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THE LITURGICAL PRESS
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SERIES I

No. 3

“MY SACRIFICE
AND YOURS”

VIRGIL MICHEL, O.S.B.

St. John's Abbey

Second Edition

1927

THE LITURGICAL PRESS
COLLEGEVILLE, MINNESOTA

IMPRIMI POTEST

✠ALCUIN DEUTSCH, O.S.B.

Abbot

NIHIL OBSTAT

ALEXIUS HOFFMANN, O.S.B.

Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR

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Bishop of St. Cloud

Jan. 6, 1927.

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Collegeville, Minn.

FOREWORD

The present pamphlet has been put together from material gathered for a series of sermons on the Mass delivered in St. Benedict's Church, New York City, during the summer months of 1926. The response to these sermons led the writer to believe that the present pamphlet might form a welcome addition to the *Popular Liturgical Library*. Anyone seeking a more detailed explanation of the subject as here treated, can profitably refer to two books that have recently appeared in this country: Kramp-Miller, *The Sacrifice of the New Law* (Herder Co.), and Kramp-Busch, *Eucharistia* (Lohmann Co.).

Recent European books that treat of the Mass from the standpoint of popular participation are: Stephan, "*Tuet dies*" oder "*Macht was ihr wollt?*" (Marklissa, Schlesien); Caronti, *Il Sacrificio Cristiano* (Berruti, Sismondie Co., Torino); Vandeur, *La Sainte Messe* (Maredsous, Belgium). A brief but admirable treatment is the chapter on the sacrifice contained in the compendious volume by the monks of Maria-Laach: *Die Betende Kirche* (Sankt Augustinus Verlag, Berlin).

The author wishes to express his special indebtedness to the Reverend Richard E. Power of Springfield, Mass., for his kindness in reading the manuscript, and for his many valuable suggestions. There is hardly a page that has not benefited from the latter. Moreover, the excellent English version of the text of the Mass quoted in these pages, the result of careful study, is exclusively the work of Father Power.¹ The design on the cover is the gift of the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, Mo.

V. M.

Octave of the Epiphany, 1927

¹Father Power's complete translation of the ordinary of the Mass of the Faithful is to be found in the latest edition of Dom Cuthbert Goeb's *Offeramus* (Popular Liturgical Library, Series II, No. 1. See inside page of fly-leaf of present book). *Offeramus* is recommended as a good introductory book for praying the Mass. It contains all the ordinary prayers of the Mass in Latin and English, with many simple explanations and practical directions.

CONTENTS

Chapter	I.	Participation in the Mass	5
Chapter	II.	The Mass and the Cross	11
Chapter	III.	The Action of Sacrifice	17
Chapter	IV.	The Offertory of the Mass	24
Chapter	V.	The Canon: Before the Consecration	34
Chapter	VI.	The Canon: After the Consecration	41
Chapter	VII.	The Eucharistic Repast	47
Chapter	VIII.	After the Communion	54
Chapter	IX.	The Mass of the Catechumens....	58

CHAPTER I

PARTICIPATION IN THE MASS

There is no doubt that some persons attend Mass on Sundays only because the command of the Church binds them to it under pain of mortal sin. It is not too much to claim that for many of these the whole meaning of the Mass is simply this: Mass is something that must be attended to once a week. Others may connect the obligation of attending Mass with the wider one of keeping holy the Sunday. Mass is then for them a special act of religion, of prayer and devotion, or an occasion for reciting special prayers, addressing special petitions, to God.

Many Catholics really do use the Mass as an occasion for reciting private prayers, carrying on some private devotion of their own, as a casual observation on any Sunday in almost any Catholic church will show. The mention of this fact is in no way meant to discredit the piety of these people, or to question their good faith. On the contrary, only firm conviction and a deep sense of duty can produce the crowds that swarm to our churches every Sunday. It is with a mind bent on paying the homage of adoration to God, bent on asking for needed graces and favors, especially such as are spiritual in nature, on giving due thanks and praise to the Lord their God, that those who flock to the Sunday Masses recite one, two, or three rosaries while attending Mass, read litanies and other prayers from their books, recite the Angelus and the morning prayers, or even follow the devo-

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

tional prayers set down in their books for recitation during Mass. In the latter case, however, as often as not, the prayers are not read parallel with the prayers and actions of the priest at Mass. The devotions read may be too short in parts, or too long, so that the well-meaning soul may during the Mass of the priest even recite two whole sets of Mass prayers, or again only part of one.

