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THANK and PRAY

Reflections on the Postcommunions of the
Sunday Masses and greater Feast Days.

by **Placidus Kempf, O.S.B.**

Price twenty-five cents

a **Grail Publication**

St. Meinrad, Indiana

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THE POSTCOMMUNIONS THANK AND PRAY

After considering some of the meaning hidden in the Collect (Oration) and the Secret (Prayer) of the Mass, we now turn to the third prayer, called from its position after Holy Communion, the Post-Communion. Like the Collect and Secret, it also is a prayer of petition, but in it the following characteristic distinction is to be made. Whilst in the Collect the theme of the liturgical celebration exclusively is expressed, and in the Secret the remembrance of the Sacrifice of the Mass takes precedence, there is usually a reference made to the reception of the Holy Eucharist in the Post-communion. The petition, presented in this last prayer of the Mass, is conceived, developed, and expressed in a manifold way. At one time it is the theme of the day's celebration of the Sacrifice; at another, by the Sacrifice itself; again, by participation in the Sacrificial Banquet; and, sometimes, by all three motives combined.

Although the prayer of petition differs and must be distinguished from the prayer of thanksgiving, yet, the Post-Communion, which is a prayer of petition, is justly considered a prayer of thanksgiving after Holy Communion and is designated as such. By this term, petition and thanksgiving are not exchanged for one another, but it merely expresses the fact that the petition, which is contained in the Post-Communion, serves also to manifest and confirm the grateful sentiments of our heart toward God. Our gratitude is displayed in this, that we honor the greatness and goodness

of our gracious Benefactor, esteeming His gifts, using them faithfully, and striving as far as possible to make a return for them in various ways. We can render to God all that pertains to a grateful acknowledgement of benefits received, not only by actual prayer and formal words of thanksgiving, but also by many other acts, such as praise, adoration, admiration and glorification, yes, even of petition. The prayer of petition is, in the first place, according to its intrinsic nature, an act of veneration and glorification of God, inasmuch as God is thereby acknowledged as the Source and Dispenser of all gifts, as well as infinitely Powerful, Merciful, Just and Truthful. Accordingly, by filial and confident petition after Holy Communion we offer to the Divine Majesty an agreeable homage, and this homage is the gift which we present to the Lord, Who has no need of our goods, for the inestimable grace of Holy Communion. These fervent and humble petitions, therefore, can really be regarded as the outcome and testimony of our grateful disposition, and consequently, they may be considered a thanksgiving after the Sacred Banquet. Therefore, as heartfelt thanksgiving for benefits received is the best means of obtaining new favors; so, on the other hand, confident petition after Holy Communion is an acceptable thanksgiving for the sublime grace of the Holy Eucharist.

A survey of these petitions in the Postcommunions shows that almost every gift or grace is therein asked for from Him Whom we have just received sacramentally.

Feast of the Circumcision

PURIFY FROM SIN

"May this Communion, O Lord, purify us from sin."

Of old God said: "Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord" (Is. 54:11). How much more clean must we be, who carry in our souls the God of purity Himself. We pray for greater purity in today's Postcommunion. "That the Holy Eucharist remits lighter offenses, or, as they are commonly called, venial sins," the Catechism of the Council of Trent tells us, "cannot be matter of doubt. Whatever losses the soul sustains, by falling into some slight offenses, through the violence of passion, these the Eucharist, which cancels lesser sins, repairs in the same manner that natural food gradually repairs the daily waste caused by the vital heat of the system. Of this heavenly Sacrament justly, therefore, has St. Ambrose said: 'This daily bread is taken as a remedy for daily infirmity. This, however, is to be understood of venial imperfections only. The Holy Eucharist... represses the licentious desires of the flesh, and keeps them in due subjection to the spirit: in proportion as it inflames the soul with the fire of charity, in the same proportion does it necessarily extinguish the fire of concupiscence.'"

Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

SKY-WRITING

"That we may rejoice to see our names written in heaven under the glorious name of Jesus."

The purpose of advertisement is to attract attention to the purchase of some necessary or useful article. The more novel the form of advertisement is, the more readily does it attract attention and buyers. One novel form of advertisement has been the spelling of words in the sky by smoke jets emitted from an airplane. But that is not new. Today's Feast is an advertisement for heaven. Our names are not written in the sky, which will pass away, but in heaven, "in the book of life of the Lamb" (Apoc. 21:27). For, when "the seventy-two disciples returned with joy, saying: 'Lord, even the devils are subject to us in thy name,' Jesus said to them: 'You do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven'" (St. Luke 10:17-20). Today we are given a "peep," as it were, into heaven's great record of all its citizens, and there, beneath the glorious Name of Jesus, we see our own name written. This is done by Holy Mother Church to prod us on to do all that is necessary that we may one day see it in actuality.

Feast of the Epiphany

OUR STAR

“That we may obtain by the understanding of a purified mind what we have just celebrated in solemn rite.”

The human will is a blind faculty. As eye to guide it and lead it on to action it has the companion faculty—the mind. The light of reason and natural truth serve as light for this “seeing” power. But for “seeing” supernatural truths, and for stimulating the will to act and live according to them, there is required the eye and light of the virtue of faith. It is just this increased stimulus that the sacred liturgy aims at. “What we have just celebrated in solemn rite,” that is, the mystery of faith that the Holy Sacrifice brings home to us ever more clearly and forcefully at each celebration, should by that very action also “purify our mind” by means of the stimulated light and fire of faith. And a deeper understanding of the mystery should also mean a more forcefully moved will. The star of Bethlehem was the index finger that beckoned and directed the Three Wise Men to the Source of true light. What difficulties they surmounted to obey its silent call! Do we appreciate and utilize the ease with which we may receive instruction in divine things and go to the new Bethlehem—to the altar and Holy Mass?

Feast of the Holy Family

COME HOME

"That at the hour of our death Thy glorious Virgin Mother and blessed Joseph may come to meet us."

When, in the Postcommunion today, we pray that we may "ever follow the example of Thy holy Family," it seems that we are praying for the impossible. Can we ever imitate Mary, our Mother? In her Litany we salute Mary as—"Mirror of Justice"—mirror of all virtues, of all perfection humanly possible. Now, we are not asked to become this mirror, but to look into this mirror often in order to see how much we are still unlike our blessed Mother. Looking in this mirror for many years made St. Joseph the great saint he was. He, too, was endowed with special graces by the Heavenly Father to become the worthy foster-father of His only, dearly-beloved Son. Yet, St. Joseph did not share our privilege of receiving Jesus into his soul in Holy Communion. There Jesus strives to make us resemble, not Mary or Joseph, but Himself. The more we resemble Jesus in virtue and perfection, and especially when Mary and Joseph see their dear Son in our souls because of the reception of Holy Viaticum, may we confidently expect them to come at the time of our death to lead us to Jesus, to their and our true home.

Sunday within the Octave of the Epiphany

SPIRITUAL ETIQUETTE

"That we may worthily serve Thee by a manner of life pleasing to Thee."

When a hostess has invited friends to dinner, whether to a formal banquet or to a simple meal, she takes great care to have her home, and especially the dining room, clean, attractive, and inviting. Everything is faultless. Besides that, she carefully dusts her memory of forgetfulness of the "Do's" and "Don'ts" that she finds in her book of etiquette for the proper entertainment of guests. We not merely invite our Divine Guest to come into our hearts, but also to be the Divine Food of our needy souls. How meticulous our preparation and thanksgiving for that daily visit should be! There must be nothing in our "soul-dining room" to offend His all-seeing eye. The best preparation is by leading a "life pleasing to Him." For that we must check on our "Do's" and "Dont's" as expressed in the commandments of God, the commandments of the Church, the duties of our particular state of life, and the all-embracing law of double charity, to God and neighbor. In order to observe these we need, not merely a good memory, but also a determined will to carry out in detail the smallest of God's rules of spiritual etiquette. When we have our Divine Guest in our souls is the best time to say the above prayer.

NO FUNERAL

"That, being nourished by Thy divine sacraments, we may be prepared to receive what they promise."

What the divine sacraments promise! And what does Jesus promise to all who receive His Sacred Body and Precious Blood worthily and often? His words are very clear and to the point. "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him He who eats this bread shall live forever" (St. John 6:54-57, 59). The importance of our prayer hinges on the one word "nourished" or "quicken." To "quicken" means to revive, to excite, to stimulate. Two of the sacraments raise the soul from the death of original or personal sin to the life of sanctifying grace, that is, Baptism and Penance. The others "quicken" or "stimulate" this life of grace to higher perfection. Holy Communion gives us the Author of all graces Himself, ready to impart to us as much grace as we are "prepared to receive." We must not tie His hands by resisting grace.

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

ONE BREAD

"Make us worthy to enjoy the fruits of these great mysteries."

