

Our Parish

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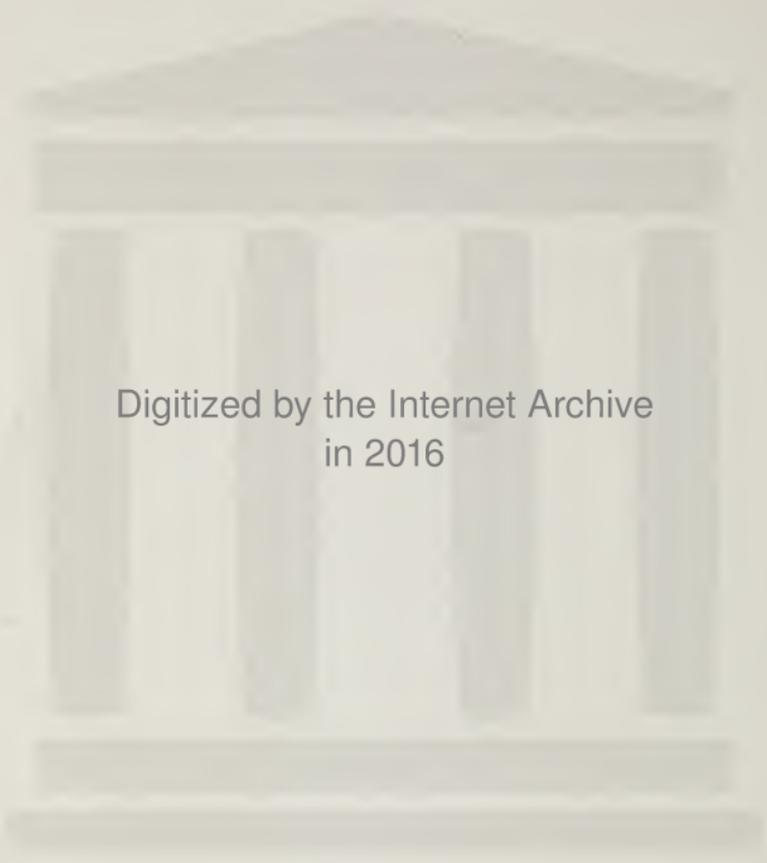


HOUSE OF GOD
AND
GATE OF HEAVEN

BY
Rev. H.A. REINHOLD



With
DISCUSSION CLUB
OUTLINE



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OUR PARISH

House of God and Gate of Heaven

A Discussion Club Text

PREPARED FOR

THE CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

BY

REV. H. A. REINHOLD



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INTRODUCTION

WHEN the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine invited me to compile this pamphlet for it, I gladly accepted, although conscious of the great difficulty of combining in it the sublime doctrine of our Holy Church with enough earthy realism to make it interesting and instructive for both the learned and the beginner. I took refuge, therefore, in the time-honored device of starting with the visible neighborly things which constitute in our minds the parish to which we all belong, proceeding from the obvious and almost banal things of our daily lives to the sublime and supernatural truths which animate and "inform" them, if I may be permitted to use this scholastic term of St. Thomas for once. I trust that this method will induce all members to take a personal and lively interest in our topic and prevent them from being frightened by too much theory from the beginning. Thus nothing is required for the beginner but open eyes and ears to pick up the pieces out of which the group will build the edifice of the parish. After that is done, we will see "what makes it tick," to use a popular expression.

I shall endeavor to hold up a sound and humble parochial pride and loyalty as one of the natural ingredients of true parish spirit. As we are proud to be Americans, inhabitants of our home State and certainly of our town or city, thus we should not only feel proud, with a humble pride, of course, to be Catholics and members of the universal Church, but also of our great diocese and certainly of our spiritual "home town"—our own parish. It follows that we embrace the parish with the same loyalty and loving attachment as we have, on the natural and civic plane, for our town. I am not afraid that we will become "parochial" in its narrow and evil sense, and I don't fear that we will lose sight of the greater things of the universal Church and our diocese. Practical experience shows that modern Catholics who move around a great deal are rather stricken with a vagabond and cosmopolitan spirit, in which the individual parish means as much to them as the new neighborhood grocer, when they change their residence. However, no parish can keep its spiritual level without a nucleus

of people who are parish-conscious and save the pastor from resorting to salesmen's methods to keep the parish going.

All this is more or less on the natural plane. The real purpose is, however, greater. It is to make the parish, its altar, our spiritual home and to let us realize that our local church is "Christ, here and now," "going about and doing good and healing all" now in His sacraments as He did once in Galilee and Judea when He was physically dispensing salvation.

I hope this pamphlet will help to open our supernatural eyes, the eyes of faith to see our parish in a new light and as new. I purposely say that I hope it will help, because it is only a map for your exploration of the real thing. No map can convey the beauty and reality of what the senses perceive of the far-flung plains, the lakes and mountains, the rivers and forests, the wandering clouds and the raging waves of our oceans. But as we may get lost in a beautiful country without a map, so we might fail to find our way through the rich, supernatural land of our parish without a guide, however modest and sketchy it may be.

You will find a great amount of asking and going about necessary to get a clear picture of your parish and its history, but your own exploring will make you understand it, not only its physical aspects but also its spiritual and social make-up. It will come to life and grow into a live organism with a human body and a divine Soul: "Christ here and now."

H. A. R.

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CHAPTER I

OUR PARISH AND ITS CHURCH

I



THE majority of our contemporaries have become uprooted. They move from town to town, from city to city, from State to State, from farm to farm and, last but not least, from parish to parish. All this is done as if it were the most natural thing on earth, and yet it makes our life nomadic, restless, unattached and nervous. It seems as if modern man can not stay a long while with anything. Great upheavals such as depressions and wars have accentuated this trend. But even before these crises hit humanity, modern industrialism and its fast-changing scenery were a great incentive for people to follow opportunity and chance and to become detached from soil, town and parish.

It thus happens that, except for a small minority of more sedentary and stable people, many parishioners know very little, not only about the importance of a parish as such and its supernatural meaning in their own spiritual lives, but even about its physical aspects and its story. Something strange has happened to us. A parish has become a commodity, like a grocery store or a filling station, although, of course, on a higher, spiritual level.

We will see later on that such an attitude is a misunderstanding of our relations with our parish church and in contradiction to the spirit and the letter of Church law. But look around and see: is there not a great deal of this spirit noticeable, when you observe yourself and, for study's sake, your Catholic friends? They call St. John's Church "Father

O'Reilly's church," as if it were one priest's spiritual "business." They go to Mass where they please, unless they feel that they have financial obligations to one pastor. That seems the only thing which keeps them in their own parish unless they like the priest who runs it or have other sentimental attachments to this particular church. Maybe they like the devotions and the services better than in other churches. Or, it is a certain religious order which they prefer or friends who go there, too. All these motives, although not bad in themselves, are personal, human, *subjective*. They all start with our own ego, our pleasure. And yet, to be a Catholic is to be a believer in the things that are given by the Church, the things which we may call *objective*, starting from facts, from God, from Christ, from the Church, from the Law. When we put our own ego into the center of all considerations, we are *egocentric*. The egocentric attitude is radically opposed to the true Catholic attitude. Thus we see that we would be better Catholics, if we asked ourselves, not "What do I prefer?" but "What is required of me as a believer and a member of the Church?"

What we do not know, we can not cherish. How can we be interested in a parish, even if we happen to live in it, unless we do know its physical outlay and its history?

Parish Boundaries

You know, of course, that when you move, this may involve a change of parish, in some cases even if you move across the street or a few houses down the block, because you may cross the parish line. The parish has this in common with your own town and State; and just as we are not free if we live in Washington, D. C., to say we prefer to pay our taxes in Virginia or Maryland and to use their courts, so we can not decide for ourselves that we would rather "trade" in the other parish. One of our first tasks in getting acquainted with our spiritual home is that we explore the territory of our parish and find out about its borderlines. We should also know how it is

socially composed. It makes a great difference if our pastor has to look after a parish in a strictly residential district, or downtown, in a factory area, or in farming country, or in a place of mixed population either on the outskirts of our town or where a slum area meets a better residential area. We ought to know if our co-parishioners all belong to about the same social layer of society, or if most of them are either well-to-do or dependent on welfare. What Catholic parishioner would be unaffected in his mind by the fact that his parish has its special problems through the fact that it contains racial or language minorities? There is a difference if your parish consists of people who have been educated in an American tradition of supporting their church, of going to Catholic schools, of joining organizations, or of people who come from countries where such things are unknown and who therefore miss a great many of their obligations and come to church only to be baptized, married and buried! We will have to ask our priests to give us a graphic picture of these conditions; and we may go out ourselves and observe. Justice and charity require that we know the problems of not only our pastor, but certainly of our fellow man. "Do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of Faith" (Gal. vi. 10).

Discussion Questions

What is the purpose of investigating the past history, the physical outlay and the social conditions of our parish? What are some reasons for the loss of parish consciousness in our times? What makes us a parishioner of a specific parish? Can you indicate approximately the borderlines of our parish? Is our parish a rural, a mixed, a poor, a residential, a downtown or an industrial section parish? Do we have strong contrasts in our parish population in race, color, income, education?

II

Our Parish Church

All the life of a parish radiates from our church. It is often surprising how little parishioners know about their spiritual home. It will be interesting to find out about our parish patron and how it ever happened that this particular patron was chosen. This may reveal something about the history of our church. "St. Patrick" may indicate that the original parishioners or priests were Irish, but by now these may be only a minority. Sometimes the title of the church indicates a period: The Immaculate Conception became very popular as a title after the middle of the nineteenth century, St. Thérèse of Lisieux in the twenties of our century.

The best method to understand your parish church is to make a conducted tour of it. You will find a great many things you never noticed before, and many a statue or picture will only become significant after you find out whom it represents, why it was erected, and what made up the life of this saint, and its significance for us. Did you ever see the inside of the sacristy, or how the organ works? Do you know who gave the vestments, what they mean, who designed the plans of the church and in what style it was built? Have you an idea how the people paid for it or how they are still doing it? In many cases even the style will tell you a great deal of history of your own parish, at least the period when it was built and, in many cases, who built it. German and Irish immigrants often preferred Gothic and Romanesque churches, Italians liked Renaissance, and in some places you will even find a church in Georgian or Colonial style, either because it was built before the Revolution or shortly after it, or because its parishioners belonged to a class eager to demonstrate their cultural ambitions as Americans. Remember the courage it took to start a parish. Think also of the patience with which generations stood the sight of an unfinished plant, a humble or raw church building, a poor school, an uncomfortable rectory, before they

started out to venture on something worthy of the representation of the greatest idea of the human mind: the *material expression* of our relation to our Creator, a church building.