Should these constitute the best and most approved methods of attending holy Mass? Can Mass be properly attended, or best attended, in mental separation, even isolation, from the progress of the priest's actions and prayers at the altar? Our answer is at present conditional. *If* the priest is simply going through a prescribed form of prayer, the general benefits of which are to be passively received by, externally bestowed upon, the faithful that are present and in good disposition, then any sort of devotional attitude at holy Mass may be reckoned not only proper, but as good as the best. *If*, however, the priest is in any way acting as the spokesman, the leader, of the people, if the action of the Mass also implies co-operation, in any form, by the people, then there can be only one best way of attending Mass, namely a way that will really be an assisting at the action of the Mass.

Imagine a group of men who have decided to interview the governor of their state in a body, in order to present their congratulations and good wishes on the occasion of some work recently brought to a successful issue, or to seek his services in furthering a certain proposal. The members of the group choose a spokesman, who is to talk and act for them. They

go to the governor's office and are admitted to a waiting room. When the governor enters, the spokesman announces the purpose of the interview and in well-chosen words expresses the sentiments and good wishes of the group, or presents their request. The speaker, no doubt, emphasizes the fact that his sentiments are shared by the entire group. What then would anyone think, if he saw one of the group sitting in a chair asleep, another reading a paper, another figuring out accounts and making entries in a note-book, and still another examining a painting on the wall? What would the governor think if he saw these things? The picture, in fact, seems too ludicrous to be thought possible.

But that is precisely what many persons attending Mass are doing; that is, *if* the priest in celebrating the Mass is in any way supposed to speak and act in the name of those present. If he is really the leader in a collective act that should be performed also by the people, then such persons are, as it were, privately reading a newspaper or figuring their accounts while the appointed spokesman is acting for them. Were it not for their good intentions, their actions might even be a mockery of the holy action being enacted in their presence. In order, now, to convince ourselves that the Mass is meant to be such a collective action, we need only examine the official text that the priest himself must follow in celebrating the Mass.

At various times the priest enters upon prayers of the Mass with the exhortation: "*Oremus*—Let us pray!" This exhortation is addressed to the people, who are thereby invited to join heart and mind in the prayer which the priest recites. No wonder, then,

that the priest recites this prayer in the plural. He uses the pronouns *we* and *us* and *our*, and is speaking not only for himself but also for the people assembled at the Mass. At the end of certain of these prayers, the server answers "Amen." This is a Hebrew word meaning "So be it;" and it is intended to express the approval of the people, their full accord with the sentiments uttered for them by the priest. The server is answering the *Amen* in the name of the people, who in former times themselves gave this answer aloud in a body. Before some of the prayers the priest turns to the people, spreads his hands to include the assembled congregation, and says "*Dominus vobiscum*—The Lord be with you." The server answers, again in the name of the people: "*Et cum spiritu tuo*—And with thy spirit." This is but one of the forms, the one occurring most frequently in the Mass, of several prayers that are recited alternately by priest and server. Always does the latter answer in the name of the people, and in all of these cases the answering prayers were formerly recited by the whole assembled community.

Twice in the course of the Mass the priest mentions the *circumstantes*, those present at the Mass, always indicating that the action of the Mass is also participated in by them, that the action is also theirs. There are many passages in the text of the Mass indicating the collective nature of the sacrifice. One more example will suffice here. When the first offering of the bread and wine has been made, and the more solemn action of the Mass is about to begin, the priest again turns to the people with the words: "*Orate Fratres*—Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice

and yours may become acceptable to God the Father almighty." To this the server answers in the name of the people: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at thy hands, unto the praise and glory of His name, for our advantage, and that of all His holy Church." Here we have the distinct declaration by the priest that the sacrifice is his and the people's; and the officially prescribed declaration of the people acquiescing in his words.

The text of the Mass, therefore, calls for the active co-operation of the people in the action of the Mass. The priest is not only acting for them, but to a great extent also acting with them, although in practice today the public co-operation with the priest is generally left entirely to the server, whose answers to the priest are often purely mechanical. Although the people today generally know nothing of this active mental and verbal co-operation with the priest, and the Church has tolerated attendance at Mass by means of reciting private prayers of any kind, such a way of hearing Mass cannot be considered in full accord with the intention of the Church as this reveals itself in the very text of the prayers. Moreover, history tells us that this is not at all the way in which the Christians in the fervor of the early days of the Church, and in the great days of Christian faith, assisted at Mass. And so it can hardly be the real intention of the Church at present, that such should be the way to assist at Mass. In fact, the Vicars of Christ have spoken on the matter. "You should not pray during the Mass, but pray the Mass," said the saintly Pius X. And he instituted a movement towards a return to the active participation of the

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

people in the Mass, which has received the approval of all his successors in the chair of Peter.