Quoting St. Alphonsus: "The divine King is accustomed to reward royally all those who entertain Him well." The fruit of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is Holy Communion. Jesus comes into the soul of the recipient under the form of material food, bread and wine, to show us how His Sacred Body and Precious Blood act upon our souls spiritually. Holy Communion is the "common-union" of Christ with the members of His Church as well as between the members themselves; for, it is "the sign of unity, the bond of charity, the symbol of concord" (Council of Trent). By His Incarnation Jesus united Himself to mankind in general. By Holy Communion He unites Himself to each individual that receives Him. According to St. Augustine, "those, who receive our Lord frequently, assume His nature." They are, as it were, transformed into Him. There is a difference between the spiritual (divine) food we receive in Holy Communion and the ordinary food of the body; the latter is less powerful than our nature and is assimilated by it; the former is more powerful than our nature, and, consequently, converts our nature into its own. Holy Communion also unites us to one another. "We, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (I Cor. 10:17).

REFINED TASTE

"Free us from the fascination of earthly things and ever give us new strength by their heavenly nourishment."

Give a bright object to a babe in its crib and it will instantly put it into its mouth to "taste" it. Its sense of taste seems to be the judge of the "goodness" of things. Besides using the word "taste" in its meaning of "the sense by which certain attributes (savor, flavor) are ascertained by the taste buds on our tongue," we also use it to indicate "the power of discerning and appreciating fitness, beauty, order in the fine arts. Thus, for instance, we say that a man shows 'good taste' in selecting his clothes, a woman, her hat and dress, the hostess, in her invitations and social evening, and so on. It is the "pleasing fascination of earthly things" that is apt to withdraw our soul from tasting spiritual pleasures and delights. The frequent reception of the "Bread of Heaven" should not dull, but rather stimulate our "taste" for higher, supernatural things. But, too often, frequent or daily reception of this "heavenly nourishment" becomes distasteful to us, and we, like the Jews of old, who were fed by the manna from heaven during their sojourn in the desert, long for the "garlic and onions" of the Egypt of this world. Hence we need to ask God to "free us from the fascination of earthly things' and to refine our taste ever more for those of heaven.

5th Sunday after Epiphany

SAVED!

"That we may receive the grace of salvation, the pledge of which we have received in this sacrament."

If a soul is saved, ALL is saved; if a soul is lost, ALL is lost. Salvation means the irrevocable union of the human soul with God in eternal bliss. When the freed soul, on leaving the prison of the body, stands before her all-knowing Judge and hears from His lips the comforting words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many, enter into the joy of thy Master" (St. Matth. 25:21)—all is saved. For all eternity the happy soul will bless the three Divine Persons for their work in her. She will praise the Father for creating her; the Son, for redeeming her; the Holy Spirit, for sanctifying her. All these are "graces," that is, free gifts of God. All that the soul has done was to accept these graces and use them for the attainment of the end for which they were conferred. She has merely done her duty. But, in order to enable her to perform her duty faithfully and perseveringly the Savior's love has invented the means and the assurance of perseverance in Holy Communion. He assures us: "He who eats this Bread (My body) shall live forever" (St. John 6:59). Can we, then, thoughtlessly disregard this means and assurance of final perseverance and of eternal salvation?

HUNGER'S SEASONING

"That we may ever hunger after those things by which we truly live."

"There is no sauce in the world like hunger," Cervantes assures us. Hunger acts as a seasoning to our appetite, and, by stimulating the digestive juices, makes the most common food tasty. To the crowds that flocked to the Savior, Jesus said: "Amen, amen I say to you, you seek me, not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and been filled. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you" (St. John 6:26-27). That "Bread from heaven" Jesus gives us daily in Holy Communion. This divine Food should stimulate rather than satisfy our spiritual hunger by increasing love in our souls. For, our degree of love is our degree of perfection and the measure of our happiness here below in our land of exile, and will also be the measure of our bliss in our true home above. We poor pilgrims travel in a vicious circle. We do not receive Holy Communion oftener because we do not "hunger" for it with increasing longing, and our spiritual appetite is not stimulated because we do not receive this spiritual Food oftener. Daily reception, as worthy as possible, will take care of both. Try it and see.

Septuagesima Sunday

IN ETERNITY

"In seeking, may they receive It forever."

Today's Postcommunion continues and develops the thought of last Sunday. A stimulated spiritual longing should cause the faithful to "seek after" the true Bread from heaven. This Divine Food not only increases and perfects the spiritual life of the human soul, but it also prepares the soul for her vital step from time into eternity. Our earthly life is spent in time. Time, coming to us moment by moment, like small drops of water, falls into the mighty river of the centuries. It may be considered either as past or as coming, since the present moment lasts but a moment. Eternity, on the contrary, is stable, motionless. It is an everlasting present, an eternal "now." We are in time, God is in eternity. When He unites Himself to us by means of Holy Communion we, as it were, leave passing time, and pass over into motionless eternity. More than that. Each twenty-four hours we unite ourselves to our eternal God, so that, when our last moment of time comes, and we do not have the opportunity of receiving Him then as Holy Viaticum, we shall be joined to Him through the Holy Communion received in the morning's Mass.

GOOD PLEASURE

"That we may serve Thee worthily by a life well pleasing to Thee."

At the baptism of Christ in the Jordan the Heavenly Father broadcast from heaven: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (St. Matth. 3:17). Of Himself Jesus said: "I do always the things that are pleasing to him (the Father)" (St. John 8:30). Again He says: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, to accomplish His work" (St. John 4:34). His mission was to do the will of His Heavenly Father: "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (St. John 6:38). God has promised us grace to do His Will and a reward for doing it as faithfully and as perfectly as possible during our earthly life. He has not promised us grace to do our own "sweet(?)" will, much less a reward for doing it. And, what satisfaction do we get out of doing our own will? It is still the tempting fruit that grows on the tree of pride—beautiful to look at, but filled with all bitterness within. If we are wise we shall unite our will, through Christ, with our Heavenly Father's Will. Then we shall not only be doing our Heavenly Father's Will, but our own (united with His). Yet more, God will do our will, as He does each time we approach the communion rail—He comes half way.

Quinquagesima Sunday

SOUL-PANACEA

"That we may be safeguarded by this celestial Food against all misfortune."

In the spring of the year wise mothers give their children a tonic to free their tender bodies from the poisons accumulated during the winter months. Holy Mother Church offers a soul-tonic each day of the year in Holy Communion. Sin is the sickness, or even death of the soul. When the poison of sin has been removed from the soul by the sacrament of penance, the soul is indeed pure, but weak. It needs a strengthening food to build up its powers of resistance to the germs of passions and temptations in the future. A healthy body is the best remedy against disease. So it is with the soul. A weak will easily consent to temptation and thus succumbs to spiritual disease or death. A firm, healthy will can easily fight off the enemies to its supernatural life, health, and growth in love of God. That is what the "Heavenly Food" of our Lord's Body aims to do. But, just because our soul is a spiritual substance and her ills are not so easily felt or discovered as those of our mortal bodies she is often neglected. We eat several times a day in order to keep up and increase our bodily strength. How often do we feed our soul? We may communicate only once a day. But let us do so *every* day.

SPRING CLEANING

"Changing us from our old life, may this saving mystery bring us into a union with Thy Divine Life."

Besides the weekly, thorough cleaning of her house, the diligent housewife sets aside a time in fall and in spring for a more thorough cleaning of the whole house from attic to cellar. This process is known as fall or spring "house cleaning." Holy Mother Church at this season invites her children to do the same with the spiritual house of their soul. Besides the daily cleaning of this "inner room" by an act of perfect contrition, made after the evening examination of conscience, and the weekly cleansing by the sacrament of penance, she also sets aside a time in fall and spring, Advent and Lent, when she invites her children to do a more thorough cleansing and ordering of the Lord's abode. The "old life" of sin must be thrown out and the "new life" of grace be introduced more fully. This process becomes one of substitution, putting the love of God in the place of love of self. God replaces self, but only gradually. It has been said that "self" will die a quarter of an hour *after we do*. Hence, if we center all our attention on the Guest of our soul, and try to please *Him* in everything that we think, say, and do, self will die of starvation and neglect. It will be merely a framed picture of our soul's youth.

ADJUSTABLE MOUNTAINS

"That we may serve Thee by a manner of life that is pleasing to Thee."

To wish that you had lived at the time of Christ, so that you might have seen Him in His glory on Mt. Tabor, as mentioned in the Gospel of today's Mass, is an idle wish. Of all men living at that time, only three were witnesses of the transfiguration, and does your present manner of life and state of soul give you any assurance that you would have been a Peter, a James, or a John? These three privileged Apostles *saw* Jesus in His manifested glory, you have just *received* Him in His veiled humility. Your soul is His Mt. Tabor. You must furnish Moses and Elias. Moses, to whom God gave the two tablets with the ten commandments inscribed upon them, reminds you of the duties common to all men—to keep these same commandments. Elias symbolizes the special duties of your particular state of life. The manner in which you keep God's commandments and fulfil the duties of your state of life designates the height of your spiritual mountain—the degree of your perfection. This mountain is "adjustable." Each time your Savior deigns to descend upon it He should find it higher, more perfect. That is due Him in thanksgiving for this Holy Communion, and as a preparation for the next.