Our Parish Activities

Apart from the work of the priests in their parish duties, there is also a lay aspect which involves quite a number of activities. There are *immediately* religious ones, like the sacraments, and the different kinds of devotions. There are also others which are not directly religious, but more or less closely related to the former. It should be of interest for any parishioner to investigate and study for himself what devotions there are in his parish. Everyone, of course, ought to have an interest in finding out about the seven sacraments given in the parish, although Holy Orders will be the one they will probably never see administered, because it is reserved to the Bishop and to his cathedral church, at least ordinarily. But have you ever watched an infant or an adult Baptism, with an English translation in your hand? Were you ever present, when the last rites were administered, again with a translation of these beautiful and powerful prayers, so that you could follow the sacred action? Have you watched closely the marriage rite or a funeral?

It would be a good idea for us to find out what the other non-sacramental devotions are about, and how they are related to the principal act, the Holy Eucharist. Perhaps one in our group can give us a history of some specific devotion and how it became popular in our own parish, on what occasion it first appeared among us. Is it an old devotion or a modern one; has it a particular importance for our town or is it perhaps a reminder that the clergy of our parish belong to a certain religious order, or the first parishioners to one of the nationalities which pioneered here before we were born? What is the Forty Hours' Devotion and where did it come from and how long has it been in our midst?

Discussion Questions

Who built our church? Our school? When was our parish founded? Who is our patron? What devotions have we in our church? Give the answers to the questions contained in the text of this second section.

III

Our Parish Organizations

Religious life branches out into our daily lives. In modern times the *Church needs organs* that feed the content of our sacramental lives into the profane world outside. The *organs* have been built up purposely out of the members of the parish into *organizations*. What are the organizations in your parish, and how closely are they connected with the parish? The Catholic Action pattern, as developed under Pope Pius XI, has what are called "four columns"—young men and married men, young girls and married women. These are the so-called natural estates of the parish. Can you classify your parish organizations under these headings? Or are there other headings under which to catalogue them: like charity, pastoral help, social, fraternal, and so on? There are, of course, other organizations which are not purposely parochial, like the Knights of Columbus or the Catholic Daughters, unless there is only one parish in your town. It may be useful to discuss the importance of these organizations for the parish life and their function in it. There are organizations which are nation-wide or diocesan, of which there may be a branch in your parish. Some are auxiliaries for the whole Church, like the Propagation of the Faith; others are strictly parochial in purpose like the Altar Society and the St. Vincent de Paul Conference. You will be surprised to note that what seemed to be a haphazard tangle of organizations is really animated by a purpose and principle which avoids overlapping, and either brings the parish

closer to God, or God into the life of men,—some leading up to the altar, others bringing the living graces of the Church down into ordinary life.

The Scene of Action

Like an army ready for conquest we find our parish on the scene of action which is the surrounding world, the souls of men living with us as practical, or potential, or fallen-away members of the Church. It is easy to imagine how we can contact men and women who live under the same circumstances as we do. We meet them socially, in our business or professional life, in our factories and in fraternal organizations, in schools and educational clubs, during sport and recreation. However, it is bad strategy to rush into the field without having first surveyed carefully. You can not approach all problems with one and the same method, and if you wish to preach to the poor you have to select an approach which differs from the one you would choose to win the wealthy. Our Lord spoke to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem differently from the way he was wont to use with the country folk in Galilee.

There are problems of a special kind in every parish: the slums, the prisons, an asylum, a county hospital, to mention the defective side of life. Souls committed to these places are potential Christians, or already members of the parish, although economically or mentally or morally weak ones. A careful survey of your own parish will reveal these things to you and you will ask: What are we doing about it? The sacramental, intellectual and social life of a parish would be suspect if it ignored these things. Our desire to be left alone and to avoid unpleasantness, to appear respectable and to hide our shortcomings, if maintained at the expense of charity, tinges all the good things we may do with the reproach of hypocrisy. If we wish to maintain our sacramental community, the parish, as something built on Christ, and bringing Christ to men, it is necessary to find out for ourselves what is going on within its boundaries.

Discussion Questions

What institutions are located in our parish, religious and non-religious? Can you enumerate and classify our parish organizations (religious, social, fraternal, charitable, diocesan, universal)? Are our parish clergy secular or religious? If they are the latter, what do you know about the ideals and history of their order? To what religious order do our parish school teachers belong? or the Sisters in other institutions within the parish? Do we know anything about these orders? Explain how you think the parish gets its support and relieves its debt.

CHAPTER II

OUR PARISH CENTER: THE ALTAR

I



IN the course of the Middle Ages altars developed into large structures, and it was only recently that American bishops began to encourage a return to the simple altar that shows at first sight what it really means to be: a table or a block for the Divine Sacrifice of the Mass. Special emphasis was given to this movement, when St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York received its beautiful new altar. We have examples of the altar, in its pure significance, in the great Basilicas of Our Saviour, St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. Mary Major in the eternal city of Rome. Whatever the altar in our own church may be like, let us remember that it is not the superstructure behind it, nor the painting, nor the sculptures and images around and above, which make up the altar, but *the sacred table with its candles and its crucifix*. Some of these altar superstructures, both medieval and modern, are very good works of art; wood carving, stone carving, plastering or painting. Some of them have been acquired with great sacrifice by the parish. Some of them are dear to parishioners because they have been there for many years, or because they were given by members of their own family. As long as we remember that they are ornaments and backdrops of the real altar, and as long as they are not such that they "crush" the principal part of the altar, they will not prevent our understanding the symbolism of our sacrificial table. It really does not make a great difference if these backdrops are made of cloth, stone or wood, so long as the principal idea is still clearly enough expressed to be seen. If we put first things first, we can not err.

Meeting of Heaven and Earth

The altar of our parish church is the place where heaven and earth meet in a symbolical way: this is the reason why the altar is raised above the level of the sanctuary, which in turn is again raised above the level of the nave of the church. Christ was transfigured and crucified on a mountain, and ascended into heaven from Mount Olivet. Moses received his law on Mount Sinai and Abraham made his sacrifice on Moriah, a mountain in Palestine. "And when Jesus had dismissed the crowd, He went up the mountain to pray." It is human symbolism to raise a place of sacrifice. Its plain surface raises our sacrifice into the sight of God—a grand and simple gesture of obedience and surrender to the Giver of Life. On it rests the Missal that contains the Word of God and those sacred texts through which the Holy Sacrifice is prepared and consummated. The crucifix in the center of the altar relates our sacramental sacrifice to the historical sacrifice on Calvary for our eyes and minds. It originates from the times when, as nowadays on Good Friday, the altar was decked out before every Mass and was otherwise empty except for a container of the Holy Eucharist and the Gospel book. At that time the candles and the crucifix were carried in the introit procession at the beginning of the Mass, and deposited at the altar upon the arrival in the sanctuary.

Another beautiful symbolism is contained in the altar candles. Originally they were needed to provide the necessary light for the service, but nowadays they are more ornamental. It is easy to draw the parallel between these candles and Christ, calling Himself the Light of the World, and comparing us with the light on the candlestick, and with the city on a mountain, visible to all the world. They are the most adequate ornament for our sacrifice; while they serve at it, they consume themselves unto their own annihilation in sacrifice. We admire the beautiful sobriety and moderation of Rome which prescribes a certain limited number of candles, never more than six—or seven for the bishop's Mass—even at our greatest sol-

emnities. We will notice this spirit of majestic restraint and grandeur wherever we come in contact with any laws given by Rome, especially in the services given in our liturgical books, the Missal and the Ritual (the latter containing those rites and sacraments which are not connected with the Mass).

Discussion Questions

What is the spiritual center of our parish church? What is the really important part of the altar? Why is the altar raised above the level of the sanctuary, and the sanctuary raised above the level of the nave of the church? What is the Missal? Why is a crucifix required for Mass? What is the meaning of the candles at Mass? What does the melting of their wax signify? How many candles are required for a Low Mass? for a High Mass? for a Bishop's High Mass?

II

The Tomb of the Martyrs

There is a great and impressive moment when the bishop consecrates an altar: the transfer of the martyrs' relics to their new place of rest, the altar. It is like a funeral service without sadness, but with the spirit of joy and triumph. Priests in sacred vestments carry the relics in procession, surrounded with lighted torches, in front of the bishop who wears his pontifical robes and carries his crozier. When this procession enters the church, the choir sings:

"How glorious is the Kingdom in which the saints rejoice with Christ; clad in white garments they follow the Lamb, whithersoever He goes. . . . Rise, ye Saints of God, out of your resting places hasten to the places which are pre-

pared for you. . . . Come, let us rejoice to the Lord, let us sing praise to God our Saviour (Ps. 94). . . . With gladness you shall go out and with joy you will be led; mountains and hills will leap expecting you with rejoicing, Alleluia. . . . Because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven, who despised the life of this world and attained the prize of the Kingship and washed their garments in the Blood of the Lamb.”—(*From the Roman Pontifical.*)

This new abode of the martyrs' relics is then anointed with Chrism by the pontiff and the stone slab that seals it is fastened with blessed mortar. At this time the choir sings the words from St. John's Apocalypse:

“From below the altar I heard the voices of the slain saying: why dost thou not vindicate our blood? And they received the divine answer: Sustain yet a little while, until the number of your brethren will be fulfilled.”

With prayer and the singing of antiphons, the bishop walks around the altar with the censer in his hands. In its fullness this rite is well worth reading and studying.

The great love with which the Church buries the relics of her sainted martyrs in every altar, indicates what she wants us to understand. No gold or silver or precious art work is as fit as the grave of one who became like his Master to be a place of celebration for the Holy Mystery. In and through Christ's Blood the blood of the martyr has received its value; his martyrdom is a fruit of the eucharistic mystery; it flows from the altar.

