the enemy suggests.

HAIL, THE VICTOR!

○ Lord, we offer Thee this sacrifice of praise
for the sake of increasing our service and of
mercifully completing in us what Thou
hast begun without any merit of ours.

Each morning the King of Day, the sun, begins anew his conquest of his enemy, the night. Almost imperceptibly his gold-tipped spears drive back the dense darkness until earth and sky are flooded with bright light. Christ, the King of each human soul, does likewise. On the Cross He conquered the power of darkness for all times. At the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the continuation of His sacrifice on the Cross, He applies to each human soul the fruits of His conquest. In the sacrament of holy baptism He plants His foot as Conqueror, as it were, on the soil of our souls, but He must win back His rightful territory inch by inch from His greatest enemy—our own self-will with its army of evil habits. Self-will can expel Him, the Source of Light and Life, by admitting the power of darkness and death, or welcome Him back and aid Him in “completing what He began without any merit of ours” by the free gift of faith and the grace of baptism. Our will must decide who shall be the victor and rightful ruler of our soul.

SEEK HERE!

O Lord, be Thou gracious
to our humble appeals, and,
after receiving the prayers and
offerings of Thy people,
correct the hearts of us all to Thyself so that,
having been set free from the
greed of earthly pleasures,
we may pass to the desire
of heavenly treasures.

There is rhyme in the last two lines of the above prayer. But there is even more than that. There is also a twofold contrast expressed. "Earthly pleasures" pass away in a moment, whilst "heavenly treasures" remain forever. The "greed" with which we seek the former leaves little time and energy even to "desire" the latter. The pleasures often elude our fanatic search, whilst the treasures lie at our feet. We have but to stoop and pick them up, as we would the morning paper, and with even less effort. We have but to "convert" or turn to the Lord to have at once the only satisfying pleasure and the only true treasure. That is the effect of the Holy Sacrifice—to enable us to obtain both by union with the Fountain of the true pleasures of eternal life and the Key to the Storehouse of God's treasures for soul and body. It teaches us where true good lies, thus clearing our supernatural vision. This light in our mind will direct the effort of our will to seek after good and pursue it consistently and perseveringly.

Feast of the Assumption

AFTER DEATH

O Lord,

may the prayers of the Mother of God
come to the aid of Thy people, and,

although we realize that she has passed
from us according to the fate of all
human flesh,

may we nevertheless feel that in the glory
of heaven she is ever interceding
for us with Thee.

God made known the "fate of all human flesh" when He said to Adam after his sin: "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19). Sin sowed the seed of death and consequent corruption into man's body. The exception to this universal law are those who "never knew sin"—the Redeemer, Who assumed the human body, that by dying He might conquer death, and Mary, His Mother, in whose sinless body Jesus assumed His mortal body. Hence their bodies, though buried in the earth for a few days, did not return to dust, but were again united with their incorruptible souls. Therein lies the assurance of our own glorious resurrection and ascension. Our bodies shall, indeed, return to dust, but, because of Mary's intercession for us, by the merits of her Son the seed of sin will be replaced by the seed of grace whose fruit, when fully ripe, is everlasting glory for the *whole* man.

Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

FIRE FROM FIRE

O Lord,
offering the Immaculate Lamb to
Thy majesty, we beseech Thee,
may that divine fire burn in our hearts
which ineffably inflamed the Heart
of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the sacrifice was called a holocaust when the offering was entirely consumed by fire on the altar. The human Heart of our Divine Victim on the altar, the Immaculate Lamb of God, was completely consumed by Divine Love. The furnace from which His Sacred Heart received its first spark of life, its first beat, was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, His Mother. The fire in both hearts was the desire to be sacrificed completely for the glory of the Heavenly Father. As we draw near the furnace of Divine Love on our altar today we ask that a little spark therefrom be transmitted to us through its original source of human life, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, that its heat may indeed be tempered to our weakness, without losing any of its purifying effects, to create in us a clean heart, ever gaining in purity and intensity of love. Can we draw near a fire and not catch a spark? Can we hide fire in our breast and not burn? Even a stone, placed in a hot fire, will become hot through and through!

Feast of Christ the King

UNITY AND PEACE

O Lord, we offer unto Thee
this Victim of man's reconciliation to God,
imploring this same Jesus Christ . . .
to grant unto all nations
the gifts of His unity and peace.

St. Augustine defines peace as "the tranquility of order." There can be no peace if there is no unity, but unity is possible only with right order. Right order is that demanded by God, Who is Justice and Truth. On these two indestructible pillars alone can right order and enduring peace be founded. Right order, God's order, demands that all men be subject to Him as their supreme Lord, because He is their Creator, and that they step down from their self-erected, little throne to be equal to one another. When the rebel angels revolted against God's order and Adam and Eve would "be as gods," harmony and peace were supplanted by discord and war. Man, with his sin-darkened mind, often thinks that his views are true and that his claims are just, but they are so only if they are God's views and God's claims. Hence it is necessary to "sacrifice" our personal interests to God's interests for the welfare of all His children, which, indeed, includes our own, and is attained according to God's wise plans.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

WITHOUT STAIN

O Lord,

receive this saving Victim which we offer to Thee
on this feast of the Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary

and grant that, even as we proclaim her
to have been preserved by Thy grace
of all stain, so we may be delivered
by her intercession from all our sins.