3rd Sunday of Lent

OUR CORPORAL

"Mercifully absolve us, O Lord, from all guilt, and deliver us from all evil."

Christ is no magic charm to be used against dangers and threatening evils. He is no relic, like a particle of the skeleton of a saint, that will keep all harm away from us. He is a living Person, the God-Man, Who has just entered our souls in the sacrament of the living, in Holy Communion. This Sacrament does not remit grave sin, as the words of the prayer—"absolve" and "guilt"—might lead us to suspect. No, having *purified* our souls in the cleansing waters of grace of the sacrament of penance or confession, having *starched* them with a firm resolve with God's grace to sin no more, and having *ironed* them smooth with the hot iron of intense and true love, we receive our Eucharistic Guest and God upon this well-prepared corporal. What we ask for in the Postcommunion prayer is—that Jesus may forgive our hidden sin, as David prays in Psalm 18: "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord" (v. 13). Further, we ask this Divine Healer to heal the effects of our past sins in our soul, the greatest of which is that weakness, which makes it liable to fall into sin again and all too easily. Against this "evil" also we ask to be strengthened by the Food of the Strong that we have just received.

FAITHFUL MINDS

"That we may ever receive Thy holy Sacrament with faithful minds."

At first glance we may think that "faithful *wills*" should have been used in this prayer instead of faithful "minds," for, fidelity is defined as "careful observance of duty or obligation." Now, it is the will that acts, that performs duties. However, it acts because of the motives suggested by the mind. These motives may be those of reason or of faith, and, accordingly, we act in a natural or a supernatural manner. It is in this sense that we may understand the word "faithful", that is, to be "full of faith." Our holy faith is not merely the assent of our mind to revealed truth, but also and above all, the acting of our will according to it. Faith gives us the only true motives for right action. It will profit us little if our mind accepts the teachings of the Catholic, true faith, if our will does not use its motives for action to reach the object and end of our faith—God. God comes to us that we may go to Him. He comes, not merely to enliven our faith, but above all to move our will to action. The best and easiest way to do this is to strive to unite our will with His. He ever does the will of His heavenly Father most perfectly.

OUR SHIELD

"Defend with ever-ready assistance those whom Thou hast refreshed with Thy sacraments."

The two principal weapons of the Roman soldier were his two-edged sword and his shield. The sword was his offensive weapon, by means of which he wounded, killed, or routed his enemy. His shield served him as a defensive weapon to protect any part of his body from the enemy's deadly weapon. Christ is our all-protecting Shield. This Shield hung battered, broken, and apparently useless on the Cross after His death. Hell had, seemingly, scored a marvellous victory. But, three days later, this shield bore the marks of every glorified body—agility, subtlety, clarity, and impassibility. It is this living Body in its glorious state that we receive in Holy Communion to serve as our best defensive weapon against the legions of hell. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and Powers" (Col. 2:15) and they truly fear Him in us. The remembrance of this comforting fact should "refresh" or stimulate our weak heart to ever-increasing courage, whilst at the same time "Our Shield" gives us the "continued support" we need, and teaches us the way to victory.

Palm Sunday

HERE AND THERE

“May our vices be purged away and our just desires be fulfilled.”

The one “just desire” in every human soul is to reach the end of her creation—union with God. The pain of loss, the greatest pain of a damned soul, is her constant striving towards God, that meets only with an eternal failure or rebuttal. But, the desire of union with our soul is also, and infinitely greater in God. He cannot wait, as it were, until our union with Him in heaven takes place. Therefore the eternal love and wisdom of the Son of God has provided a means in Holy Communion for the closest union with our souls whilst we tarry in this land of exile. The union of His Sacred Body and Precious Blood with our own body is but a means of a still closer union with our soul. The intensity of that union depends on the perfection of our soul, the extent to which we permit or make possible this intimate union. Every Holy Communion received should find our soul more perfect, more capable of a still closer union, whilst at the same time It perfects our soul by the abundance of grace bestowed. Every action that we perform should be directed to rendering us better prepared to receive our Divine Guest, and each reception of Him should augment and stabilize our union with Him.

Easter Sunday

OF ONE MIND

"Make us to be of one mind and heart, whom Thou hast fed with Thy Easter Sacrament."

The closest union possible in our physical life is that which exists between the food that we eat and our bodies, for, its vital elements go over into our very flesh, blood, and bone. However, whenever we partake of the Sacred Body and Blood of Christ, we do not change Him into ourselves, but He changes us into Himself, that is, He makes us share in His divine life through grace. Although He is in this way the link or bond of union between all who receive Him, each person still retains his own individuality. Does Jesus thereby give us the secret of being of "one mind" with all our fellowmen? We may retain our own opinion, but we must refrain from trying to force it upon others. To "give in" does not mean to "give up." It means to have respect for and to give credit to the opinion of one's neighbor. How many family quarrels and how much public strife could be avoided if the opponent's views were given due credit and followed as far as possible. A quarrel, like the boring bookworm, needs opposition. Remove the opposition and it will die of inertia. Just try and see. The soul of "one mind" celebrates a perpetual Easter, for she possesses Christ within herself, not only as long as the Sacred Species last, but forever.

TAKE AS NEEDED

“Make this most holy Sacrament a remedy for us, both in the present and in the future.”

After the germs of a disease have been conquered and expelled from the human body by medical treatment, the body is often left in a weakened condition until it has regained its strength by proper food and care. The same might be said of the human soul. After the germs of temptation have been conquered and the disease of sin routed by contrition and confession, the soul is left in a weakened state. She will find a “remedy” in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in Holy Communion. According to Denis the Carthusian, the Holy Eucharist is “an aromatic and health-restoring medicine, to heal anew the injuries suffered and the wounds received.” How consoling the thought is that, in the Bread of the Strong, we have so powerful a means of protection against the facility and danger of sinning, of being separated from God and of forfeiting His grace. Thus, as a supernatural Food, the Holy Eucharist imparts perfect health of soul and refreshment of heart. It strengthens the spiritual life; for it increases sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtues, above all—charity, but also faith and hope, purity and devotion, humility and meekness, patience and perseverance. In this way It impels to good works and bestows on us fervor to devote ourselves with generosity to the service of God.

SEE MY GIFT!

"That we may ever glory in Thy gift."

When a bright present is given to a little child on its birthday, it holds it up to everyone it meets, exclaiming; "See my gift!" Jesus gives us the greatest gift that an omnipotent God can give when He gives us Himself completely in Holy Communion. Each reception of Him might be called a birthday feast for us. We can receive Him worthily only if our soul is living, that is, is in the state of grace. To our living soul the Giver of Life comes in order to preserve and increase our life of grace by a gift of additional sanctifying grace. But, how can we "glory" in His gift? He is invisible in His greatest gift, the Holy Eucharist, and even more so when we have received Him and He has entered into our soul. Must we, then, go about with a placard with these words, suspended from our neck, "I received Holy Communion this morning?" No! But we do so by the holy use we make of our bodily senses that have been sanctified by this Gift. Our eyes, that looked upon the Sacred Host, must not be turned to gaze upon sinful objects. Our hands, folded beneath the paten or communion cloth, must keep pointing heavenwards, that is, our actions must be performed to glorify God. The feet that have carried our body to God's house and to the holy table must no more wander on dangerous or forbidden paths, but keep on the narrow, straight, steep road to heaven. Thus we ever glory in God's Gift.

3rd Sunday after Easter

OUR SUPPORT

“Be a life-giving food to our souls, and a life-saving help to our bodies.”

Our daily experience proves the truth of St. Paul's words that our “flesh lusts against the spirit” (Gal. 5:17). It is foolish to make the human heart the bloody battlefield where body and soul try to “fight it out” to victory. It is much more sensible to make our heart the conference table where our soul and body talk over our condition and strike “a good bargain.” The soul begins: “I am the principle of life to you, my body. When I leave you, you are a corpse. But I also have my own life, that of union with God by sanctifying grace. You can deprive me of that supernatural life by enticing my will to consent to forbidden pleasures, thus offering me the cup of poison, or the deadly weapon for committing spiritual suicide. We are destined to live together here and hereafter. If you will keep your five senses in check, so that I may preserve and perfect my supernatural life here, you will one day be glorified and share the bliss of heaven with me. But if not, if you want to make me your slave now and enjoy forbidden pleasures (that last only a moment and do not really satisfy), then you and I shall have an eternity in which to repent of our folly. What do *you* say?”

4th Sunday after Easter

OUR LIFE LINE

"That we may be cleansed from sin and rescued from all dangers."