The Altar Is Christ

According to the law of the Church, the altar should be clad in precious fabrics, linen covering its blade and sill, brocade or damask clothing its front and rear. Repeatedly the book used by the bishop at consecrations and ordinations, which is called the “Pontifical,” says: “The altar is Christ.” This brings us to the deepest meaning of it. Christ said to the

Samaritan woman at the well in Sichar: "God is spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John iv. 24). We must, therefore, always seek the things of the Spirit behind visible signs. Our Holy Faith is truly spiritual, and in itself such things as stone altars mean nothing. They are matter. Only when we understand what all these profound symbols mean in "spirit and truth," do we do justice to the supernatural character of our religion. The One on Whom we lay all our sacrifices and prayers, the One Who sanctifies whatever we offer to our Father in Heaven, is Christ Himself, Who is our spiritual Altar in Heaven. Our visible altars signify Him, and they remind us that our religion centers around sacrifice, that we are all sacrificers, and that every single act of our daily lives receives its consecration and eternal value, if we lay it down on this divine Altar.

Discussion Questions

What is in the center of the altar table? Why are martyr's relics placed there? With what must the altar be clad? When the bishop ordains a deacon for the service of the altar, he says in the service: "The altar is Christ." Explain in what sense the altar stands for Christ.

III

The Offertory

The moment in which we gather up our small daily offerings of work, endurance, joy and prayer is the Offertory of the Mass, when we approach the altar (that is, Christ) to heap on Him our personal offering. It is small, as the drop of water which the priest drops into the precious sacrificial wine at the Offertory, but it is the one thing which gives our life its accent and its philosophy. What else makes life worth living? Its chain of success and disappointment, of human happiness and

unhappiness, health and sickness, richness and poverty, is suspended on birth and death—both are ends. There is not any sense to anything we do unless we incorporate it into Christ's sacrifice, by laying it down beside the host and by dropping it into the wine, which are to become Christ's Body and Blood, the pleasing sacrifice in the eyes of God. Thus we see that our whole lives have to be conformed in intention to this spirit, in order to live up to what we are witnessing in our attendance at Mass.

In centuries past, this intention found its expression in the solemn Offertory procession. Part of this procession is still left with us and visible to our own eyes: when at Solemn Mass the subdeacon carries the veiled chalice and paten to the altar; when at Low Mass the altar boys bring up the water and wine. The Offertory verse in our Missals, especially the one at Requiem Masses, although very much shortened, is the processional hymn which was sung when the faithful brought their gifts, symbolizing themselves and their lives, to the gates of the sanctuary to be deposited on and around the altar. Thus Christ was laden with our gifts, which receive all their value from becoming a part of His divine offering.

Bread and Wine

From the altar comes our life's sustenance. Why did Christ choose the *symbols of food and drink*? Why did He say, eat and drink? Because the primary purpose of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist is our spiritual growth in Him and our conforming to Him. His Body is to fill us with strength to become outwardly and inwardly more like Him, to enable us to imitate Him. His sacred Blood is to fill us with His spirit of sacrifice and obedience unto death. When we unite ourselves at Mass with Him, this union does not only consist in a passing act of our minds, a conformity of intention, but it ought to be connected with our everyday life. We have to live in conformity with God's will as expressed in His commandments and the example of His earthly life. In this fashion our life becomes a

unity. Even the most common daily chores are a part of the eucharistic sacrifice and banquet. We offer them on the paten in the Offertory so that they may become one with Christ's sacrifice during the Consecration: we give ourselves not only in express prayers and words, in mere verbal acts of surrender, but especially in the dedicated actions of our life. Then in the eucharistic banquet (the Communion) we receive the fruit of Christ's and our own obedience. More closely united to Jesus and mysteriously grown in Him, we receive strength to make our life more Christlike.

Our spiritual life is, therefore, closely bound up with the altar in our parish. Before it, we are not alone, like hermits in a desert cave. All these things happen likewise to our fellow parishioners, whom we meet at the altar, in the Communion of Saints. "For where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). This oneness, in which Christ is, makes our strength. It is made ever more perfect through Holy Communion at the altar in our parish church.

As far back as the first century, in the *Didache* or "Teachings of the Apostles," Christians were conscious of this unifying fact of the Blessed Sacrament: this document tells the priests how to perform the Consecration and adds immediately after it, "As this broken bread was once distributed over the hills and gathered into one, so let your Church be gathered together into Thy kingdom from the ends of the earth (p. 4)." Three hundred years later the great Bishop of Constantinople, St. John Chrysostom, enlarged this beautiful eucharistic thought in one of his great sermons. He quotes St. Paul's famous saying in the first letter to the Corinthians (x. 17).

"Because the Bread is one we, though many, are one Body, all of us who partake of the one Bread."

and continues:

"What do those who receive Holy Communion become?"

The Body of Christ, not many bodies, but one Body. For as the bread, made of many grains, is united so that the grains in no way appear any more, although they remain themselves, and their difference is not evident because of their union; so we become one with Christ and with one another.”—(Quoted from *Enchir. Patrist.*, *Rouet de Journal* 1194.)

According to St. Augustine (and St. Thomas Aquinas, also), this is the very essence of the sacrament: “If the faithful want to live off the Spirit of Christ, let them become His Body, as only His own Body lives through His Spirit. O sacrament of godliness, O manifestation of unity, O bond of love! If you want to live, here you have where you may live, from which you may live. Come, believe, let yourself be incorporated into this Body that you may become alive” (184, *ibid.*).

Discussion Questions

At what part of the Mass are we called upon to place the offering of ourselves upon the altar? What was the meaning of the ancient Offertory procession? What remnants of the Offertory procession still exist in the Mass? Why did Christ choose bread and wine for the Sacrifice of the Mass? What does the consecration do to our gifts of bread and wine? What is the *primary* purpose of Holy Communion, as taught by St. Paul, the Fathers of the Church, and the prayers of the Missal?

IV

The Parish Mass

We would therefore be under a serious misconception if we looked on our more or less frequent Communion as a purely personal and private affair, on the same order as, for instance,

our private morning prayers, or a meditation with a good spiritual book. In the first place, Communion should never be detached from Mass without a good reason, and never detached from life; but our life should breathe this spirit of sacrifice and sacrament. In the second place, since we have St. Paul, the Fathers of the Church and the very texts of the Missal driving the point home so strongly, our Communions should be, so to speak, a community affair, a *parish banquet*. We should be conscious that right and left of us there are fellow members, not to be shut out, but to be taken into our charity and prayer. This is the reason why the Church has developed the beautiful texts and songs of the Mass. In them we have common prayer and community singing. At every "Dominus Vobiscum" the celebrating priest invites us to join with him in prayer. At the Preface he expresses our individual prayer in the most majestic and solemn fashion, in a collective hymn of praise and thanks: "It is truly fit and just, right and salutary, always and in all places, to give thanks unto Thee, O Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God through Christ our Lord. . . ." After the Consecration the priest prays over the holy gifts, not in his own name, but saying with precision, "We, Thy servants, also Thy holy people," when he calls to mind the full content of this sacred mystery of Christ's redemption.

We should now understand that the parish Mass is not in any way a disturbance of our private devotions, but in fact the real and true preparation and thanksgiving for Communion, especially the sung Mass. According to our Missal the sung Mass is the normal way of celebrating Mass; Low Mass is a concession made for urgent and practical reasons. Most of the texts in the Missal reveal on careful examination that they are hymns, and hymns are to be sung. A parish community walking in the ancient processions at Mass, singing and praising God, would be the result of our obedience to the admonitions of the Holy See (Pius X). Sunday Mass would be "celebration" in its true sense, and its uplifting power would become

more apparent than if we had only theoretical knowledge of its true meaning, and then concentrated only on our own individual world. Within a short time we would be free from the use of books, and would listen, sing, pray and act in this great mystery which is meant to be celebrated collectively. In its wise and psychologically well-balanced plan, there is still ample room left in Mass for private prayer, and even meditation.

Popular Devotions

Now that we know the center of our parish, it will be easy to see how other devotions have been derived from its idea, and how some are closer to, others more distant from, the center of all worship, the Mass. Sacramental Benediction and the Forty Hours' Devotion make us realize the hidden meaning and the basic teaching of this sacrament. A long line of thought and theology have derived these devotions from the central mystery. The fiercer the denial of heretics, the more did Catholic people love to dwell on the Real Presence of Christ, and to assert their faith outside Mass in processions, adorations and devotions. From this it is easy to understand why the Sacred Heart devotion was given us; to fill, with personal relations of love and atonement, those Christians who live in a world that is cold and looks on Christ merely as a historical person of the past. The warmth of this devotion will keep mankind from an attitude of mere formal ritualism, which is one of the tendencies in modern man as it was in Christ's contemporaries, the Pharisees.

Other devotions are more loosely connected. It will be interesting for the discussion to see how closely they are related to our sacramental worship. Some of them have come from outside, like the Stations, which came from the Holy Land; the Rosary, which takes the historical stages of Christ's life for mental prayer carried over a certain amount of time which we keep with Hail Marys; and finally the devotions to saints and their novenas, many of them stemming from pilgrimages and famous shrines. Their degree of eucharistic intensity de-

creases toward the circumference, and in many cases they are not actually "parochial," but rather private devotions performed with great profit in public.

Discussion Questions

Is Communion a private affair? Explain. In the light of this truth, why is the High Mass the normal way of celebrating Mass? Explain how the High Mass fulfills in a religious way man's expression of sociability by eating and singing together. Name some popular eucharistic devotions. What purpose do they serve? How would you relate the devotion of the Stations of the Cross, or of the Rosary, to the Holy Eucharist?

CHAPTER III

OUR PARISH SHEPHERD

I



As far back as the first century of our Christian era, before or around the year 100 A. D., Christians represented Christ as the Good Shepherd with a lamb on His shoulders. The image of Christ the Shepherd was apparently more popular than any other representation of Christ. It remained so till after the times of persecution, when it was superseded first by Christ in His glory, and, simultaneously with increasing frequency, by the crucified Lord, at first triumphantly clad in royal robes and later stripped and in agony. Although the picture of the Good Shepherd has lost its ancient popularity to a certain extent, its sight and the sound of the words still warm our hearts and let us see Christ in His most tender and lovable aspect. He is the friend of the poor sinner, Who helps him in need when everybody has given up hope. He rules him with His gentle law, and sees to it that His faithful will not want. He has gone before in His Life, Death and Resurrection so that no follower may fear. He shared the hardship of His flock and defended it with His own Body against the foe. He nourishes His sheep and they trust Him with a total and infinite trust. He is the incarnation of God the Father's paternal care and love, the Word He spoke to mankind.