Since this is the case, should not every devoted Catholic try to the utmost of his power to participate actively in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, to follow the priest in mind and heart, to pray with him and act with him? Should not every Catholic for this reason try to the utmost of his power to understand what the Mass really is, how its action is built up, and especially just what the action means for each individual present at the Mass? It will be the purpose of the following pages to aid those who will towards a better understanding of the internal structure of the Mass, of the spiritual action taking place therein, and thus to indicate to them how they may best enter into the spirit of this most holy action, and derive the greatest fruits therefrom.



CHAPTER II

THE MASS AND THE CROSS

We cannot understand the holy sacrifice of the Mass without understanding something of the true meaning of the great sacrifice which was enacted on Calvary, and which was consummated by the death of our Lord. Christ had come upon this earth to bring a sacrifice that would again restore man to a position of favor with God. The friendship between God and man had been broken by man's wilful disobedience. It was an outrage against the infinite majesty of God, and therefore an offense of infinite wickedness. Man could of himself do nothing to atone for it. Christ, the Second Person of the divine Trinity, came upon earth out of love for man and in obedience to the will of His Father, whose command likewise issued from His great fatherly love for man.¹ From all eternity it had been decreed that the Son, true God like His Father, should undergo the sacrifice of His life, after taking upon Himself weak human nature." "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (John 3, 16).

¹In speaking of the things of God, human words are almost hopelessly inadequate. Christ Himself speaks of doing the will of His Father. This does not mean that Christ as God is inferior to the Father, much less that He is not together with the Father and the Holy Ghost one God, one divine Substance. The work of the redemption is the work of God, decreed, as we say, from all eternity; and the love prompting it is the love of God; therefore of all the three divine Persons as co-equally the triune God.

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

That the sacrifice of the Son might be the more evidently made in our stead, Christ took upon Himself a nature like ours and thus entered the ranks of the descendants of Adam. By the union of the divine nature and the human nature in Him, Christ, as the natural Head of the race, concentrated in His own person all the weakness and the guilt of mankind, and took upon Himself all the wrath that was man's due because of sin. Thus laden, Christ went willingly to His bitter suffering and death. At different times before His passion, the Jews tried to stone Him, to lay hands upon Him that they might kill Him. But Christ's time had not yet come and they could do nothing. When, however, His time had come, He delivered Himself to His persecutors, but not before instituting the perpetual sacrament of His Body and Blood. Having gone through the passion unto the bitter end, He died on the cross, surrendering His life into the hands of the Father as the one acceptable offering which could again restore man to the divine pleasure. In this great sacrifice, Christ as God-man was both the offering priest, and the victim offered. Only a divine Victim could span the infinite abyss separating man from God, and only a divine Priest could of His own power offer such a victim.

This sacrifice of redemption was enacted during our Lord's sojourn on earth; it was a personal sacrifice of atonement on His part, consummated before His ascension into heaven. And the possibility of eternal bliss for us was thereby completely realized. Man was again the adopted child of God, and could with the fullest assurance look upon his heavenly home as his rightful inheritance, bought for him by

his brother through the Incarnation, Christ Jesus. But man, after this great event, remained as before a creature endowed with intelligence and deliberate choice. He had been created to give to his God a voluntary service and worship according with the dignity of human nature. Each individual had still to prove himself personally and show himself worthy of the redeeming action of Christ. As he could still use his free will to sin, so he had, in accordance with his position as a rational creature of God, to use his free will in order to render due service to God by acknowledging God's absolute dominion over him. Only the free actions of man being worthy of rational human nature, each man was still to choose for himself the lot that he was to have in the world to come; he was still to make his own choice in accepting or rejecting the fruits of the redemption merited by Christ. Christ by His sacrifice had made salvation possible for all men. But the fruits of this redemption were still to be applied to all men one by one.

Now not all men were capable of being present at the sacrifice of Calvary, and of there choosing to accept or reject the blessings of Christ's sacrifice. This sacrifice was enacted within the space of a few days; while the human race was to continue throughout all time. There were to be generations and generations of men who were to choose for themselves whether or not they were to be included in the sacrifice of Christ, and become acceptable to God by offering themselves with Christ to the heavenly Father.