The Cross of Christ on Calvary is the central source or spring from which the life of sanctifying grace flows into every human soul living on earth, either before or after Christ. A human body may either be *made* or *kept* healthy. A body can be cured by *expelling* from it the causes of disease, such as germs, or it can be kept healthy by *preventing* these from entering the body. The same may be said of human souls. Sin is the deadly germ that brings spiritual disease and death. Christ's death is the powerful "shot" that removes these germs from ever truly repentant heart. In Mary's case it was the antitoxin that prevented her soul from contracting this deadly germ. But, if our Blessed Mother never contracted the germ of sin, can she have sympathy with her sin-sick children? Although she did not suffer in her stainless body as Jesus did, her soul was "crucified" by the sight of His terrible torments and death. She now is the nurse "in white" that is eager to inject this healing remedy into our souls if we will permit her.

CLEANSE US

O Almighty God,
may these holy offerings
 cleanse us by their mighty power and
 make us more pure to approach
 Him Who is their author.

The violet color of the priest's vestment today reminds us that we are again entering upon a season of fruitful penance. This should not consist merely in pruning the wild offshoots of our sin-tainted nature, but rather in digging up the deadly root of all our sins—our pride. To do this we must have the mind that was "in Christ Jesus, who, though he was by nature God... emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men. And appearing in the form of man, he humbled himself, being obedient to death, even to death on a cross" (Philip. 2:5-8). At His first coming (Advent) Jesus appeared in the lowly form of a human being. In His coming in a few moments He will "empty Himself" still more—retaining only the appearance of the bread and wine. Although our substance cannot be changed into the Person of God, as the substance of the bread and wine is, we are, nevertheless, thereby admonished to set no limits to the cleansing process in our soul, stripping it as much as possible of all human wickedness.

OUR SHIELD

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
be appeased by our humble
prayers and offerings, and
since we cannot plead any merits of our own,
grant us the aid of Thy protection.

When the chosen people fell into idolatry because Moses, their leader, stayed so long with the Lord on the mountain, God said: "Let me alone that my wrath may be kindled against them, and that I may destroy them, and I will make of thee a great nation" (Exod. 32:10). But Moses pleaded earnestly and "the Lord was appeased from doing the evil which he had spoken against his people" (v. 14). Christ, the Leader of God's chosen people, to which all men belong, has not come down from the mountain of Calvary. He still hangs on the cross on every altar, appeasing the just anger of His Father, Whom His children have forsaken to worship idols of their own making—the objects of their personal sins. Thus, wherever on earth the Father may look, He sees His beloved Son and hears Him with dying breath praying: "Father, forgive them!" and He is appeased from punishing justly every sin that cries to heaven for punishment. If we follow the sun that lights up every church steeple in the earth's daily revolution and unite ourselves with our "Moses" on the altar of sacrifice, then we shall always be under this protective Shield.

GLORY AND SALVATION

O Lord, we pray Thee,
may this sacrifice of our devotion
be continually offered to Thee both
to fulfil Thy purpose in
these holy mysteries, and
to work in us the wonders of Thy salvation.

Today's Secret prepares our hearts for the approaching Feast of the Nativity of Our Savior and attunes our spiritual ears to His life's program as outlined in the angel's song—"Glory to God" and "Peace to men." That twofold end enters into all God's relations with His creature, man. Every divine act has as its end to give glory to the Divine Doer, and to enrich man by a special grace or gift. To have been created would profit us nothing without the greater gift of redemption, and, if cooperated with by us, that of our ultimate "salvation." But, in the free gift of redemption God seems to go still further. He not only would share His life and His happiness with us, but also, in a measure, impart His glory. He does us the honor, not only of stooping to our own vileness and nothingness, but of lifting us up from the mire of sin into the realms of pure light and heavenly glory. The very anticipation of these "wonders of our salvation" must cause our throbbing heart to join Holy Mother Church in her joyous chants today, and cause them to reecho in our hearts *each* day.

LOOK DOWN FAVORABLY

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
look down favorably upon these sacrifices
that they may be profitable both
to our devotion and salvation.

In a few moments "our offering" will be the Son of God, in Whom the Father is always well pleased. Hence, we need not ask our heavenly Father to look favorably upon our sacrificial "Victim." Neither need we ask Him to do so on the sacrificial elements of bread and wine, His gifts, prepared by the hand of man for this special purpose. On what part of the sacrifice, then, do we ask the Father to "look favorably?" Upon the disposition of those who are assisting at the Holy Sacrifice, on the spirit of sacrifice of the celebrating priest and the assisting faithful. The sacrificial elements may well remind us what we should be in order to be acceptable to the Father. Just as the *appearance* of the bread and wine remains unchanged after the consecration, so also we do not change our outward form, our body. What we can and should change is our soul by making its dispositions resemble those of the Victim on the altar, of Whom St. Paul tells us: "As Christ comes into the world, He says: 'I am coming to do Thy will, O my God'" (Heb. 10:7).