All these things are still with us in the office of Peter, the shepherd of nations, our Pope. Equal in his sacramental power to the Pope is the bishop, the pastor and shepherd of the flock entrusted to him. He has the full power of shepherdship like the apostles, and he is vested in the full priesthood of Christ.

While his sacerdotal throne stands in his cathedral church, the head and mother church of all churches in the diocese, whenever he comes to our parish he also uses a throne and the shepherd's staff (crozier) and his Mass is surrounded with the full ceremonial due to this great mystery. The Roman Pontifical even prescribes that the lower ministers at the throne genuflect before the bishop—or at least bow deeply—which cannot be done unless a deep faith in the presence of Christ animates us.

The Pastor

A bishopric or diocese is too vast a territory nowadays to be looked after by a bishop alone, and has therefore been divided into parishes, with priests who have been given as much sacramental power as they need for their flock. While the full priesthood is reserved to the bishop, all that a parish ordinarily needs is given to its pastor. His rights and duties are clearly defined. In many dioceses there is the custom of a solemn installation of pastors. This custom provides that either the bishop or the dean leads the new pastor to the sanctuary, and introduces him to his parishioners. The keys of the parish are given him and certain prayers are recited. Then the new pastor mounts the pulpit to read the Gospel of the Good Shepherd and to preach his inaugural sermon on it, indicating that his parishioners shall above all see him from now on in this supernatural light of faith. This beautiful rite binds parish and pastor together with the common vision of Christ: "I know mine and mine know me . . . and I lay down my life for my sheep" (in daily labors for the parish).

The Law

This sacred office is protected by Canon Law. Normally a pastor is irremovable, which means he cannot be transferred unless he agrees or his transfer is made necessary by certain legal conditions. This is extremely important. It shows the spirit of the Church, which does not regard parishes as so many rungs in a ladder for a brilliant ecclesiastical career, but

as a lasting relation comparable with the bonds of matrimony. That is, by the way, why your bishop wears the bridal ring: his diocese is his beloved spouse.

The Canon Law also provides that a parish cannot have more than one pastor, nor a pastor more than one parish. The pastor has to say Mass for the intentions of his parish, even when absent on vacation, on every Sunday, and a great number of feasts. This is called applying "pro populo," "for the people." He has by law the right to minister to all his parishioners and is held by the same law to know them: "I know mine. . . ."

Discussion Questions

What was the favorite representation of Christ in the early Church? Through whom does Christ still exercise His function of Good Shepherd? Why has the Church been divided into dioceses? Why have the dioceses been divided into parishes? What is the custom in some dioceses for the installation of a pastor? What is an irremovable pastor? Why cannot a parish have more than one pastor? What is the Mass "pro populo"? How often must it be offered?

II

Pastoral Care

Like a good shepherd the law bids him to watch that nothing against faith and morals creeps in. It is therefore his lawful task to warn and rebuke in a fatherly way. It is his duty to see that works of charity be carried out in his parish and that organizations to promote faith are active and well supported. He has the right to use a parish seal, to keep an archive, to record the history of his parish and to provide all the documents, records and books. His is the duty to preach the Gospel, either himself or through other preachers. The

trust of his flock is protected by a special law: all he hears and sees as a pastor is his professional secret, and he cannot be forced to testify against any of his parishioners so long as he receives their confidence as a pastor, even outside the confessional.

To the pastor's loving care Canon Law gives the poor, the miserable, the orphans, the widowed and the sick; he is their father. A special Canon makes it clear that all the non-Catholics living in his territory, who are all potential members of the Church, are the object of his care. He is required to convert them or to do what is humanly possible and reasonable to win them for Christ.

Canon Law does not encourage parishes built on language and nationality except in very definite circumstances. It is the territory that makes a parish. And in this territory all Catholics are trusted to one pastor, who has the following rights: to baptize them solemnly; to bring them Holy Communion when they are sick; to administer the last rites when they die; to publish their marriage banns and to assist at their weddings; to perform their funerals in his parish church and the parish cemetery; to bless their houses; to preside over the Holy Saturday liturgy and over all processions and devotions; to perform all ceremonies and sacraments for his parishioners in his parish church.

Canon Law also provides that every parish have its dowry, and makes it the pastor's obligation to work for this purpose. If it is the custom of a country which is still building up its ecclesiastical organization to have its church subsist on collections of the faithful, this is by no means rejected by the provision that all parishes should be endowed. As a matter of fact, such an ideal state will be finally achieved, when the generous support of the parishioners will have wiped out all debts and the parishes will be able to build up a dowry.

The parishes which are too large for one pastor are supplied by the bishop with assistants to carry out the functions of the shepherd. What applies to the pastor does to a different degree

also apply to the other priests who help him to administer the sacraments, to teach, and to be the father of the afflicted and the shepherd of souls. This activity trains them to be pastors themselves one day. The bishop moves them, however, more or less frequently in order that they may gather varied experience.

The Pastor's Priesthood

You have noticed that your priest's way of life differs from your own: he lives in a rectory near the church; he wears a distinctive garb, vestments and a cassock; he is unmarried; he reads his breviary every day. Thus he is "taken from among men," as St. Paul says; he is segregated for the sacred service of the divine mysteries, his greatest task.

His Roman collar has something of the timelessness of eternal priesthood, as it is not affected by the whims of changing fashions. His long cassock secludes him and raises him above the differences of sex and age. His vestments submerge the peculiarities of his human personality in the glory and beauty of the eternal and royal Priest whom he represents. So he also lives in a house entirely given to the service of his office with very little privacy and only frugal comfort, required nowadays by the nervous speed of life in large and noisy cities. He belongs to the people even more than a public servant, yet more to God. Therefore he is unmarried and not attached to a family. His bride is the Church. His children are the faithful (read the Preface from the blessing of the baptismal font on Holy Saturday, in your Missal).

The Pastor and His Breviary

He joins the whole Church daily in her praise of God in psalms and hymns, in lessons and prayers, while he reads his Office as a mouthpiece of his parish which praises God through him. His Office is contained in the prayer book of the Church which we call nowadays a breviary. It contains one night-

service (Matins) and seven day-services divided over the day from sunrise (Lauds) to sundown (Vespers), from the dedication of the daily task (Prime) to the priestly night prayer (Compline) and the short hour services at 9:00 a. m. (Terce), noon (Sext) and in mid-afternoon (None). Thus your pastor's day is constantly re-consecrated to God, and so is your own day through him as he stands before the face of the Almighty with Christ, praising, at least mentally, for you. You probably have noticed that he "recited" this prayer orally, with moving lips—a last reminder that it was once sung by all the faithful together with their shepherd gathered in the sanctuary. If we see our pastor in this way, we shall learn again to see him with the eyes of faith, while around us the "denominations" often tie up their religion with personalities and the advertisement of human individuals, and thus manifest that they have become dependent on men and their mere natural talents. The priest is, supernaturally speaking, nothing as a man; Christ is all, and Him he represents in his detached life as a sacrificer, a teacher, a father and a representative of his flock in prayer.

Discussion Questions

What are the pastor's duties: concerning faith and morals? concerning the needy and the helpless? concerning non-Catholics? Name some of the pastor's rights. Why are there more than one priest in many parishes? Why are they frequently transferred? What are some details of a priest's life that set him apart from the world? How do these things help him to belong even more to his people than he could otherwise? What is the breviary? For what special reason is the priest obliged to say his Office every day? Even though for the most part the priest says his Office privately, what detail in the manner of saying it shows that it is the public prayer of the Church?

III

The Shepherd's Auxiliaries

Man's inventive genius has all through history developed tools. God gave him hands, and gradually these hands grew into simple things like spades, chisels, millstones and plows. His feet were aided by animals and wheels. But now we have such complex and precise "prolongations" of our hands and feet as planes, cars, printing presses, textile mills and a thousand other things which we hardly recognize as aids of the instruments God gave us through nature—our own limbs. Technical progress has sometimes outrun mental, moral and spiritual advancement. But on the whole it is a sign of a greater understanding of man's task to submit matter to spirit, to participate in God's creative power, and to dominate nature: "And God blessed them and God said unto them: Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Man is created in God's image and likeness.

What is true in the sphere of mere nature is also a law of development in supernatural organisms, like the Church. St. Peter had no great administrative apparatus, like Pius XII with his Cardinals, Sacred Congregations and Apostolic Delegates. But growth requires diversification, development. Just compare the government offices George Washington had to assist him, with the Capitol of 1943. The more intensified and extended an organism becomes, the more tools and auxiliaries are developed.

Catholic Action

So does our modern parish. At first sight, all these organizations seem like arbitrary and incoherent things. However, the great Pius XI, our present Pope's predecessor, gave us something to understand our parish auxiliaries in a new light

when he set up the program of "Catholic Action." It gives us a yardstick to see which organizations are real auxiliaries in the hands of our pastors and thus really participate in his sacred ministry, and which are more on the outer fringe of parochial life.

Pius XI told us that "Catholic Action" was the participation of laymen and women, young and old, in the Apostolate of the bishops and, in parishes, of the pastors and under their direction. He insisted, as has been pointed out, on the four natural estates or columns of the parish in which "Catholic Action" was to be organized: men, women, young men and young women. He insisted on their thorough personal training and personal holiness. He insisted on an aggressive spirit and apostolic initiative which goes out to win the world for Christ. He insisted on discipline and obedience. Have you any organization in your parish which lines up these columns of the army of Christ, or is at least imbued with such a spirit? Then you have "Catholic Action" in the bud, and you can figure out for yourselves which organization is just a left-over of tradition, and which one is a real auxiliary and shock-troop of your pastor. The value of your organization for the spreading and deepening of the true spirit of Christ is the yardstick with which you can measure the importance of it. Some people nowadays seem to think that it is "Catholic Action" when they send their children to church and school, contribute to collections, sponsor the bazaar, belong to some fraternal organization and march in the Holy Name or sodality parade. That is certainly only a pale shadow of what Pius XI had and your pastor still has in mind!