Through Baptism, individual souls are given a personal right to the merits of Christ. The official

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

means, however, by which the coming generations were to unite themselves fully to the great sacrifice of Christ, is the holy sacrifice of the Mass. For this purpose was the Mass instituted, and for this was it to be offered up in all places for all ages to come. The Eucharist was instituted by Christ at the beginning of the passion which led to His death. It was, as it were, the last will of the dying Savior, His official testament, by which He delivered to His Apostles and their successors all His divine treasures. The institution of this sacrifice was prompted by the same love that inspired His descent to earth, and His death. "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you" (Luke 22, 15), he told the Apostles just before the institution. It was then that He consecrated the bread into His body, and the wine into His blood, which was to be shed for the sins of many. And it was then that He gave the Apostles the command: "Do this for a commemoration of me." The Mass is thus the continuation both of the Eucharistic Supper and the Sacrifice of the Cross, a renewal in an unbloody manner, of what was done on Calvary in a bloody manner.

In the Mass, after the offering of the bread and the wine, the official prayer reads: "Accept, most holy Trinity, this offering which we are making to Thee in remembrance of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord . . . ;" and immediately after the Consecration: "Wherefore, we Thy servants, and likewise Thy holy people, calling to mind not only the blessed passion of the same Christ, Thy Son, but also His resurrection from the

dead, and finally His glorious ascension into heaven.”

The Mass is not a commemoration only of the passion and death of Christ. It is a commemoration also of the resurrection and the ascension, which events have made impossible a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ in a bloody manner. Christ sacrificed Himself once for all in a bloody manner, was accepted by God the Father, and taken into the everlasting state of glorified humanity. He can not suffer in a bloody manner a second time. But the Mass is nevertheless a real sacrifice, and the same sacrifice as Calvary. For the Mass is the sacrifice of the same victim, Jesus Christ, and the priest offering the sacrifice is the same, namely Jesus Christ. The ordained priest acts only by the divine power of Jesus Christ, transmitted to him in the sacrament of Holy Orders, by a successor of the Apostles. And in the solemn moment of the consecration, the words are distinctly those of Christ, and are through the priest pronounced by Christ Himself, with all the divine efficacy of the word of Christ, true God and true man. The Mass and the Cross of Calvary, therefore, are in a real and true sense the sacrifice of Christ by Himself; and the Mass is a true continuation of the sacrifice of the cross.

But why this continuation of the sacrifice of the cross? The need is not on the part of God, but on the part of man. As we have seen, all men have to choose for themselves whether they shall actively associate themselves with the sacrificing humanity of Christ, by actively entering into his sacrificial act. It is precisely in the Mass that each of us has the opportunity of coming in contact with Christ Himself

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

and with Christ performing His sacrifice, therefore the opportunity of performing the one acceptable sacrifice for the good of man together with Him. In the Mass Christ continues to offer Himself for each of us in a particular manner, in so far as He there reaches out to us a hand that we can grasp. The Mass has been instituted particularly to enable us all to enter actively into the sacrifice of Christ. It is our ever recurring opportunity of uniting ourselves with Christ in His official act of rendering an acceptable offering to His Father, and of uniting ourselves with Christ by becoming ourselves an acceptable offering to God. In the Mass we have a special opportunity of applying to ourselves the fruits of the redemption that was wrought once for all on Calvary. We see, then, that the Mass is the most precious treasure that can be thought of, because in it the Author of all good is placed within our reach, in order that we may with His aid enact a sacrifice which truly honors God and sanctifies ourselves. This conception of the Mass springs out of the purpose of the Mass, out of the very notion of sacrifice as contained in the Mass.

From this standpoint it should be evident, how necessary a proper understanding of the Mass is for all of us,—an understanding, not only of the general significance of the Mass, but of the very action of the Mass into which we must enter with conscious intention if we are to obtain the fruits of the Mass in their fulness. For such an understanding of the Mass, a notion of the nature of sacrifice in general is indispensable.

CHAPTER III

THE ACTION OF SACRIFICE

If the Mass is properly called a sacrifice, we should be able to find in it the different characteristics that mark off a sacrificial action from any other kind of action. In general, sacrifice is as widespread as religion. Very few real religions can be found that have no sacrifice whatever. Especially have all the great religions of historic civilizations had a sacrifice of some kind as the central act of their religious worship. Hence it was that the early Christians were so often tried by their enemies just on the matter of sacrifice. Had the Christians conformed even externally to the heathen sacrifice, they would have considered themselves apostates. Participation in the act of sacrifice of any religion was considered equal to the profession of that religion; refusal to take part in the sacrifice was considered equal to a rejection of that religion.