We are in constant danger to both body and soul. Germs from within and accidents from without can injure our health of body, or even deprive us of life itself. Our soul's health and life is also constantly menaced by the germs of sin within itself and the attacks of the evil spirit from without. We are immersed, as it were, in a sea of trials and ills that threatens to submerge us beneath its angry waters. But there is One watching us from the shores of eternity. He daily throws out the life line—Himself, that we may cling to Him and be saved from spiritual ills and death. But, if we fail to grasp that life line, if we fail to grasp His nail-pierced, saving Hand, and, in consequence of our neglect, go down into the depths, whom must we blame? St. Peter wished to perform the acrobatic feat of walking on the water. When he asked Jesus, "Lord, bid me come to thee over the water," all went well until his faith sank and he with it. Jesus at once stretched forth His hand and took hold of him, saying: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" (St. Matth. 14:28, 31). If we have a lively faith, we shall not merely clasp our Life Line, but never let anything separate us from Him.

RIGHT DESIRES

"Grant us both to desire what is right, and to obtain what we desire."

Scarcely is a child born into this world when it curls itself into a question mark and cries out: "Why? why? Why am I here?" Its newly-opened eyes, that look up to heaven, and its little arms, stretched out to grasp it, give the true answer. In order to reach that happy end its Creator places "desires" into His new creature. Before the awakening of reason, the desire for the necessary food, drink, and rest to enable its little body to grow and mature, although uttered in code, are interpreted and fulfilled by the child's understanding and loving mother. At the dawn of reason, these desires for "good things" are increased. When the light of faith dawns in the infant soul, this also has her own desires. Some are right, or good; others are wrong, or evil. If God grants us to desire what is "right," there is no doubt but that we shall "obtain what we desire," for He desires only our temporal and eternal good. The commandments of God, the commandments of the Church, the duties of our state of life, and the voice of God speaking within us, which we call the "voice of conscience," tell us exactly what is right, and therefore, what we may and should desire. But they also tell us what is wrong and what we must avoid even in desire.

Feast of the Ascension

DIVINE LIFE

“That what we have received in this visible sacrament may profit us by its invisible grace.”

As we learned in our catechism: “The sacraments are sensible signs, instituted by Christ, by means of which the graces of the Holy Spirit are communicated to us.” They are seven in number, the greatest of which is the Holy Eucharist. For, in this sacrament we receive, not merely the grace of God, but the Giver of all grace Himself. In the Holy Sacrament of the Altar Jesus comes to us in the form of bread to remind us of the invisible effect that It produces in our soul—the sustaining and perfecting of our supernatural life of grace. The desire of our first parents, Adam and Eve, was—to share in God’s divine Being and Life. On this desire the tempter based his suggestion that, by eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they should be like God. In this way satan led them to sin and death. In the Holy Eucharist, however, that, which satan deceitfully and maliciously suggested to our first parents, has become a reality. The worthy reception of Holy Communion causes God to remain in us and we in Him. As the only-begotten Son of God, generated by the father, lives His divine life, so also His children on earth, adopted through grace, live through the Son of God, because, by receiving Him, we become one spiritual body with Him.

Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension

GIVING THANKS

"That we may ever continue in the spirit of thanksgiving."

Breathing is not merely a sign of life, but also a necessary exercise to preserve it. Through the nostrils the fresh air is inhaled, deprived of its life-preserving contents in the lungs, and then is exhaled again. Because breathing is so necessary for our bodily life it is also natural. We do it mechanically, automatically. We seem to notice it only when we have some difficulty in this vital exercise. The soul also has its supernatural life which needs its own exercise of breathing in order to preserve her life. She inhales God's grace and exhales her own sins and faults. But there is another vital function of our soul that we so easily forget, yet, which should be as constant as the breathing done by our body—that of *giving thanks*. All that we have comes from God. He *gives* continually. Hence we, the receivers of these constant gifts, should also *thank* Him continually for every gift, for every breath we draw. He gives, we thank. He gives, we thank. That is, or should be, the constant breathing exercise of our soul, and the deeper, the better. And yet—to take a familiar example—God gives the food, so tastily prepared by our good cook, we eat it, enjoy it, wipe our fingers and mouths with our immaculate napkin, and rise to say—"Let's take a little smoke!" To say "thanks" (grace) might choke us. And what do we do after we have dined on the Body of Christ?

Pentecost Sunday

PURIFYING FLAME

“Purify our hearts and sprinkle them with the dew of His interior grace.”

Our thoughts today go back to the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues. Fire purifies and consumes. It does not rest (go out) until it has consumed everything within its reach, transforming, as much as possible, all things into itself. We ask the Divine Guest of our heart to send the Holy Spirit to “purify” our hearts. We ask also for His “heavenly dew.” Physicists assure us that if the immense quantities of heat that are radiated to the earth’s surface by the sun had been allowed to accumulate, our earth would have been destroyed long ago. This disaster has been averted by the earth cooling off during the night and producing one of the most beautiful and most mysterious of all earth’s phenomena, and one of nature’s greatest blessings to man—the dew. It is the heavenly dew of the Holy Spirit’s grace that does to our soul what the refreshing dew does to plant life on the earth. Aristotle was one of the first to observe that dew appears only during a calm, serene night. Dew forms only when the skies are clear. When our soul is clear and calm we may expect this condensation that will cause all the virtues to grow and blossom in the garden of our hearts.

BOON COMPANIONS

"May the reception of this Sacrament be of profit to our health in body and soul."

Our body is so closely united with our soul, the principle of its life, that both mutually react upon each other. When the body is ill, the cause may lie in the soul rather than in some disease germ in the blood stream. Take, for example, the habit of worrying. "Worry," says Dr. James Joseph Walsh, "is the worst thing for high blood pressure, and nothing is more serious than the patient's own worry about his condition." Again, deep sadness, poignant grief, and gloomy melancholy may deprive us of the desire to take needed nourishment, or upset the little food we have already stored in our "little pantry." That is the dark side of the picture. Let us look at the bright side. Peace of soul and joy of heart also react upon our boon companion, our body, imparting to it health, vigor, energy, just as the bright sun does after a dark, dreary night. Must not, then, the daily reception of the triune God of joy and peace and light also affect our body? We do well to pray for this happy effect. However, merely to ask for this blessing, is like standing before a showcase that houses deliciously prepared food. We must also do our part—go in and help ourselves.

Feast of Corpus Christi

DIVINE BEINGS

"Grant us to be filled with the eternal enjoyment of thy divinity."

We celebrate today the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Body of Christ, because the gathering clouds of sorrow of Good Friday dampened our joy at the commemoration of the institution of the Blessed Sacrament on Holy Thursday. It is a feast of great solemnity and deep joy. But, there is one fact we must not lose sight of today or any day. We call it the "Feast of the *Body* of Christ." In Holy Communion we receive, not only Christ's most sacred Body and most precious Blood, but also His divinity. Christ's human and divine nature are inseparable. Just as our visible body with its manifold needs often makes us forget about our invisible, spiritual soul, with her even greater needs, so in Holy Communion we are apt to lay too much stress on the "visible" Host rather than consider that It is but the means whereby our invisible God comes into our needy, spiritual soul to make her share in the life of His divinity. That union and bliss is the beginning of the "eternal enjoyment of His divinity." Each reception of Holy Communion should make that union more perfect, and our bliss deeper and fuller until our soul, like that of some of the saints, dies for very homesickness for heaven.

OUR METRONOME

"Detach our hearts from the empty vanities of this world."

The metronome is a small, pyramidal instrument, whose metal pendulum, like an index finger, swaying to and fro with clockwork precision, beats exact time according to the position of the movable gauge upon it. Placed upon the home piano it helps little John or bigger Mary to get the "feel" of music time or rhythm. To get the rhythm of Divine Love our Blessed Savior loans us His own most Sacred Heart in Holy Communion. He places us upon it, as it were, that we may get the "feel" of it and keep exact time with it. In this, as in all other matters, the well-trying rule holds good: Practice makes perfect. Our heart may be jittery, not to say "ragtime-ly" with regard to (or because of) the "vanities of this world." What our Divine Physician of souls aims at is, to give a steady beat to our little metronome, our heart, for that is both a sign of health and strength. To reach that happy goal we must fix our attention and desire upon the stable things of the spiritual, supernatural world, characterized by God's own divine essence, which is unchangeable, an everlasting "now." Daily practice in learning these divine Heart throbs should make our own little heart beat in unison with that of Jesus.

PETRIFIED HEARTS

"That the more often we receive this Sacrament, the more surely may its salutary effects increase within us."

The constant dripping of water will wear away the hardest stone; friction will wear away the hardest material. That is the law of nature around us. With our body and soul the law seems to be in reverse. By constant exposure our body can become hardened and almost insensible to changes in temperature. The hand that daily wields a heavy tool will become very callous. Unfortunately our soul follows the same law. Repeated acts of religion, such as praying, assisting at Holy Mass, receiving Holy Communion, and so on, can become so mechanical, that we must often examine our conscience after these acts to find out whether or not we have really performed them. This is due principally to our wilful distractions at these holy exercises. The devil knows this all too well and, to deprive us of the spiritual fruits we should reap from these exercises, is always at hand to draw away our mind and heart to other enticing things. In this respect we have but to imitate the example of our Eucharistic Guest. His daily coming into our soul is not a matter of routine, but each time He comes as though it were His first visit and He gives Himself completely and most ardently to us. If we merely imitate His example at each reception of Him, each one will "more surely increase its salutary effects in us."