Even study and discussion groups are not "Catholic Action"; they may (or may not) lead to it. Nor is monthly Communion; it has in most places not yet led to Catholic parish Action as defined by its originator, Pius XI. Nor is the protest against a bad show or magazine stands "Catholic Action," as little as shooting on a rifle range is war. The pastor needs a well-trained, well-organized and well-disciplined army.

Solidarity or Exclusiveness

This is all very good. But there is one danger: the narrowing of our love and interest within the horizon of our parish in a fashion that would lead to antagonism against other parishes or organizations of diocesan, city-wide or church-wide character. We need solidarity against a narrow exclusiveness leading to hypocrisy, dishonesty and the "covering-up" method. This narrow mind loses its understanding for the greater tasks of our Church in our city, our state, our nation and the world. It has a false pride which destroys its helpfulness. It is a danger which besets families, schools, organizations and nations. On a nation-wide scale we call it nationalism. Here it is parochialism. Study, charity, obedience and constant contact with our neighbors are its remedies. In our times, when there is almost no realization of the importance of our own parish, this danger may be less than in those times when the parish was the true spiritual home of the average Christian. Let not the allegiance to one church and one pastor hamper our sense of solidarity with all churches and all Catholic Christians.

Discussion Questions

If someone said, "But the early Church did not have all these departments and organizations," what would you say? What is "Catholic Action"? What are the four columns of "Catholic Action"? Name some parish activities which do not come under the head of "Catholic Action." What is one danger of parochial organizations? What is the best remedy against this danger?

CHAPTER IV

OUR PARISH FLOCK

I



“Nos servi tui et plebs tua sancta”—
“We Thy servants and Thy holy people.”
These are words the pastor says during
Mass after Consecration. He is the servant
of God, and standing before the altar are
his holy people, the parishioners. St. Peter
calls them “a royal priesthood, a chosen
race, a holy nation, a purchased people.”
St. Paul speaks of his parishioners in the
city of Ephesus as the “new man, who has been created ac-
cording to God in justice and in holiness of truth.” “The old
things are gone . . . all has been made new” is the exclamation
of St. Paul when he looks at his parish in Corinth. St. John
in his Revelations hears the voice of Him Who sits on the
throne: “Behold, I have made all things new.”

How did this come about?

Children of God

It came through Baptism. Baptism is a re-birth, as our
Lord told Nicodemus on his nocturnal visit: “Unless a man
be born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into
the kingdom of God.” This is a mystery, as Jesus tells Nico-
demus, which only spiritual man understands with the mind of
faith. It is like a second birth and it is also a resurrection. St.
Peter writes: “Baptism now saves you also—through the resur-
rection of Jesus Christ, Who is at the right hand of God, swal-
lowing up death that we might be made heirs of eternal life”
(1 Peter iii. 21 f).

The great apostle St. Paul gives us a very definite explanation of Baptism in the sixth chapter of his long letter to the Romans:

“Do you not know that all we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” (St. Paul refers here to the ancient rite of Baptism by immersion). “For we were buried with Him by means of Baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ has risen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in the newness of life . . . we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Christ. . . . The death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives unto God” (Rom. vi. 3-11).

Effects of Baptism

From these quotations we can easily draw a few very important conclusions:

1. We share in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection through Baptism. This happens in the way of a “mystery,” a holy, symbolical action instituted by Christ through direct command (“Go ye and teach . . . and baptize”), and His own explanatory words (to Nicodemus), and His example (St. John’s Baptism of Jesus). This fundamental mystery, or sacrament, raises us from supernatural death to a new life, commonly now called sanctifying grace. How this happens is a supernatural mystery, like the Consecration of Mass.

2. Therefore our life is “new”; it is “unto God,” like Christ’s. His imitation is our program. We are now one with Him or, as St. Peter says: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people.” Not only does Baptism wash off our sins, bestow on us the white garment of innocence, but it does more: it gives us divine life in such a fashion that Christ compared us to grapes on the Vine (Christ), and St. Paul said we are members (cells) of a Body whose Head is Christ. The sap of the vine flows through the stem as well as through the grapes, and the life-blood of the body pulses alike in head and

members; sanctifying grace is the life-sap and life-blood of our soul and makes us one with Christ.

3. From this we draw, with eyes re-opened by faith, two conclusions:

- a. We are brethren, one family in our parish.
- b. We have a life program (unto God): to live like Christ.

Discussion Questions

What sacrament incorporates us into the parish family? How does Baptism relate us to Christ's death and resurrection? Describe how the divine life given to us by Baptism is the greatest bond of union in the parish.

II

The Adult New Man (Confirmation)

In Baptism we became children of God. All the seeds of supernatural life were sown in us and all its capabilities were given us. But with growth to adulthood come responsibility, obligation, leadership. Thus Baptism has to be developed and confirmed. We have to be sealed anew with the character of Christ, so that we may grow into His fullness as adult Christians. This second great mystery is the sacrament of Confirmation. It follows Baptism as Pentecost follows Easter, as summer follows spring. The fire of the Holy Spirit invisibly descends into the baptized Christian to do to him what He did to Peter and the other Apostles: to fill him with the seeds of enthusiasm, of apostolic fervor.

The warming, gentle and healing symbol is the anointing on our foreheads. We then walk upright with Christ's seal on our brows. This seal is Chrism, bestowed on us, not by our parish priests, but by the high priest, our bishop himself. What did he sing in his Cathedral on Holy Thursday, when he consecrated Chrism during Mass, surrounded by priests, deacons and

subdeacons? He called this Chrism an ointment to make *priests, kings, prophets* and *martyrs* out of us. The seal of Christ which was imprinted on our soul, never to be blotted out, and which gave us the "character" of Christ to act through our lifetime, is thus deepened as befits those who grow up in Christ.

Priests and Kings

We become "priests," ready to share in His mystical offering of Himself on the altar, yet also ready to live this offering through every minute of our everyday life—unto God. Our whole life, awake and asleep, working or resting, suffering or enjoying, if lived in this intention, is a sacrifice "that may rise up in the sight of Thy divine majesty, as a savor of sweetness for our salvation and for that of the whole world." Like clouds of incense rising from the altar, so our intentions of a "priestly" life rise from the offering of our daily lives.

We become "kings" in Confirmation, rulers over our own lower nature. That is another responsibility or obligation given in this adult sacrament. Man received dominion over the earth, but this dominion was injured by Adam's sin. For his full restoration in dominion a sacrament is necessary: "In creating human nature God marvelously ennobled it. Still more marvelously He has renewed it" (Offertory of the Mass).

Prophets and Martyrs

We become "prophets" through this sacrament; the spirit of the prophets is sown in us. Their task was to be witness to God in a surrounding world of corruption, to stand like a lone beacon in the darkness of sin and decay. Some of this fortitude is needed by every adult Christian. The Holy Spirit, pure and strong, imprints this steadfastness into our soul in the sacrament of Confirmation.

This great sacrament also makes us "martyrs." That is, if we ever have the strength to carry this "witnessing unto God" to the degree of suffering, physical or spiritual, in an unbloody

or bloody martyrdom, we can do so only in the strength of this sacrament. Christ predicted that the world would hate His true followers as it hated Him, would throw them out socially and deliver them up to the authorities. He gives them strength to suffer, out of His strength on the cross, in the anointing with Chrism which bestows His spirit on us.

Discussion Questions

What does Confirmation bring to the soul? How is it related to Baptism? How does it affect "Catholic Action" in the parish? When the bishop consecrates the Chrism of Confirmation on Holy Thursday, one of the prayers says that Chrism makes us "kings, priests, prophets and martyrs": repeat the paragraphs above which describe each of these.

III

Penance: Sacrament of Restoration

But all these glorious things are bound up with our weak human nature. They are not things of magic which work without our doing anything about it. That would be an insult to our dignity as free persons. Our freedom of decision is so precious in the eyes of God that He would rather have us take the risk of failure and damnation than to make us puppets moved about by invisible strings. He gives us capital—one, three or five talents—but it is we who have to double it or lose out.

The balance is very delicately set, and we are weak, being children of Adam and Eve. In His mercy Christ, knowing how tired we may get in this endless struggle, gave us a second means of restoring ourselves, if we do not live up to our Baptism and Confirmation, and if the New Man of grace is overcome by the old Adam. This is the sacrament of Penance. St.

Jerome called it the second plank after shipwreck, Baptism being the first saving plank. True, we should not suffer shipwreck at all, gifted as we are with a new divine life which is constantly being nourished from the altars. But we would not understand human nature as it is now, if we said that Penance ought to be unnecessary. The priest, seated as a judge in Christ's name in the confessional, raises his right hand and makes the sign of the cross over our bowed head: it is a judgment of mercy which allows the accused to be his own prosecutor and always ends in acquittal or, at least, probation. The fine—temporal punishment—is only another chance of converting it into merit and of increasing our standing as Christians.

Confession and the Parish

Baptism and Confirmation are the foundation of our life in Christ, the divine gift helping us to grow up to the stature of Christ. Penance is twofold: the *virtue*, which we always ought to have, shining forth in works of self-denial, and the *sacrament*, which is the extraordinary means of restoring us to the fold of Christ, or of wiping out minor transgressions. In order to indicate that this penance is bound up with our entire life in the parish, there was a law in past times to receive this sacrament from one's parish priests. But experience showed that human shame often recommended that a sinner go to a place where he was unknown, so as to speak more freely and honestly, or to have a guide of personal choice for his soul, because this is a matter of confidence. Besides the strictly sacramental parts, confession and absolution, there is also the element of advice and continued guidance. Therefore the Church had to take account of a more human element and relax its ideal rule.

The Two Focal Points of Our Parish Church

“God Who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts. . . . But we carry this treasure in *vessels of clay*, to show that the abundance of the power is God's and not ours” (2 Cor. iv. 6f.), says St. Paul of our status. Therefore

our parish church, whose center is the altar of sacrifice and banquet, has near its gate another focal point: the baptistery, and, adjoining it, the confessionals. In Rome, in Florence, Pisa and many another old Christian town, this was even more visible inasmuch as these baptisteries were large and ornate separate buildings, gorgeously adorned with precious stones and pictures. In them (in the so-called "consignatorium") Baptism and Confirmation were given in the "Great Night" of Resurrection. We still see its rich celebration in the prayers, lessons, hymns and benedictions of our Missal assigned to Holy Saturday. No Holy Saturday should go by without a renewal of our baptismal vows. That is why the Church prescribes Easter confession for sinners: all things are new on Easter, even our baptismal spirit.