In all sacrifice there is the offering of a gift to the Supreme Being. A great variety of gifts have been offered in different religious sacrifices in the history of man. The exact nature of the gift is not so important for the general notion of sacrifice. What is more important is the fact that something is offered, and is offered to a higher power. The very nature of the action is meant to imply the acknowledgment of a higher dominion or power existing above man, to whom man is subservient, to whom he owes allegiance and homage, from whom he can expect to

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

receive good or bad. The sacrifice is thus essentially a religious act directed to a higher power for the purpose of expressing or acknowledging human dependence on that power, for the sake of thanking him for favors received, asking him for future favors, appeasing his wrath, averting the recurrence of past evils, etc.

All these purposes are so many different ways of expressing the dependence of man upon the Supreme Being. Hence sacrifice may be considered the essential religious act by which man expresses his absolute dependence upon God, and God's supreme dominion over him. In this we find our explanation for the universal existence of sacrifice in all religions; and in this we find our explanation for the meaning of the presentation of a gift in the sacrificial action. The gift offered in the sacrifice is almost invariably something that is useful or valuable to man, something related to life, like food, of which man deprives himself in the action of offering it to God. It was moreover, except in the case of the first fruits, almost always something on which man had expended labor and care, e. g., domestic animals, oil, wine, bread, e. a. Again, the ceremonial of the sacrificial action tends to indicate that the object is not to serve its ordinary purpose in the ordinary way, but is considered to be set aside for a holier purpose, and in the process is sanctified. Frequently it is then consumed after the sacrifice to denote a participation of the consumers in the holiness of the offering, or in the power of the being to whom it is sacrificed. In all cases man performs an action that is outside the or-

dinary routine of his life, in order to show deference to a higher Being.

The meaning of sacrifice is by no means exhausted by the external action taken by itself. It is not the external action of giving or setting aside an object that expresses fully the relation between man and his God. This relation is an internal one, and must be expressed by an internal act accompanying the external oblation. The external oblation is little more than the sign of an internal act. This is the more evident since man did not in the sacrificial action come into external contact with God's person, did not visibly give the gift to Him. The gift remains in the possession of man, or is manifestly destroyed by human action. It is the internal act accompanying the oblation that forms the essence of the sacrifice. The nature of this internal act has already been hinted at. It is the expression of man's dependence on God, therefore of God's dominion over man. But the very act of acknowledging this allegiance on the part of man is equal to his putting himself, humanly speaking, into the hands of God, of offering himself to God. In this we come to the essential internal meaning of sacrifice. By means of the external gift, which man offers in sacrifice, he intends to offer himself to God, to unite himself to God. The gift, closely associated with man's daily life as a rule, is merely a symbol of the giver's own self; just as in daily human life, the gift of a person is taken to represent the person himself, and a gift is treasured because it has come from a friend. In the offering of the sacrificial gift, then, the person offering desires to unite himself to the Supreme Being. The external act of offering is there-

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

fore incomplete unless it is accompanied by the internal oblation of self, by internal acts of mind expressive of the homage, allegiance, gratitude, submission, that man owes to God.

In the conjunction of the external with the internal action we have the full substance or meaning of the sacrifice. But the external act is there not merely for the purpose of expressing, on the part of one individual, the internal acts of his religious homage. Sacrificial acts in all religions have been performed also, even mainly, as public, collective acts. The one external act signifies the internal offering of as many as are present at it, or have associated themselves by proxy with the performance of the external act. In such cases the external act is performed by some official representative of a group or community for the entire community. His external act, by reason of the explicit or tacit delegation by the other members of the community, is taken to be officially the action of the entire community. In that way all can offer their internal homage through one and the same external act. For all who are present, the visible performance of the external act becomes an indication of the progress of the internal act; and by watching and following the progress of the sacrificial action, all can present their internal acts in unison, that is, as one act.

We have now a more complete conception of the sacrificial act in religion. It is an external act, performed by someone delegated to act for many, and expressive of the internal acts of worship of all who feel themselves represented by the delegate, and especially of all who by active assistance associate them-

selves with the actions of the delegate. In the *Catholic Encyclopedia* the following definition is given: "The external oblation to God by an authorized minister of a sense-perceptible object, either through its destruction or at least its real transformation, in acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion and for the appeasing of His wrath."