OUR LITTLE GIFT

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
may the oblation of this day's
festival be pleasing to Thee
that of Thy bountiful grace we may . . .
be found conformed to Him, in Whom
our substance is united to Thee.

Christmas giving was begun, like all good things, by God, the Father, Who on this day gives us His Son as our "little" Gift. His eternally begotten Son (to Whom He is every moment giving birth) on the first Christmas night became our little Brother by uniting His divinity to human nature. In this way He gives Himself to each human being in particular. The immense God becomes a mere span of human life, enclosed by the rough fence of the narrow crib, and will soon be enclosed in the still narrower cradle of our little, selfish hearts. Oh, how much He wants the gift of our poor hearts! But, not as "big" as it thinks it is (which is a lie), rather, as "little" as the truth (honesty) shows it to be. He, Eternal Truth, can join only the true to Himself. Only if we are "little" can He make us "big" by uniting our humanity to His divinity through grace and love. In this way we shall be conformed to Him, and with Him offer ourselves to the Heavenly Father as "His Gift."

CHRISTMAS CHARM

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
may our gifts be agreeable to the
mysteries of this day's Nativity
and ever pour down upon us peace . . .

According to Father Faber: "No Christmas is like its predecessor. Bethlehem grows more enchanting. The strains of the angels is sweeter. We know more of Mary and Joseph. The Child surpasses Himself year after year" (Bethlehem). But wait! Is that not poetical exaggeration? How can the Immutable One change? Ah, He is always the same; the change takes place in changeable us. In fact, we cannot appear before Him, whether exposed at Mass or at Benediction, or hidden in the tabernacle, without being changed. The hardest stone cannot be exposed to the elements repeatedly, to the sun, the wind, the rain, without being affected by these elements, although this change may be scarcely noticeable by the weak human eye. The same is true of our hard hearts. The sun of God's Face, the gentle breath of His inspiration, the plentiful rain of His vivifying and perfecting graces must eventually change the stone that pounds in our breast. How great and rapid will not this change of heart be if we willingly and wholeheartedly cooperate in this "softening" process and change for the better! Will this Christmas work a greater change in us?

NEW BIRTH

○ Lord, do Thou

sanctify the gifts we offer by the
new birth of Thine only-begotten Son
and cleanse us from the stains of our sins.

For the third time today (and perhaps without even thinking of the words italicized) we have recited the words of the Creed—“Who *for us men and for our salvation* came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man.” Our own need drew Him down from heaven as a Babe on the first Christmas night that He might redeem us, buy us back from the death and slavery of sin. He paid the price once for all men. But, we have a further need. The seed of sanctifying grace, infused at baptism, together with the infused and acquired virtues must be brought to their full perfection to form our own sanctification. To fill this need He comes in each Holy Mass, and would come each day into our hearts in Holy Communion to help us in this work of sanctification. We may take Him up with our two arms of love and desire and take Him into our very souls. Although we may receive Him only once a day sacramentally, there is no limit to the spiritual communions we may make each day with every increasing profit.

DEVOTED

O Almighty God, we beseech Thee . . .
grant that this gift may obtain for us both
the grace of a tender devotion and
the reward of a happy eternity.

We ask for the "grace of a tender devotion." Do we realize for what we are asking? Too often we think of devotion as a pious feeling expressed in words of prayer and acts of worship. If this is the true meaning of being devout, then we should indeed be in a pitiable state, for we cannot arouse pious feelings or gushing sentimentality by merely pressing a button or turning a switch in the supply room of our devotion—our heart. "Devoted" means "dedicated to," and we are devout when we dedicate our free will to God's will and service. This is always in our power, although there is no feeling in our will. By the degree of devotion is meant the degree of union of our will with God's will. Our devotion is "tender" when our subjection to God is not that of a servant or slave, but of a son, a child. A dutiful child obeys (and loves) his father for *his* sake and not because of the hope of reward or out of fear of punishment. That is the "tender devotion" we pray for today at the Crib.

PEACE IN REST

O Lord, we beseech Thee,
be merciful to the soul of Thy servant . . .
that, by these holy peace-offerings,
it may be found worthy to
win everlasting rest.

In the Old Testament God ordered His children to offer Him two kinds of sacrifices: the holocaust, in which the whole offering was consumed by fire, and the peace-offering, in which some part of the victim was consumed by fire on the altar of God whilst the rest was eaten by the priests and by the persons for whom this sacrifice was offered. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is both holocaust and peace-offering. Christ is totally consumed for our sins by the fire of love. He then gives the priest and the faithful, not a part of the Victim, but the Victim entirely, Himself, to be eaten in Holy Communion. But, when the Holy Sacrifice is offered for a departed soul, what part of the offering does this soul receive? "Peace." The satisfaction of Christ pays his debt still due divine justice, and thus brings it nearer or even gives it eternal rest, which consists in having its longing to be united to God stilled. For, the pain of separation from its end is the greatest pain for a soul in Purgatory, just as the pain of loss is the most severe punishment of the damned.

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