We are accustomed to salute our Lord on the altar. Do we ever stop to think, to remember the two great sacraments that constitute us Christians, when we see the baptistery and the confessionals in our parish church? It should be easy, because what else are the holy water fountains, and the *Asperges* at Sunday High Mass, but a reminder of our birth out of "water and spirit," an appeal to cleanse ourselves through contrition when we enter the church? Every Mass starts with *Confiteor* and absolution. With clean hearts and hands we participate in Christ's sacrificial mystery on the altar.

Strength for Living

To become a Christian is a full life's laborious task, like gathering a fortune, developing a farm, building a professional reputation. We can never relax in these fields. Our profession of being a Christian, which embraces our secular vocation, is labor and sweat, watchfulness and social interaction with fellow Christians. Our workshop, our farm, our office for this job is the parish. From the two focal points of this parish, the altar and the baptistery (or the confessional), we are being "strengthened with power through His spirit unto the progress of the inner man" (Eph. iii. 16).

Discussion Questions

What sacrament restores the soul from sin committed after Baptism? Can you describe the parallel between what takes place in the confessional and what takes place in a legal trial? Though the sacrament of Penance is received in private, what relation does it have with the life of the parish? Name the pivots of the parish's life.

CHAPTER V

OUR PARISH FAMILIES

I



WHEN the Church prays she says: Let *us* pray; *we* pray thee. . . . We are not alone; we are members of Christ's Body with fellow members at our elbows. "If one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it, or if one member glories, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ, member for member" (1 Cor. xii. 26 f). We work our salvation in common with others, not as single, lone and disconnected beings. Christ's command to love our neighbor as ourselves suggests this. But our Lord is more specific in St. Matthew's Gospel, when He tells us that charity gives prayer irresistible power, nay, brings Him down among us: "If two of you shall agree on earth about anything at all for which they ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together for My sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 19 f).

This does not mean that we have to be physically in the same place when we pray privately for the same cause. Our being together in mind brings Christ into our midst. But there is no doubt that Christ wanted also worship in common for the celebration of His mysteries, when He had His apostles with Him at the Last Supper. Communion creates a deeper community.

The Great Mystery

The closest human community is matrimony, in which two lives become one. When St. Paul endeavors to illustrate the closeness of life between the Church and Christ, he compares this relation with marriage. The Church has followed St. Paul here closely, especially in the prayers connected with solemn

Baptism on Holy Saturday. Matrimony is the "great" mystery—through its relation to Christ and Church. Not only are there two gathered together and Christ in their midst, but He is present in a special way. It is a sacramental "together-ness." When bride and bridegroom become one for life before the altar and in connection with Mass, the inner grace which follows this outward sign of mutual surrender is the supernatural companionship and love that sanctify and perfect both partners.

Thenceforth they are united as one through the new sacramental life, as Christ and His Church are one. Their purpose is one: to wander the narrow path to heaven not only together, but helping each other, sanctifying one another, perfecting one another. This is aided by the natural love of affection which made them to find each other out of hundreds of acquaintances or passing and lasting friendships. The first intensity of human passion which they "suffered" like an elementary power in married life gradually develops into a deep and loyal community, which is constantly being nourished through the other sacraments at their parish altar and in the confessional.

Discussion Questions

Why does St. Paul call marriage a "great sacrament (or mystery)"? Prove from his need of family life that man is a social being. Does this mean that man's religion is intended by God to be social as well as personal? Is that why Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament? In the sacrament of Matrimony, what is the inward grace that follows the outward sign of the spouses' mutual consent? Can wedded love harmonize with the life of grace?

II

Wedded Love

The new natural life which arises out of this oneness, their child, is the strongest bond in which they realize and see this

oneness. Their love, so to speak, has become flesh and now they see before themselves the wonderful task of modeling Christ's spiritual features in a new life whose components are a product of their own characters and physical heritage. Only what defiles or breaks up the nature of this unity is sinful, while everything that expresses it, makes it more stable, elevates it to a more sublime meaning, is good. "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her. . . . Even thus ought husbands also to love their wives as their own bodies. . . . And let the wife respect her husband (Nuptial Mass, Epistle). . . . Let the yoke of love and of peace be upon the wife. True and chaste, let her wed in Christ and let her ever follow the pattern of holy women" (Rachel, Rebecca, Sara). "Let her fortify her weakness by strong discipline. Let her be grave in demeanor and honored for her modesty. Let her be well taught in heavenly lore. Let her be fruitful in offspring" (Nuptial Blessing after Pater Noster of Wedding Mass). This clearly shows that both men and women are responsible in their way for the spiritual success of their married life. It is the wife's task to protect the nobility of this sacrament by her ever watchful discipline, reverence and modesty. One glance at the texts of the missal and at our great mystical writers, from St. Augustine to the great St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, shows us that all the deep symbolism of a superior spiritual life is taken from the ideal of marriage: Christ the bridegroom, and the Church and the soul the Bride.

The Family—"A Little Church"

The family has been rightfully called a "little church," an *ecclesiola* (from the Greek *ecclesia*—church). It is a community of grace, of which, as Pope Pius XI said, the "father is the head and the mother the heart." The physical fatherhood of the husband is not all that is expected of him, nor is it only the material support, nor the discipline. He takes the place of Christ, therefore his duties include also that he guide and

teach. Our modern conditions have in most cases led to a sort of wage-slavery for the husband who comes home to be fed, to relax and to sleep. The culture and intellect comes with the more leisurely life of the woman— unless she, too, goes out and leaves the education to public institutions like schools, radio, libraries, theaters and clubs. In such a life man and woman, to stay with Pius XI's image, are hardly head and heart, but rather the nutrimental organs. Second things are thus made to be first. A deeper understanding of the sacramental role of parents in the parish shows that the natural agents for the spiritual formation and the intellectual and moral education are father and mother. The school is only an auxiliary to help the parents beyond the point of their own mutual abilities.

Discussion Questions

Why could St. Augustine call the Christian family "a little church"? Whom does the father represent in the family? What are his most important spiritual duties to his family? How has modern industrial life been allowed to interfere with these duties? Explain the truth of Pope Pius's saying that "the father is the head, and the mother is the heart" of the family? Does this belittle the status of the wife and mother? How does the school fit into the pattern of family life? Why is it not right for parents to leave all responsibility for their children's development to the school?

III

Family Rituals

The book of the Church which regulates the services and blessings in our parishes is called the Ritual. Parishes are made up of families. It is natural that every family has a certain ritual—customs which are observed by it. The way

in which birthdays, Christmas holidays and family events are celebrated is a sort of family tradition which we love to keep, just as a parish does. Many of our present-day family rites, however, come from outside, are purely social or often the result of a merely natural development, not inspired by faith, but rather by social ambition.

We light candles for formal dinner and we dress for it; but do we say our prayers with equal dignity, or is it just a routine mumble? Does the father say the blessing, or just a little child? A sentimentalized attitude toward children and the natural shyness of men to appear solemn often make them forget that they are missing a chance of true fatherhood, and a duty to impress their children that it is not "child stuff" but a man's privilege to pray and bless.

Family Communion

What about "family Communion," instead of making it a "private affair" of individual members of the family? Should not the mother prepare her children for Confession and Communion and lead them to the altar? The piety of the clergy and religious in the parish, the priests and sisters, will lift up the adults, but for immature minds it is "Dad and Mom" who set the example. Otherwise the idea will always persist, that frequent Communion and common prayer are not the way of people in the world, but only of school children and their professional educators.

Family Celebrations

Do we ever invite the godfathers and godmothers to see their spiritual charges, have dinner with them and show their solemn and pledged responsibility—at least on the anniversary of Baptism, at First Communion, Confirmation, graduation and wedding day? Thus the otherwise apparently dead formalities can become very live, fruitful relationships. If we do not "coordinate" these things into life, if the family does

not show the unity of natural and supernatural life, how can we expect our young to avoid that fatal bi-secting of life which is the ruin of modern, secularized religion: live like everybody else and have religion just as a gilt edge on your book of life! Yet our faith should be a leaven, penetrating the whole lump of life.

The Ritual requires also that our families reflect the holy seasons of the Church Year: Advent, Lent, Paschaltide and the Ember Days, not to speak of the celebration of the great feasts through a "grand meal" after the festal Mass, a picnic, a social, and games. Remember that Christ attended a wedding feast; and the Apostles presided at what were known as "charity-feasts" after the celebration of the Eucharist. Is there a crucifix, a picture of our Lady, blessed candles, a sick-call set in the home? Have your houses been blessed by your pastor? Do you ask the priests to bless your children, your sick, with all those strong, special blessings of the Ritual?

Family Prayer

When you pray in common with your family, it is not so much to tire your children's interest and to spoil their immediateness by long, formulated prayers, but to make them more articulate by helping them to speak to God and the Saints with their own words. It is not multiplication, not quantity, but quality that is desirable. "But in praying, do not multiply words, as the Gentiles do; for they think that by saying a great deal they will be heard. So do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matt. vi. 7, 8). Christ condemns the Pharisees "who devour the houses of the widows (by their abuse of hospitality), making pretense of long prayers" (Mark xii. 40).

Family Sharing of Sorrow and Joy

The spirit of a Catholic family is that of Christianity. There is always Good Friday linked with Resurrection, the Cross with joy, the sacrifice with victory. The parents who go

to church on Sunday to take part in the sacrifice of Christ and make it their own, will bring home the wisdom of the Cross: in their own lives they will teach their children that triumph and victory, gladness and contentment are unavailable to those who shirk the element of suffering and self-denial, the Cross.

Discussion Questions

Why ought the father to lead the family prayers? What is the special merit of going to Communion in family groups? Why should that be more pleasing to God than any other way? Discuss some of the old family religious customs for Advent; for Christmas; for Lent; for Easter; for October and May. Do such customs bring too much religion into the home? What religious objects ought to be in every Catholic home? What ought to be set on every sick-call table? What is objectionable about long-drawn-out family prayers? What is the spirit of a true Catholic family in its sorrows and joys?