We can now readily see how the notion of sacrifice finds its realization in the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. By coming upon earth and taking to Himself a human nature, Christ indicated to us most clearly that he was acting for all mankind. For this purpose He was sent by the Father, the Creator of all things. Christ's delegation was therefore of the highest kind, since it was at the instance of the divine Author and Lord of mankind that Christ assumed the role of representing the entire human race. In offering Himself to the Father as an acceptable victim, Christ by the best right possible offered also all mankind to the Father. And the total oblation thus offered to the Father was the most precious possible since it included the divine nature of Christ, true God like His Father in Heaven. Because of this oblation, the sacrifice of Calvary was the best possible. It was that also for another reason. The offerer of the sacrifice likewise was Christ Himself, Second Person of the Trinity. Priest and victim, the offerer and the oblation offered, were in the sacrifice of Calvary identical. The sacrifice was therefore also most perfect from the standpoint of the harmony between internal and external action, both of which were performed by one and the same all-perfect Person. Never was an external action more perfectly the ex-

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

ecution of an internal one, since the natural instrument for externally expressing the internal act of this sacrifice was the very object that was also sacrificed. In Christ's action on Calvary, therefore, not only the essential characteristics of a sacrifice were present, but they were present in a super-eminent degree. As we have indicated, the person offering, the substance of the offering, and the act of offering were each and all of infinite excellence. And the delegation of the Offerer came from God Himself, while the consciousness of the purpose and of the character of the sacrificial oblation was supremely actual: *This is my Blood which shall be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.*

Now if the sacrifice of the Mass is a renewal by continuation of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, the elements of sacrifice must also be found in the Mass. In the Mass, too, Christ is the victim offered to the heavenly Father. And in the Mass the power offering the sacrifice is that of the official priesthood of the Church, exercised in the actions of her officially ordained priests, and received by her from Christ Himself. The manner of the offering is likewise the one instituted and commanded by Christ Himself when He told the Apostles at the Last Supper: "Do this for a commemoration of Me." The one difference we have mentioned between the sacrifice of Calvary and that of the Mass is this: that on Calvary Christ in person alone offered the sacrifice and in a bloody manner, and mankind had no opportunity of actively associating itself with Him. In the innumerable continuations of the sacrifice through the Mass, mankind has precisely this opportunity of joining in the action

THE ACTION OF SACRIFICE

of the priest, therefore in the action of Christ. It is the Mass that gives the members of the Church of God their opportunity of associating themselves with the sacrifice of the Church, through her priest, that is, with the sacrifice of Christ as He commanded it to be performed for all time.

This, then, is the full meaning of the Mass as a sacrifice. Our next step will be, to examine the Mass itself more in detail, in its action as unfolded in the words and gestures of the priest, and as expressed in its very text. The purpose of this examination will be to see just how the faithful can best by their own internal acts associate themselves with the action of the Mass, and thus obtain the full fruits of the redemption of Christ distributed to men through their participation in this great eternal sacrifice.



CHAPTER IV

THE OFFERTORY OF THE MASS

The Mass is the great sacrifice of the Church of Christ, in which the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is perpetuated. It must, therefore, as a sacrifice, show the general characteristics of a sacrificial action, such as we have analyzed in the previous chapter. At the same time the Mass, as the perpetuation of the redeeming work of Christ, must bring us into possession of the fruits of Christ's redemption. In other words, by means of the Mass we must come into intimate contact with Christ, and through Him undergo that transformation by which we are made acceptable children of God, a transformation made possible for all mankind through the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. While therefore containing all the general features of a sacrifice by which we offer ourselves to God, the Mass must also be the means of distributing the fruits of the Redemption to the souls of men.

The Mass is liturgy at its zenith. It proceeds step by step in the development of its action. Only by degrees do we arrive at the full accomplishment of the sacrificial action and its completion in us. In the Mass many actions are performed and words uttered by the official priest of the Church, so that the minds of the faithful may without difficulty follow him in the offering of the sacrifice, and may by following his action unite themselves heart and soul with it. Through this gradual collective action of priest and

THE OFFERTORY OF THE MASS

people, the dispositions, mind and heart, of all engaged in the sacrifice are lifted up to a higher spiritual level, a state in which the holy act of homage to God may be performed with more perfection and with greater fruits of soul for all that participate in it.