TIED HANDS

"May they atone for our sins and fit us to share in Thy everlasting mercies."

The Holy Sacrament of the Altar is a sacrament of the living, that is, we must be in the state of grace in order to receive our living Savior. Although it is He who forgives all sins, truly repented of and confessed, He does not do so by means of His sacramental presence in our sinful souls. A soul, dead in original or personal sin, is raised to supernatural life by the sacraments of the dead, holy baptism and penance. To receive Holy Communion in the state of grave sin would not forgive that sin, but only add another grave offense to the poor soul's standing score. But, an empty vessel may be far from being clean and most unworthy of receiving a precious substance. Such is the case with our poor soul. Emptied and cleansed from the filth of sin by heartfelt contrition and a sincere confession, our soul needs still further purification and adornment to make it more worthy of receiving our Divine Guest. It is here that we are at fault. We tie the hands of our Guest by not letting Him in a moment accomplish by His almighty power and mercy what we could never accomplish by our own efforts. O Lord, make me clean, and whole, and beautiful, and thus show Thy mercy!

SWEET AND STRONG

"May the Sacrament we have received be our sure defense."

David exclaims: "Taste and see how good the Lord is; happy the man who takes refuge in him" (Ps. 33:9). This "tasting" of the Lord was only by means of divine consolation, help and deliverance that he experienced in his time of trial and suffering when he fled "from the face of Saul and came to Achis, the king of Geth" (I Kings 21:10), and escaped only by feigning himself mad. God rescued and freed David from the greatest dangers and sufferings because he feared God and was just. In the Old Law union with God was possible only by faith, love, and prayer. More intimate is the union of the faithful of the New Testament who are united with God not merely by faith, love, and prayer, but also by the sacramental bond of Holy Communion, where they really "taste and see how good the Lord is." By eating the Flesh of the Son of God, the sweet, living Bread of Heaven, the Bread of Angels, they receive, not merely the grace and comfort of God, but God Himself. As God did to David of old, so Jesus comes to be "our sure defense," for, "if God is for (and in us) who is against us?" (Rom. 8:32). However, Jesus produces these wonderful effects only in those who receive Him in a worthy manner, making their disposition of soul as inviting as possible.

OPEN EYES

"Deliver us from the snares of our enemies."

When predicting Peter's denial of Him, Jesus said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail" (St. Luke 22:31-32). The cleaned wheat remains in the sieve; the chaff and dust fall through, are gathered up and burned. Satan is still up to his old tricks. He lays snares for unwary or over-confident souls in order to catch them on their way to heaven. To detect his tricks we need the "single" eye of faith that looks through all sham and hypocrisy at Eternal Truth. "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18), but humility is the solid foundation for the lighthouse of faith by which we see and safely avoid the "snares of our enemies." To keep the light of faith ever burning brightly in our soul, Jesus, Eternal Truth, comes to us daily as our Light and Guide and Helper in every need. If we listen to Him, follow Him, cling close to Him, we are safe. But, when pride makes us over-confident in our ability to detect and avoid the wily serpent along life's highway, we are headed for certain destruction. Pride is the cataract that blinds the eyes of our soul and causes us to fall into the deadly trap.

CLEAN AND STRONG

"Make clean our hearts and be our sure defense."

On Holy Thursday the celebrant of the Mass consecrates two large hosts. The second of these he places in an empty chalice which is later carried to the repository. This, with wine and water, he will consume in the Mass of the Presanctified on Good Friday. The empty chalice may well remind us of our souls into which Jesus comes in Holy Communion. It must be pure and empty, that is, free from grave sin. But even this purity can be increased by acts of heartfelt sorrow, just as the priest purifies the clean chalice at mass before he pours in wine and water at the offertory. But, besides purity, the soul also needs strength. For our Savior says: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he roams through dry places in search of a resting place, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house which I left;' and when he has come, he finds the place unoccupied, swept, and adorned. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there" (St. Matth. 12:43-45). However, we need have no fear, for "when the strong man, fully armed, guards his courtyard, his property is undisturbed" (St. Luke 11:21). Our will becomes stronger by an ever closer union with the Divine Will.

OUR EMMAUS

"Lead us from the wrong ways unto the right way."

Heaven is our Emmaus towards which we are travelling every moment of our life. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The straight, narrow path to heaven is, therefore, also the shortest and surest. Christ came to teach us this true way to eternal life by word and example, as we see it outlined in our guide-book to heaven—the holy Gospels. But he does more. He merely joined the company of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He joins us to Himself most intimately in Holy Communion. Must not, then, we also recognize Him in this Bread and our "heart burn within us?" Unfortunately we too often listen, as Eve did, to the wily serpent who suggests: "Why do you always eat the bitter fruit of obedience to God's law? Why not get a little pleasure out of your short life on earth? Why not tour the country of sinful pleasures a bit and travel your own way and at your own speed? But, can sinful pleasure ever bring happiness to our pilgrim soul? There are more obstacles on the roundabout way, that we want to take, than on the narrow way that leads to true peace and happiness. There is an exhilarating joy of success in surmounting obstacles that gives us ever new strength and courage.

8th Sunday after Pentecost

HEALTHFUL EXERCISE

"May this heavenly Sacrament be to us a renewal of both soul and body."

An old Latin proverb puts as man's goal—"A sound mind in a sound body." But our mind is only a faculty or power of our soul. For us it should read—"A healthy soul in a healthy body." The health, life, and death of our soul, however, depend upon our free will. For, by our will we either admit God with the supernatural life of grace into our soul, or drive Him out by grievous sin. Hence our goal should be—"A healthy, strong will, in a healthy body, if the latter helps the former." Vigorous bodily health may be a hindrance rather than a help to the life and perfection of our soul. Good health too often blows us up like a balloon and causes us to soar up into our own little heaven of forgetfulness of our soul and its health and needs. Then it is that our kind Father punctures this balloon with the thorn of suffering in order to bring us back to earth and to look up to Him, or rather, upon Him present in our soul. It almost seems to be an axiom that—the greater the saint, the poorer his or her health, when we read their lives. Bodily sufferings, furthermore, help us to practice many virtues, our soul's daily set-up exercises, such as patience, trust in God, and so on. It has been said: "Rheumatism has kept many people on the right path of life."

ONE IN ONE

"Make us to be of one mind and one heart in Thy service."

Our life's program must be to put our "flesh" on the "shelf," that is, to raise our life from the natural to the supernatural plane. If we take the letter "h" from the word "shelf" and let it stand for "humility," we shall have a true picture of what remains—"self." Humility is the truthful acknowledgment of what we are in the sight of God. We can look at self from below, from a human viewpoint, or from above, from God's viewpoint. His viewpoint is expressed in Christ's prayer at the last supper for all the members of His mystical body: "I pray for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that thy also may be one in us" (St. John 17:20-21). Our true self, then, consists in forming a minute particle of the immense Body of Christ, the Church, and, just as the atoms of our mortal bodies are united most closely and work together most harmoniously, so we also, as atoms of Christ's mystical body, must be closely united to and work with all the other atoms, all the other members of the Church. Just as one and the same Christ animates the soul of each member of His mystical body, so we also should do our part in making this union of His members complete and perfect.

SPIRITUAL TASTE BUDS

"Whose strength Thou ceasest not to revive in this adorable Sacrament."

It has been said that in our "age of condensation" man's genius will soon concentrate in a few pills or tablets all the vitamins that our bodies need each day. What a boon to our busy and over-worked housewives and cooks! No more cooking, no more washing of dishes, and so on. But, that would not be very much to our "taste." In order to seek food God gives us an appetite, and in order that we may enjoy the food we eat, He has placed "taste buds" on our tongue. We may say the same of our soul. Into it God has placed an appetite, a strong desire for Him that He alone can satisfy. This is the greatest pain of a damned soul—this ardent longing for union with God which will never be satisfied. But God does more than that. He not only satisfies our spiritual hunger but also fills our soul with sweetness. At Benediction, Holy Mother Church applies to the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar the words of the Book of Wisdom: "Thou gavest them bread from heaven . . . having in it all that is delicious" (16:20). This ever-increasing desire for the Food of our soul, coupled with the ever-growing sweetness of taste, should cause us to renew our soul's strength from day to day.

Feast of the Assumption

S O S TO MARY

“Through her prayers to be delivered from all the evils that now threaten us.”