CHAPTER VI

OUR PARISH: THE GATE OF HEAVEN

I



WHEN the patriarch Jacob awakened from his dream in which he had seen the ladder reaching up into heaven and had received God's promise of a Savior, he said: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not . . . how dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God and this is the Gate of Heaven" (Gen. xxviii. 16 f).

The Church uses this expression frequently for the sacred songs at the solemn consecration of a church. Many churches have this inscription over their gates or their sanctuaries: "Domus Dei et Porta Caeli"—"House of God and Gate of Heaven." It is the second of these terms which we are to consider in this chapter: our parish church a gate opening up on eternal life. This is true in a twofold sense. In the first place, the celebration of the mysteries of our Lord itself gives us a foretaste of heaven, especially such feasts as All Saints, Epiphany, Purification, Ascension and Assumption. As a matter of fact, every Mass summons us to leave earth at the time of the Preface and to join the heavenly choirs to sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy" with them. The sanctuary becomes the throne-hall of God which St. John saw so vividly in the Apocalypse. "Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim and who sing to the life-giving Trinity the thrice-holy hymn, now lay aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all things who comes escorted by unseen hosts of angels." These are the words of the Eastern Cherubic hymn opening the sacrificial part of the Mass.

Heaven on Earth

This becomes more obvious on the above named feasts, especially on All Saints. The words of the two Masses of this feast throw open those gates and give us a glimpse of heaven. On the vigil day which was originally celebrated during the night preceding the feast, with Mass at sunrise, we read: "Behold, I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the ancient, a Lamb, as it were slain. . . . Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God in Thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and hast made us to our God a kingdom and priests" (Epistle; compare the Introit, Gradual, Offertory, Secret, Communion verse). The epistle of the feast day Mass again gathers the congregation into this vision of heaven: "I saw a great multitude which no man can number . . . standing before the throne . . . and all the angels stood round about the throne." They fall on their faces and adore the Lamb and God. And then, in the Gospel, we hear the voice of the Lamb: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are they that mourn. . . ." What a realism of faith! It is the same Lamb that stood on the hill in Galilee, speaking the same eternal words. Once it was among the poor, downtrodden peasants, artisans, publicans and fishermen; now among the heavenly choirs and saints and the Church, our own parish church. "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not." If we celebrate with the priest and the congregation the feasts of the Church, our humble parish church assumes a new and sublime meaning. Traces of this spirit are in all Masses of our Missal, from the great feasts down to the requiems.

Discussion Questions

Our churches are called "Gates of Heaven"; how is this true? At what part of the Mass does the priest call out loud to the people to raise their hearts to heaven? Why then particularly? On what feast particularly is there

a strong emphasis on the closeness of heaven to earth in the Church? Repeat some of the texts the Church then uses.

II

The Gate of Glory

What is a reality in faith and a foretaste for our souls, becomes a physical reality when we die. Our parish church becomes a real gate of heaven, in this second aspect. Here the parish will sing over the lifeless body: "May the Angels lead thee into paradise," while our friends and relatives leave the church in the solemn funeral procession. It is our last attendance at Mass, while all our friends, the pastor above all, join in the Eucharistic sacrifice and in the peaceful prayers and lessons of the requiem, to render us their last action of friendship. From our church will also have come Christ in His last visit at our sickbed. He will be the only one to reach us and to stay with us in the agony of death.

Our Divine Physician

The pastor's book of sacraments and blessings, the Roman Ritual, has a large treasure of spiritual medicines. When we are sick we may consecrate our suffering by the sacrament of Penance. Never in life has this word more significance in itself than when we suffer. Because we cannot go to church, the Church comes to us. After the sacred banquet of the Mass, our pastor brings us a particle of the divine meal to let us participate in it. In modern cities it will be impossible to do this with solemnity. Yet we should not forget that the ideal laid down in the Ritual by the Church is a solemn sacramental procession by the pastor to the sick room, accompanied by ministers bearing lighted candles, the Ritual book, a bell and a canopy, singing psalms and hymns. When it may be done, the priest ought to wear not only surplice and stole, but even a

white cape. We can easily see that this would not be possible in modern cities or in busy parishes, but the memory of these fine customs will help us to realize the full importance of the Communion of the Sick. When Communion is brought to the dying, the priest uses a more solemn form when he gives the sacrament: "Brother (sister), receive your traveling fare,¹ the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ; may He shield you from the malignant foe and bring you to life everlasting."

The two concluding prayers (Domine Sancte and Deus qui) point out the healing force of the Holy Eucharist for body and soul and relate Communion to Christ's passion, Whose fruit we beg to become more and more felt in our own lives as redemption.

Further Sickroom Rites

Before we turn to the glorious mystery of Christian death, let us mention that the pastor's book contains still more prayers for the sickroom: the seven psalms of penance with the litany of All Saints and its prayers, and a specially arranged service of the sickroom (Rit. Rom. v. 4).

It opens, like all functions, with the greeting: Peace to this house and to all that dwell therein; the pastor comes in Christ's stead. There follows the renewal of the baptismal spirit (as before High Mass) in the sprinkling of holy water and five different psalms and gospels, all of them strong and beautiful, followed by a prayer. The gospels are carefully chosen: the healing of the servant of the Roman captain; the order to baptize the whole world; the healing of Peter's mother-in-law; the great miracle at the pool of Bethsaida; and finally the beginning of St. John's Gospel. The pastor lays his right hand on the sick and says: "They will lay hands upon the sick and they shall be well. May Jesus, the Son of Mary, salvation of the world, and Lord, through the merits and prayers of His Apostles Peter and Paul and of all saints, be to you clement and kind. Amen."

¹ This is what "viaticum" means.

Discussion Questions

What is the second way in which our parish church is a "Gate of Heaven"? When is the last time we attend Mass? In what way, when we are ill, does our parish church come to us? What is the Church's ideal way of carrying Communion to the sick? Why does she not use it now? What inspiration can we gain from remembering this ideal way? What is viaticum? What does the word mean? What special prayer does the priest say, administering viaticum? What other rites does the Church provide to bless and comfort the sick?

III

Extreme Unction

We modern men of the twentieth century are fast-living, superficial, nervous, and lacking a great deal of supernatural vision. The things of the spirit seem to be unreal to us, while the material things impress us. That is certainly one reason why our generation has so little understanding of a great sacrament, the sacrament which St. Thomas Aquinas called "unction for glory," ordinarily called "Extreme Unction." As it is a true sacrament, not a sacramental or a blessing, it towers high above the other rites in the hour of death, like the last blessing and its plenary indulgence. As a sacrament its effect is certain and powerful, because it applies Christ's salvation directly. It is applied through the anointing of eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands, feet and—originally, but no more—also the loins. At each anointing, the priest says: "Through this holy unction and His most tender mercy, may the Lord forgive thee whatever sin thou hast committed by the sense of sight (hearing, touch, or the power of motion," etc.) The priest has laid his hand on the patient, has pro-

nounced an exorcism over the sick person with a threefold sign of the cross, invoking Father, Son, Holy Spirit and all the saints, before the unctions are performed. Afterwards he quotes St. James' exhortation to the faithful about this sacrament and proceeds: "Cure the ailments of this Thy servant, heal his wounds, forgive his sins, relieve him of all miseries of body and mind, and graciously bless him with perfect health within and without. . . ."

Healing of Soul

Sacraments do not implore, as blessings and sacramentals do, but they effect, as they depend not on our will, as long as we are disposed, but on Christ's almighty and saving power. They effect, bring about what they signify through their words, their actions and their matter. One of the effects indicated for Extreme Unction is healing. In some cases this means bodily health, but certainly only in a few. It also means alleviating the sufferings of death, but certainly this too only at times, as our experience shows us.

None of these effects is reached in many cases, especially when it is administered when the patient is already in a coma, which is a regrettable practice, but humanly understandable in an age when even Christians are as afraid of death as the poor heathen next door. What then is the certain effect? Spiritual health, full restoration of spiritual integrity, healing of the wounds which life has inflicted. This great sacrament corresponds to Baptism and Confirmation. The first two are inscribed over the gate of our pilgrimage on earth. Extreme Unction is our Saviour's final mercy, as gratuitous and unmerited, as free a gift of grace, as our infant Baptism. The exorcisms preceding Baptism are once more repeated in the hour of death. The gentle and healing oil, an old and popular medicine here raised to sacramental dignity, is applied to those senses of our body which sinned. It effects a re-consecration of the "temple of the Holy Spirit" and a total cleansing of our soul. We were brought to church as infants on the arms of our

sponsor to be re-born in Baptism. Now Christ, our Shepherd, comes to us in the person of our pastor to restore us fully to our initial integrity as His member, to make us sound again. Life has made us veterans who may have failed our Lord all too often, who are covered with the scars of life's battles. To innocence is added maturity in the many anointings with signs of the Cross. The gate of Heaven is wide open to receive us. All through our life Christ has not regarded our sins, but has been good and generous to us. He called us before we could think and act. This mystery of mercy accompanies us out of life again, perhaps after a wasted life.

In a last act of faith we pronounce the saving name of Jesus and receive a plenary indulgence in the Apostolic blessing.

Discussion Questions

What is Extreme Unction? What special value does it have? Recite the prayer by which the priest administers it. What material is used in Extreme Unction? Why this material, and not another? In what two senses is Extreme Unction a sacrament of healing? Which is the more important? How does Extreme Unction perfect the work begun in Baptism? Describe how Extreme Unction may be called, in a special way, the "sacrament of the Good Shepherd." What name does the Church ask the sick person to invoke? Why?

IV

The Departure

From then on a confident peace prevails. The Ritual contains a magnificent rite of commending a departing soul. A candle is lighted, in many cases the same candle which the sponsors gave for baptism and which was given to the infant

with these words: "Receive this lighted lamp and keep your baptism without blame. Obey the commandments of God, so that when our Lord shall come to His wedding feast, you may enter with Him and all His saints into the heavenly hall and there live forever and ever."