The Mass is ordinarily divided into two parts: The Mass of the Catechumens, which ends just before the offering of bread and wine, called the Offertory; and the Mass of the Faithful, which extends from the Offertory to the end.¹ The Mass of the Catechumens consists of a series of prayers and readings that are meant to prepare the priest and the faithful for a better accomplishment of the sacrificial action itself. The latter is effected and brought to completion in the Mass of the Faithful. The Mass of the Faithful accordingly falls into two distinct parts: The act of oblation proper, and the more perfect completion of this act. The latter, the more perfect completion of the act of sacrifice, centers around the Communion, since the act of oblation is perfected and consummated by the union of God and the faithful in the sacramental reception of Christ in the Eucharist. This part of the Mass, therefore, beginning with the Pater Noster, includes some of the action that immediately precedes the Communion of the Mass and all that follows. From the Offertory to the Pater Noster, on the other hand, we have the act of offering typical of all sacrifice. It is therefore the real performance of the sacrificial oblation or offering.

As we shall see in the course of the following pages, this act of offering in turn unfolds itself in

¹See Chapter IX, first paragraph.

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

three separate stages. The first of these is concerned with the preliminary offering of bread and wine. In it we indicate that we are setting apart these gifts of ours for a holy purpose, that we are thereby dedicating them to the service of God. Bread and wine, used in the Mass, are excellent gifts for us to offer. They have always formed the staple food of many peoples, especially those living around the Mediterranean, where stood the cradle of Christianity. In offering bread and wine, we are therefore offering that which represents our own life, and which would naturally be converted into the substance of our own flesh and blood. We are depriving ourselves of these objects and offering them to God, in order to indicate the giving of ourselves to God. We are doing it also, as was said before, to reap the full fruits of the redemption of Christ. It will soon become evident that the very texts of the Mass indicate this most clearly. The purpose of the sacrifice, which is the glory of God and our salvation, is mentioned in them time and again. This was also the purpose of the entire mission of Christ and His redemption. In performing the action for the sake of fulfilling the redemption of Christ in us, our minds naturally expand to the broad sympathy of Christ Himself. We can not have sentiments contrary to His mission, which was for all mankind; on the contrary, we enter into that mission in all its fulness. Our sacrifice therefore, being performed by the official priest of the Church, with whom we join ourselves, becomes the sacrifice of the entire Church; and we in turn offer it up for all mankind as did Christ, thus in spirit approaching to a more perfect assimilation with Him.

THE OFFERTORY OF THE MASS

In commencing the Offertory, the priest turns to the people with the customary greeting: "The Lord be with you"; and having received the answer, "And with thy spirit," he exhorts them to join in his prayer: "*Oremus*—Let us pray." The priest then recites the so-called Offertory antiphon. This is a verse taken from some Psalm. In former times the whole Psalm was sung at this juncture, and during its singing all the assembled people went up in procession to the altar to hand their special offerings to the priest. Some gave oil, others vegetables; most of them, however, gave bread and wine. In this way the action of offering was really participated in by the people also externally. Some of the bread and wine was laid on the sacrificial altar by the ministers in order to be used in the sacrifice of the Mass. The rest of the oblation was set aside in order to be distributed to the poor. The bread and the wine offered in the Mass were then truly the gifts of the people themselves.

This old custom of the offertory procession has been out of vogue for many centuries. A distant echo of it, however, remains in the practice of the Sunday collection. This collection is most appropriately taken up at the Offertory of the Mass. While the object offered is money, we must remember that money is now the common means of exchange. It stands for all types of possessions, for with it man can procure any material thing that he wishes to have for any purpose whatsoever. The money offered in the Mass is given by the faithful to the parish church for the needs of the church. It represents a denial of self as much as did the offerings of old; and just as much as these, it is a setting aside of some personal

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

profane thing for purposes of God. This is true in particular also of the stipend offered by the person according to whose special intentions the Mass is to be offered. The bread and wine are therefore today still the gift of the people of the parish, and represent as much as ever the personal oblation to God of the members of the parish, of all attending the Mass. This intimate union of the people with the offering of the gifts is well illustrated in the texts of the prayers accompanying the offering.

The priest offers the host of bread on the paten with the words: "Accept, O holy Father, almighty and eternal God, this host for the all-holy sacrifice, which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, to atone for my numberless sins of wilfulness and neglect; on behalf of all here present, and likewise for all faithful Christians, living and dead, that it may profit me and them as a means of salvation unto life everlasting. Amen." We see in these words that the priest prays not only for himself, but for all present at the Mass, and then also for all Christians, living and dead. Thus the sympathy and love of priest and people, as was said above, must be as wide as that of the Church and of Christ, if they wish to offer up a sacrifice pleasing to the Father. The purpose of the sacrifice is here expressed as being expiation for past sins and offenses, so that it may bring eternal salvation to all the faithful, especially to those present at the sacrifice. The prayer is not offered to Christ, but to the heavenly Father. Christ is to be our co-operator in our sacrifice. As on Calvary, our sacrifice is finally to be offered by Christ to His Father in heaven, and is at

the same time to be an offering of Christ to the Father.