The Blessed Virgin Mary has been called the “neck” of the Mystical Body, the Church. By using this figure of the human body we may say that Christ is the Head, Mary, the Neck, and all the faithful, whether in heaven, purgatory, or on earth, are the limbs or members. From our Head, through the Neck, the life of grace flows into all the members. The Head, Neck, and the souls in heaven are, as it were, above the clouds, where there is everlasting sunshine, eternal happiness. But the poor souls in Purgatory, and we poor mortals on earth, have much to suffer and bear up with. Although Mary has been taken up into heaven in body and soul, she has not thereby lost connection with nor interest in the church suffering and the church militant. At the foot of the Cross she received charge of all the souls for whom her Son died. Like Him she is eager to assemble all her children around her bright throne when their term of exile here below is over. For each she pleads constantly at the throne of her Divine Son, our Savior. Through her prayers, then, we may confidently hope to be delivered from all that threatens us, provided that we keep up constant contact with her by prayer.

11th Sunday after Pentecost

HEAVEN'S INFIRMARY

"That we may glory in the fulness of this heavenly remedy."

Today Holy Mother Church gives us another dose of heavenly medicine. (See 8th Sunday) To the two disciples, sent by St. John the Baptist to Jesus, He said: "Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (St. Matth. 11:4-5). Contact with the Savior's human body meant the cure of bodily ills, even the touching of the tassel of his cloak healed the woman who had been suffering from hemorrhage for twelve years. Why are these things changed now? The same, healing Savior comes into our poor, weak soul and makes it well and strong, even robust with spiritual health. Why does He not cure our body of its innumerable ills and ailments as well? Has He lost His power? Not at all. Apparently it is not in His plan. Bodily illness should not be a hindrance but a help to spiritual perfection. Robust, physical health can make us forget God and our eternal destiny. But when illness puts us flat on our back, we must look up to heaven (unless we refuse to open our eyes) we see things in their proper light and perspective. Yes, earth is heaven's infirmary where ills of the body should help to make our soul robust in sanctity.

Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

RIGHT OF SANCTUARY

"That, freed from present dangers, we may attain to the joys of eternal life."

"In the middle ages, persons fleeing from justice or persecution had what was known as "the right of sanctuary," which was based on the inviolability attached to things sacred. Thus, a person fleeing to a church found there a safe refuge from his "present dangers." We have the right of sanctuary in the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother, given to us by Jesus, our Elder Brother, on the Cross. We are in danger of falling into sin through selfish, stubborn pride or flabby weakness. Pride goes before the fall. Because we trust to our own strength, which is in reality weakness, we shall lose no time in fleeing to this sanctuary as soon as our soul's enemy approaches. The prince of darkness was never permitted to enter this sanctuary of light, Mary's Immaculate Heart. Furthermore, he well knows her power over him, the old serpent, whose head she has crushed. Therefore he does everything in his power to keep us from fleeing to her. In this sanctuary, too, we may have a foretaste of the joys of heaven, but the price for living there is to imitate Mary's virtues.

SPIRITUAL MILLIONAIRES

"May it profit us to the atoning of our sins."

Actual grace is a free gift of God, given to us in order to glorify Him by doing His holy Will. Sin is the abuse of grace, the doing of something that He has forbidden, that is contrary to His Will. When the malice of sin is forgiven by contrition and absolution in the sacrament of penance, there still remains the honor and glory to be paid to God of which our evil deed has robbed Him. Sin is an infinite offense, because it is gauged by the dignity of the person offended. Man, a finite being, could never atone for his infinite offense. For that he needs the infinite atonement that is offered by the Son of God Himself. In order to pay the temple tax Jesus told Peter: "Go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And opening its mouth thou shalt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and for thee" (St. Matth. 17:26). The Sacred Host, placed on our tongue each morning in Holy Communion, is like a white-gold coin that enables us to pay ever more and more of our debt of atonement to our heavenly Father for our past sins by restoring to Him and increasing the glory of which they robbed Him. We receive in order that we may be able to give the more.

13th Sunday after Pentecost

HAND OVER HAND

"That it may dispose us more and more towards our eternal salvation."

Eternal salvation consists in seeing God face to face and being most intimately united to Him forever. It depends upon the grace of final perseverance, of our soul being in the state of sanctifying grace when she leaves our body at death. That depends upon ourselves, not upon God. Christ has merited all the graces we need to be saved. He offers them to us. We can accept or refuse them. The sacramental graces are not like a staircase, by means of which we can ascend to heaven with little effort; still less are they an escalator. They are neither like a ladder by which we ascend with a little more effort. They are rather like a rope, let down to us from heaven, by means of which we must work our way up with effort, hand over hand. In the beginning this is somewhat difficult to our weak will. But as it grows stronger, the climbing becomes easier. This is the case especially when, by the daily reception of Holy Communion, our will becomes more closely united to the Will of the Divine Guest of our soul. He comes to bring heaven to earth, to strengthen and toughen our will, and thus to strengthen our hope of final perseverance in grace.

14th Sunday after Pentecost

THE ETERNAL RIDDLE

"Lead us to the fruit of everlasting salvation."

Perhaps in the bright light of eternity our limited and darkened understanding will be able to solve the eternal riddle—why a human creature insists on being damned. God has done all that is necessary for each human soul to be saved. He offers salvation to the soul for the price of doing His Will for a few eyewinks of fleeting time. The doing of it is not hard, and it alone brings true peace and satisfaction. Yet man, His stubborn creature, will use his free will, not to choose salvation by doing God's Will, but will assert his independence (base slave of passion!) by doing his own sweet(?) will. Is it worth it? Has, yes, can sin bring real satisfaction and true pleasure? Unless the soul's conscience is already dead or in a coma, that image of God will endure untold torture after the beastly body has enjoyed a moment of forbidden, sensual pleasure. And, that one grave sin may mean an eternity of torture. Why not tell the tempter off and give God a trial? Why not test the truth of the words of Eternal Truth: "My yoke is easy, and my burden light" (St. Matth. 11:30) Why not use sacramental and actual grace to make sure your salvation?

LOST MOTION

"That the graces flowing therefrom may inspire all our actions."

The inventive and active mind of man is ever at work trying to shackle the subtle robber of time, known as "lost motion." Time makes money; hence each moment lost means money lost. From the simplest gadget to the most complicated machine every part must work smoothly and coordinately. The same holds for the spiritual machinery of our soul. One act of the will succeeds another just as one heartbeat is followed by another. These acts of the will may be good, bad, or indifferent, according to the intention with which and end towards which they are made. The bad we must avoid, and the indifferent we make into good acts by a good intention, by an act of love of God. That is what we ask our Divine Guest to give us—that His heavenly Gift, He, Himself, working in us, and not the impulses of our nature, may inspire all our actions. "Inspire" means to breathe into, to put a soul into, as God did of old to Adam. "He breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Jesus should be the "soul" of all our actions.

TWO EQUAL ONE

“That our bodies also may obtain help both in the present and future.”

One soul and one body form one human being. Body and soul are most intimately united during this mortal life and are destined to be so also during the next, during our freely-chosen, eternal life. Consequently they must react upon each other. A sad, depressed, worried soul, will make the body feel tired, weary, worn-out; whereas a cheerful, joyous soul will act like a spring tonic in toning up its mortal container. On the other hand, the pains, ailments, and sufferings of our mortal frame also leave their painful effect upon the sensitive soul that lives within it. As our soul should rule the body, our first effort should be to see that this queen is all that she should be with regard to God. Then she will be beautiful, healthy, and happy. This happiness will be communicated to her loyal subject, the body, and if this subject complains of any ills, she will know how to heal or bear them. Therefore we ask our Divine Guest “to purify our souls” and to “give us new life” in His Sacrament, that we have just received, so that we may find help therein even for the needs of our bodies.

SEEDS OF WEEDS

"May our sinful passions be subdued and our eternal salvation be assured."

After God had created Adam He "put him into the paradise of pleasure, to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). This duty must have been one of pleasure since there were no weeds to be pulled. But, after Adam had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and had let its seed fall into the ground, the virgin soil produced "thorns and thistles." Since the day of that first sin weeds seem to thrive better than plants and flowers on our poor, cursed earth. Yet, the material weeds are but a symbol and reminder of the far more harmful weeds of our soul—our passions. These also seem to thrive more than the flowers of virtue, their direct opposite. This may be due to many causes. One of the strongest is, no doubt, that the devil is their gardener and applies ceaseless care and abundant fertilizer. The Divine Gardener, now resting in the garden of our soul, would cause the virtues to crowd out and practically kill the noxious weeds of our passions if we would listen to his directions and follow His example, yes, let Him work in our souls as He longs to do. He will not force us to do and be good. If the effort used to cultivate the weeds were spent in fostering the flowers, then...!

NOT WORTHY

“Make us worthy to receive it.”