The pastor and the family then recite a shortened and very ancient form of the litany of All Saints, and continue: "Go forth from this world, O Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Almighty. . . . O merciful God, O gracious God, O God . . . Who blottest out the sins . . . renew whatever has been corrupted. . . . Have pity on his tears . . . admit him to the mystery of Thy reconciliation." The whole heavenly court of angels, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins is called upon to meet the departing soul: "May the face of Jesus Christ appear to you mild and joyful. . . . May Satan tremble at your approach in the company of the angels." This is followed by a majestic, imploring hymn to God in the forceful language of the psalms and prophets.

In the last agony the prayers quicken their rhythm: examples of distress from the Old Testament are evoked. Christ's passion is displayed in several prayers to comfort the dying; Ps. 117 on God's mercy and goodness is recited; Christ's own dying words on the Cross are put into the mouth of the dying person and then the first prayer for the departed soul is said: "Come to his assistance, ye Saints of God, come forth to meet him, ye angels of the Lord, receive and offer his soul in the sight of the Most High."

Into Paradise

No wonder that after such a death there is no room for clamorous wailing and "unavailing grief." Psalms full of hope, lessons of consolation, prayers full of confidence and trust, the Eucharistic sacrifice, candle light and confident Gregorian melodies greet the venerable body of a dead Christian in his parish church during the final requiem. At Communion time he is for the first time greeted in the company of the saints: "Lux

aeterna luceat eis"—“Eternal light shine upon them, O Lord, with Thy saints forever, because Thou art merciful.”

When the body is lowered into the grave, to return from where its elements have been taken, the triumph of faith bursts forth in a twofold way; the pastor intones the words: “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believes in Me, although he be dead, shall live, and everyone that lives and believes in Me, shall not die forever.” The choir then takes up the morning hymn of the Church which was first sung by Zachary at the cradle of St. John the Baptist, Christ’s forerunner, a song which now greets every young day at sunrise in our abbey churches as the monks and nuns sing Lauds: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: because He hath visited and wrought the redemption of His people . . . to direct our feet in the way of peace.” While the consecrated ground of the parish cemetery (*cemetery* is a Greek word derived from “Koimeterion”; *i. e.*, the sleeping place, the dormitory) receives the remains of a parishioner, the survivors sing a song of resurrection and victory. The death of one member serves to fortify the faith of the whole parish.

Discussion Questions

Describe the Church’s rites during the departure of the soul. Why is it appropriate that the same candle be lighted which was used at Baptism? Why should there be no room for wailing grief in a true Christian at the dying of a loved one? Does this mean that all mourning is un-Christian? What saying of Christ confirms the answer to this last question? What last farewell does the parish church give to its dead member? What song of hope is said or sung at the grave? What does the word “cemetery” mean? How does this name express the Christian view of death?

CHAPTER VII

OUR PARISH IN ACTION

I



As in natural life, things grow out of one another, hang together, sprout and blossom. Our Lord Himself always described our spiritual life as such a natural process of growing and gradual unfolding. We should remember here the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. One shows a process of growth; the other, a chemical yet organic process. Both are simple and coherent. Another comparison He used was that of the branches and the vine. He is the Vine on which we grow like branches. Or St. Paul's vision of the Church—and of course, the parish—as a body, the head being Christ, the members (or cells) being we, the baptized faithful.

Parish Brotherhood

The parish is such an *organic* thing, growing, healing itself, with a soul (the Holy Spirit), with continuity. We have to learn anew to grow into this world. For many a parishioner in our age this organic vision has been lost; for him it is only a sort of "spiritual filling and service station" attended to by priests. "You can try this or that one, what's the difference," is their attitude. They are homeless, un-"organized" consumers. They are starved in their hard shells of individualism, and the parish has become as brittle as an engine to their minds. This attitude is a fundamental violation of the true spirit of "Holy Communion," brotherhood in Christ. It is one of the reasons why our modern society is a chaos, a jungle of interests that prey on one another, and why nations are packs of wolves gang-ing up on one another to grab and exploit.

Before Christians have re-learned and re-lived the idea of "brotherhood" in their parishes, around their altars, there is

no hope that they will ever grasp the idea of solidarity in the spheres of national and international lives. Nothing can grow without coming either from roots or out of seeds. A new humanity is built on a "new man." This "new man" grows in our parish churches, planted in the baptistery, pruned in the confessional, and nourished from the altar.

Strong Spiritual Life

The organic and coherent character of this piety is the best remedy for the excited, fitful and nervous way in which so many practicing Catholics try to be religious. It brings the quiet and strong rhythm of the Church year, as lived in the parish, into their lives. It raises them out of that kind of religion which centers around their own ego, their own worries, true and imaginary; it widens their souls and airs them out. Not their momentary moods, not fads and fashions, not a dozen disconnected practices of this and that—but the strong and sane piety of the Church as we have it in our approved books, like the Missal, will lead them on. When singing the Mass with their fellow-parishioners and their pastor, when listening to the Apostles and Christ, when walking in procession to the altar with a poor or a rich man, a child or an old woman, or orderly in groups of families, their cramped individualism and selfishness will be relaxed and "the multitude of the believers" will be of one heart and one soul . . . "nor was there anyone among them in want" (Acts iv. 32, 34).

Discussion Questions

What does it mean that our parish is an organism? Name some parables of our Lord that show this. Show how Christ's words: "I am the Vine, you are the branches," are fulfilled in the parish. How can living parishes be the hope for a peaceful world? How can genuine parish living cure the selfishness and intense egotism of modern life?

II

Essential Things

Scholastic philosophy distinguishes between the "essence" of a thing and its "accidents." It is essential to man to have a body and an immortal soul, to be a "rational animal." It is accidental if he is colored or white, man or woman, primitive or civilized. In a true vision of our parish as an organism of sacraments, as an immediate presence of Christ, as the Savior, here and now, among us, we shall learn too which are the essential things in our lives, and which are the accidental things. Our spiritual lives become more "essential," more Christian, the closer they are conformed to Christ in His mysteries or sacraments. When we make these first things first again, assigning places of less importance to less important things, when our parish is re-awakened in our souls, a profounder Christian spirit will result in ourselves. "Christians are not different from other men by country or language or social institutions. . . . In simple words: what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world" (Ep. Diog. 5.1; 6.1). The world will recognize them as Christ living on earth, and treat them like Christ, if our parishes become again a sacramental unit of men and if we make less of conventional and accidental things. The right vision precedes right actions; we have to know a thing first before we warm up to it.

Sacramentals

At the hour of "prime," which is a prayer the priests recite in their breviary as an opening of their daily labors, thus consecrating their work to God, they also read or may read the calendar of the Church of this specific day. It is called the book of martyrs, the martyrology. On Christmas Eve this lesson gives the chronology of Christ's birth and mentions the purpose of His coming in the flesh: "Through His most merciful presence He wants to consecrate the world."

He consecrated humanity through His incarnation, by be-

coming a member of the human race. He consecrated the elements (water, *e. g.*, using it for Baptism; bread, wine and oil in other sacraments). The Church in its blessings carries this consecration to God into all possible walks of life. These sacramentals are extensions of the sacraments into the life of Christians. They are a visible overflow from Christ's incarnation through sacraments into our daily lives.

For the individual Christian as well as for our parish, they are a challenge. They challenge us to extend ourselves to our neighbors and to creation in our immediate neighborhood with that charity which is the greatest consecrating power. It brought Christ down on earth; it made Him do His Father's will unto death; it made Him abide with us in the Church: "As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love . . . this is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John xv. 9, 12).

"By this, will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John xiii. 35)—this is what the world looks for, as the sign of the true faith. This is the fruit of "consecration" in us and our parish to win the outsider.

Our parish, like every individual parishioner in his sphere of life, is what Jesus called a "city on the mountain" and "a candle on a candlestick" visible from afar and shining in the darkness, like our Master.

Discussion Questions

How do our spiritual lives become "essential"? Name some spiritual practices that are "unessential." Granted that these practices are not wrong, what is to be said about them? What is the purpose of the many blessings which the Church uses? From your own experience, how many of these blessings can you remember? What did our Lord mean, calling His Christians "a city seated on a hill," "a candle on a candlestick"?

III

Charity

Only if our consecration to God becomes visible to the world in charity, will the world believe. The responsibility to convert the world is on all Christians, since they are confirmed. Not all of them can teach and preach as priests and religious. But all can preach a greater sermon by their deeds. Is there charity and community at the altar, finding its visible expression in our way of participation in Mass through praying and singing together? Do we have such modern activities as systematic and thorough care for the poor and the sick in our neighborhood, and are these services better than those run by public authorities and sectarian organizations?—better, not bigger or wealthier, but more full of charity, personal respect and individual care?

Is this charity really the hallmark of our sacramental Christianity in our provisions to raise our weaker members, not only by alms, but by establishing them in better responsibility in such activities as credit unions, maternity guilds and consumer-co-operatives? Is our charity enough to bridge the chasm between employer and employee, not only through the fact that they are physically in the same pew and at the same altar rail, but that they meet and understand each other, cooperate with one another to bring social peace from their common parish altar? In their labor unions or their employer organizations, their chambers of commerce, their professional associations, are our parishioners the element of peace, integrity, liberty and honesty? Do our fellow-citizens call on our parish to assure a clean city government, decent morals and volunteers for welfare work, because they know that our parish is the focus of divine and heroic charity? Our city is looking at us with expectation, not for solemn resolutions and pressure votes, but for live Christianity. Without it our sacraments seem to them like empty rites of superstitious or quaint theatrical people.

"Man, Become Essential"

The seventeenth century poet, Angelus Silesius, coined the phrase "Man, become essential." It means, live up to the eternal truths; cast aside the little, unessential things, the embroideries of life. An "essential" parishioner is the one who puts the sacramental, communal life of the parish first, and his personal likes and devotional tastes second.

The "essential" parishioner is objective. This means that the truths and facts given by God, the things faith holds up to us to accept, are his yardstick for thought and action; not his own interpretation, or his subjective, self-loving thinking.

The "essential" parishioner lives in the center, not on the circumference of the Church. The center is Christ, present in the Church through the sacraments, through the charity of its members and through our faith. When we begin to see our parish, its altar and its pastor, once again as the sources of our religious life, we begin to become central, essential.

Discussion Questions

How do parishioners show themselves as "one" in the Mass? Name some ways in which this "oneness" radiates into outside action. How do credit-unions fulfill Christian charity? Maternity guilds? Should such things as these have place in every healthy parish? What community unit should be the strongest factor for civic virtue? Why?