When we are about to receive Holy Communion, the priest turns toward us with the ciborium in his left hand, and, raising a small Sacred Host above it, says: “Ecce Agnus Dei—Behold, *look at* the Lamb of God!” That look reminds us of the fact that we, a mere handful of dust, are about to receive the infinite Lord of heaven and earth. Then we bow our head, strike our breast, and say with the priest: “Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof!” No, we shall never be worthy, that is, deserve to receive Him because of any merit of our own. But that does not mean that we cannot make ourselves less unworthy of each reception of Holy Communion. We are told that St. Aloysius, who had the happiness of receiving Holy Communion only once a week, spent three days of preparation for His Savior’s “entering under his roof” and then three days in thanksgiving for this unmerited favor. We shall do well to thank our Divine Guest from the time of reception until noon, and then begin our preparation of heart for tomorrow morning’s reception of Him. This merely means to make all our thoughts and actions tend to that worthy goal as we go about the performance of our duties. Our Guest will bless each effort we make in this regard.

OUR WALKING STICK

"Make us hold fast to the keeping of Thy commandments."

The little child needs a perambulator to steady its unsteady steps and to learn how to walk. Again, when man's "pegs" or legs grow weak, he must look for support in a third leg, a wooden leg, a cane. By means of this staff he can support himself and continue to walk about without the aid of another person. God's commandments are designed to be such a perambulator and walking stick. By means of them we should learn how to walk on the way to God, and by means of them our soul should get that support that she needs to keep steadily on the straight way. God always plans the best and easiest for us. But we are so self-centered, so obedient to the hard dictates of our self-will, that we too often refuse to enter into God's plan, thus making life a drudgery, not to say a crucifixion. Whether we want to or not, we must obey His commands if we wish to have peace of soul now and eternal bliss hereafter. Why not, therefore, cast aside the stick of our own will, that will one day break and pierce our soul, and in its stead take and "hold fast" to the walking stick that our loving Father offers us for our support and joy?

REMEMBER AND DO

"Make us ever ready to obey Thy commandments."

Let us admit it frankly—we have a poor memory and a weak will. Each evening, as we do our daily home task on our decimal table, that is, examine our conscience on how we have observed God's ten commandments during the past day, we find that we so easily forget our daily duties, or, if we do recall them, that we do not have the strength of will to perform them. Knowing this weakness, during His earthly life Christ taught us by word and example how to serve His and our Heavenly Father. In the Gospel of each Mass we have a reminder of His words and deeds. But He does more. He also gives Himself as Food to our soul each morning to strengthen our will in putting the Gospel lesson into practice. If ten commandments are too many to remember and to observe when the occasion arises, we have our Savior's own words that they may be reduced to two—love of God and neighbor. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (St. Matth. 22:37-9). If we would pour out our love of self on our neighbor we should have no difficulty in loving God.

21st Sunday after Pentecost

STEP UP

"That what we received on the tongue we may follow up with a pure mind."

God "steps down" that we may be able to "step up." Jesus steps down from heaven upon the altar and changes the offered host into Himself. From the altar in the Sacred Host He steps still further down "upon our tongue" in order to unite our soul most intimately with Himself. The purpose of this union is in order to enable us to "step up" or ascend the steps or degrees of the love of God by means of which alone we can go to Him. For that we need a "pure mind" to act as a lamp or light to the feet of our blind will. The purer this light is, the more it will attract our wandering feet and keep them on the steep, narrow path that leads to eternal life. In the Book of Proverbs we read: "Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended?" (30:4) Father Faber gives us the answer when he speaks of Mary's sanctity and purity, which at the age of fifteen, had become so constrainingly beautiful, that these constraints reached even to the Eternal Word Himself. And "He yields to the force of their attraction, and anticipates His time, and hastens with inexplicable desire to take up His abode in His created home."

Feast of Christ the King

OVER THE TOP

"That we may be able to reign with Him in His heavenly court."

Patriotism, or the love of one's country, is a fire that smolders in every human breast. The threat to the honor, liberty, or welfare of one's country serves as fuel to cause this fire to glow with intense heat, producing those heroic deeds that serve as capital letters in the written history of a country. Following their country's sacred flag and encouraged by their dauntless leaders, soldiers overcome all obstacles and difficulties in their path and "go over the top" to victory. Christ is King and Commander-in-Chief of all who volunteer to become His loyal subjects and courageous soldiers. He has planted His standard, the Holy Cross on Mt. Calvary. By dying on the Cross He "went over the top" and conquered sin, death, and hell. At each Holy Mass He raises that standard anew and renews that glorious victory. But He does more, more than any earthly commander can do. Besides showing us how to fight successfully by His own peerless example, He comes into our soul to direct in person our warfare against the same enemies that He conquered on Calvary, and also to give us the strength and the courage to do our part, to "go over the top" to victory—to heaven.

DAILY EXERCISE

“That what Thou hast commanded us to do may be a help to our weakness.”

Some people each day need a set of “setting up” exercises for their bodies by means of various mechanical devices. That holds especially for those who lead a sedentary life and spend most of the day in an office or work room. But the busy housewife and the industrious farmer find all the exercise that they need for every muscle and limb of their body. Our soul has a like need of exercise according to its nature. Its faculties—mind, memory and will—like the limbs of the body, need daily, strenuous exercise. This is provided for us by what God has “commanded us to do.” Exercise, however, is obtained not merely by work, but also in recreation. Thus, the exercise prescribed by God is not meant to be a burdensome task, but rather a means of true spiritual joy because it makes us lighthearted and happy by means of the joy of a good conscience. If we were to put the effort that is required to offend God into trying to please Him, our task would be much lighter. Then we should realize the truth of Bishop Keepler’s words: “The truth is that joy is a constituent of life, a necessity of life; it is an element of life’s value and life’s power.”

BREAKING RECORDS

"Thou wilt not allow us to be overcome by human dangers since Thou hast gladdened us with a share in Divine Life."

In our day the breaking of records has become a mania. Almost every day the inventive mind of man discovers new "stunts" that he can perform to beat his neighbor. And when, after very strenuous efforts, at times coupled with the risk of his life, a man does set a new record of speed, agility, endurance, and the like, it will last only until his jealous neighbor excels and breaks this record. The reward for all this strenuous effort and deadly risk is the mere applause of men that lasts only as long as the clapping of their hands lasts. Yet, what men do for the praise of their fellowmen, we must do for the approval and reward of God. We must not let our striving to break our former record of goodness, by striving to attain a higher degree of perfection in the service of God, be diverted by any "human dangers" connected therewith. Man can kill our body, but he cannot kill our soul. We alone can and must decide the fate of our own soul. The thing that gladdens our soul and makes us face any danger in connection with saving it, is the fact that in each Holy Communion we "share in the Divine Life" ever more fully and are united to God ever more closely.

A SURE CURE

"Whatever is diseased in our hearts may be cured by the gift of its healing power."

The sick, the blind, the lame, the deaf and dumb, and even the dead were objects of Jesus' special pity and love, which He showed by restoring the afflicted to robust health and rejuvenated life. He continues that mission of mercy to this very hour. Although the Blessed Sacrament does not restore diseased bodies to health, It does cure diseased souls. From Adam, our first parent, we inherit the germs of our passions that can grow into a dangerous malady, which unless checked in due time, will cause the death of our soul by grave sin. It is often not until our body is laid low by some grievous illness that we realize that we have been the incubator of disease germs. The same may be said of our soul. Often we do not realize its tendencies until we have incurred the disease of sin. This is due to one of the germs we have inherited from our proto-parent—blindness to supernatural truths and values. We "see, but do not understand." Hence we ask the Divine Physician in our soul to heal it of the ills and diseases that exist there, but of which we are unaware. He will do so if we let Him.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

HEAVEN TOUCHES EARTH

"Heal in us the wounds of sin from which thou didst preserve one alone."

When the heavenly substance of the human soul comes from the hands of the Creator and touches the earthly material offered by the parents to form the body, it immediately receives a mortal wound, it suffers the spiritual death of original sin. But there is no rule without its exception. That exception we celebrate today. The death of original sin is removed by the baptism of water, of blood, or of desire. If, after baptism, the soul becomes guilty of grievous sin, she commits spiritual suicide. Man often commits mortal sin because he cares too little for and thinks too lightly of venial sin. He says: "Oh, it is only a venial sin!" It is true that a hundred venial sins, or more, will never add up to form a grave offense against God, but they will go far to break down the resistance of the human will, and will greatly strengthen the evil tendencies towards sin, the evil seeds still slumbering in our soul after original sin has been removed. This is taking a selfish view of sin, as it affects us. But with regard to God, it is like slapping our father or mother in the face and saying: "I know you don't care!" Don't they?

DUE REVERENCE

"That we may prepare with due reverence for the coming festival of our redemption."

A proverb tells us that "Familiarity breeds contempt." We are creatures of routine, and repeated actions too readily form in us the habit of doing things mechanically, thoughtlessly. In this way we not merely deprive God of the due honor and respect that we owe Him, but we also rob ourselves of the merit we should earn by showing due reverence to His august Majesty. At the beginning of her liturgical year our thoughtful and wise Mother, therefore, rouses us from our routine and coldness and invites us to put "heart" and "heat" into our acts of adoration and devotion. Jesus, Who "is the same, yesterday, and today, yes, and forever" (Heb. 13:8), does not make His coming into the human heart in Holy Communion a matter of routine. Each time He comes as though it were the first, with all the ardor and longing of His Sacred Heart. But His love attempts are foiled by the lack of proper dispositions in the recipient. What he needs is to approach the communion rail with a lighted candle in his hand—the light of faith that is replenished and intensified at each approach to God's holy altar. Trim your lamp!

2nd Sunday of Advent

REFINED TASTE

"Teach us how to spurn earthly things and to love those of heaven."

It is not correct to say that "we are what we eat." It is true that the vital elements of the food that we eat three or more times each day furnish our body with the energy necessary for life to continue in it and for the body to grow and to become perfect. However, we are not changed into the "spinach and hash" that we eat. It is the same with the Divine Food that we partake of each day. There, too, we are not what we eat. Our Blessed Savior says: "You will not change me into you, but I will change you into myself." He might have added: "If you will let me." Just there lies the difficulty. That is why we are still so human after partaking so often of this Divine Food. Jesus, in Holy Communion, changes as much of us into Himself as we let Him. If we ask Him to give us a refined taste that "spurns earthly things and seeks heavenly ones," our body will not tip the scales unduly whilst our soul is dying with spiritual hunger. Saints have lived on Holy Communion alone. This example is for admiration, not imitation. But it teaches us where to place the emphasis and how to satisfy life's essentials.

3rd Sunday of Advent

ATONE FOR SIN

"That these divine aids may help us to atone for sin and prepare for the coming feast."

In as far as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a sacrifice of propitiation or atonement, it calms and appeases the righteous anger of God, disarms His justice, and induces the Lord to regard sinful man with favor and mercy. The effect of the atoning power of Holy Mass, is, therefore, to cause God no longer to be angry and to punish, that is, it favorably disposes Him to remit wholly or in part the punishment due guilty man. This reconciliation and the remission of punishment on the part of God are effected in virtue of Christ's vicarious service or payment offered to His Heavenly Father for this purpose; for the ransom purchased by Christ with His Blood on Mt. Calvary for the atonement and satisfaction of sin is always being presented anew to the Father, and this for particular persons, that He may turn away from them their well-merited punishment and again impart to them His mercy more bountifully. In this way we prepare the crib of our hearts "for the coming feast," the birth there of the Infant Savior. Because He is an all-seeing God, we must not stop at appearances, but go down to the very bottom of our soul-crib and remove all the remnants of sin.

GOOD WILL

"That the frequent reception of this sacrament may advance the work of our salvation."

In a few days the angels will again broadcast their joyful message: "Glory be to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of good will." God will be glorified by man if he attains his eternal salvation. He will reach that end if he keeps God's commandments, if he does God's Will. Peace is possible to the heart of man only on that condition. Jesus has done all that is necessary to procure the salvation of every human soul. It is now up to the individual to accept and properly use the graces acquired by the Savior and offered to him to reach this happy goal. Salvation, then, considered from man's point of view, is a matter of good will, of a determination to cooperate with Christ in the redemption of one's soul. It is our will-power that Holy Communion will strengthen and thereby "advance" and make more certain the work of our salvation. One of the most cruel tortures to be inflicted on a prisoner is to bind him hand and foot, and then place near his head, close enough that he may smell but not near enough to eat, most tempting food, and then—let him starve to death. The Divine Food for your starving soul is as near to you as the nearest tabernacle. Your hands and feet are not tied. But, perhaps you are lacking in good will.

Feast of the Nativity—I Mass

KEEPING COMPANY

“That by worthy conduct we may deserve to be admitted into His company.”

Again in the three Masses on Christmas day we note a progressive union. This is expressed by the words—fellowship, new life, immortality. First, we are to attain to true fellowship with the Infant Savior by “worthy conduct.” The Latin word “*conversatio*” (conversation, conduct) means—frequent use, frequent staying in a place, friendly interchange of views, talking. We might include all these meanings in the well-known expression—“keeping company.” We go to the home of a friend, we greet him, we stay with him for a longer or shorter period of time, and exchange views and ideas by means of intimate, friendly conversation. We do that easily and naturally, without effort in the case of our earthly friends. But when our Divine Friend, the Infant Savior, comes to the house of our soul for that very purpose, we seem to be entirely changed. We receive Him coldly, mutter a few phrases mechanically, and soon forget about Him entirely. This is no “worthy conduct”—no proper “company keeping” with our truest Friend and loving God, and does not deserve intimate fellowship with Him. Why not surprise, as it were, our new-born Savior by changing from that mechanical coldness, to intimate ardent union with him TODAY?

Feast of the Nativity—II Mass

NEW LIFE

"May the new life from this Sacrament ever revive us, O Lord."

Our first Christmas gift was the greatest that even an almighty God could give—Himself. His birth in the lowly stable at Bethlehem on the first Christmas night is not a mere matter of history. This historic act repeats itself in each Holy Mass in which this same God is born again, only in a different way. The purpose of His coming is the same—to impart new life to us, a greater share in His own divine life by means of sanctifying grace. Jesus is the same, the purpose of His birth in our souls in Holy Communion is the same, only the manner and effects of His birth in this new Bethlehem (our soul) should be different, should be more perfect, more complete. That is our part in His new birth—to prepare the crib of our hearts ever more perfectly for His coming, that He may share His life more fully with us. Each reception should mean a new and higher degree of grace. That is our gift to Him. To each of us He says: "My son (or daughter), give me your heart (Prov. 23: 26), that I may work in it according to my infinite Love. How perfect I would make you in a short time if your will were one with mine, if your own self-will would not tie my hands."

Feast of the Nativity—III Mass

LIVE FOREVER

"That He may Himself also be to us the Giver of immortality."

Our soul, because it is a spiritual substance, is not subject to the laws of disintegration and corruption that rule our bodies. When the soul at death leaves the body, leaves time and goes into eternity, the body will return to dust as God told Adam: "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 into dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19). But at the day of the general judgment "the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall arise incorruptible... and this body must put on immortality" (I Cor. 15:52-3). Then our body will be, as it were, the crystal clear, cellophane wrapper, through which the beauty of our soul will shine to glorify and gratify God. And, in what will this beauty consist? In our likeness to the Infant Son of God. At each birth in our soul in Holy Communion the sweet Babe of Bethlehem impresses His image more deeply on our soul, the more deeply we let Him, by making our stiff and stubborn will as pliable in His Hands as molding clay in the hands of the sculptor. The Father has predestined us "to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). Let us, then, strive to bear ever more and more in us the likeness of the heavenly (man)—the God-Man, Jesus.

Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity

BREAD AND WINE

"May our vices be purged away and our just desires be fulfilled."

Holy Mass is both sacrifice and sacrament. The Sacred Species of bread and wine remind us of the salutary effects of the Sacrament on our needy soul. Into the wounds of the traveller, who had fallen among robbers, the good Samaritan poured oil and wine; wine, to cauterize the wounds, and oil of olives to heal them. The fiery wine of Christ's Precious Blood should cauterize the wounds caused in our soul by sin. But, still more is needed. The soul is weak, and, like, the body, can rebuild its wasted tissue only by means of nourishing food. The Sacred Body of Christ, our Good Samaritan, should help our weak soul not merely regain its lost strength, but also to attain a state of better health and greater perfection not enjoyed before the fall into sin. Hence, just as the Communion is an essential part of the Holy Sacrifice, the reception of Holy Communion should also form an essential part of our daily, devout assisting at it. Just as hunger for substantial food is natural to our body, so the longing for God, for union with Him, is natural to our soul. St. Augustine assures us that "our heart is restless until it rests in God."

Mass for the Dead on the Day of Burial

PAY DAY

"That if (this soul) is still soiled by any earthly stains, they may be wiped out by Thy merciful forgiveness."

In the Mass for a departed soul the priest and those assisting at the Mass forget themselves and give all their thought to and supplications for the dear departed one. This we see very clearly in the threefold "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world," to which we add the threefold petition—"give them rest, give them rest, give them eternal rest." So also, forgetful of our own many needs, we now implore the Divine Guest in our soul that all earthly stains may be wiped out of the departed soul by His merciful forgiveness. But, is that not a futile prayer? At the moment when the soul left the body, that now lies before us in the coffin, God's hands of mercy were tied and strict justice assumed command. Every cent of the debt due on forgiven sin must be paid. In fact, it has been paid already by the infinite merits of Christ. We now ask Him to apply a portion of these merits to the departed soul, thus to satisfy Divine Justice and permit the soul to enter into eternal bliss, if she is not already enjoying it. What a forceful reminder for us to pay all *our* debts in time by offering up the Sacrifice of Atonement for this end as often as we assist at it. In Purgatory we can only suffer; here we can atone and increase our merit at the same time.

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