The next prayer is said while the priest mixes wine and water. It tells us that the wine represents Christ, and that we are represented by the water. The mixing of the two shows that we must unite ourselves with Christ now, just as Christ at one time united Himself with human nature when He descended in person upon this earth. "Grant that through the mystery of this water and wine, we may be made partakers of His divinity, who has deigned to become partaker of our humanity." Indeed, if our sacrifice is to be a continuation of that of Calvary, we must unite ourselves intimately with Christ. —The wine is now offered up to the Father. In the prayer, the priest, praying for all, asks that "it may arise before the face of Thy divine majesty, with a pleasing fragrance, for our salvation and that of all mankind." Again is the offering made for our salvation, as on Calvary. And it is offered for all the faithful. By thus joining our intention with that of Christ, who died for all, we are preparing our minds more and more for the intimate union with Him that is necessary if our sacrifice is to be that of Christ also.

Further prayers of offering follow. They form a progressive action of oblation, in connection with the above two. Their purpose can not be to indicate to God what He already knows, namely, that we are making an offering, but is rather the increasing development in us of those sentiments of heart which make our sacrifice more holy and efficacious. "In a spirit of humility and with a contrite heart," reads the next prayer, "may we be accepted by Thee, O

Lord, and may our sacrifice be so offered in Thy sight this day as to please Thee, O Lord God." Making the sign of the cross over the oblations, the priest asks the special blessing of God upon them. Thereupon he washes his hands while reciting some verses of a Psalm. We may take the action of washing of hands to indicate that we wish to cleanse our minds of all faults before continuing with the sacrifice, and as an indication that the sacred action of the Mass is about to proceed with increasing solemn dignity. Historically, some say, the washing may have arisen from the handling of the many gifts formerly brought up by the people in the offertory procession.

After the washing, the priest again asks for the acceptance of the gifts "which we are making to Thee." This time the prayer is addressed to the Holy Trinity, in whom the three divine Persons are always inseparably united. The oblation is said to be made "in remembrance of the passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord." Our sacrifice is to be not merely a remembrance of the suffering and death of Christ. Like Christ, and with Him, we are to rise from death and ascend into heaven. In fact, by union with Christ and His Church, we achieve an anticipation of our final ascension. The Mass is for all of these together, since it is to give us the fruits, not only of the passion of Christ, but of the whole Redemption. In this same prayer we mention the blessed Virgin Mary, some Apostles, and "all the saints," in order to honor them and ask their intercession. We thus unite the prayers and merits of the saints with our own sacrifice and prayers. God will more readily hear them than us. Furthermore,

by uniting ourselves with the saints, who are near and dear to Christ, we can more readily also unite ourselves with our divine Mediator. The more closely we unite with those who are in intimate union with Christ, the closer do we get to Christ Himself.

The priest now again indicates the collective nature of the offering by turning to the people with the words: "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Father almighty." It is the people's sacrifice as well as the priest's; and they now well understand the nature of the sacrificial action and its purpose. They answer with the server: "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at thy hands, unto the praise and glory of His name, for our advantage, and that of all His holy Church." The people thus formally endorse the priest's action, and are aware that he is to act for them.

The priest answers "Amen—So be it" to this prayer of the people. He then recites a prayer called the Secret, because said in a subdued voice. But it is again said for all the people, and always indicates some of the special graces desired from the offering of the gifts. At the end of the prayer the choir and server answer "Amen" for the people.

With this, the first stage of the offering is at an end. The people have, through the priest, set apart something of their own as dedicated to God, as given over to a holy purpose. In this action all the offerers should be mindful of the deeper meaning of the sacrificial offering. While bread and wine are being offered, all should consciously offer themselves along with the gifts which represent their persons. If anyone has had a special burden to bear, some spe-

cial misfortune, some weakness, or on the other hand has had a special joy—all these should be placed on the altar with the holy elements. Our joys will be purified and our sorrows and weaknesses hallowed by the sacred action. No one should attend Mass without in that way making some very specific offering, one that is close to the immediate circumstances of the offerer. Then the external action will be most perfectly expressive of the internal oblation of mind and heart through which is attained the real personal value of the sacrificial action.

Before the second stage of offering, which constitutes the first part of the Canon of the Mass, there is a prayer of transition. This is the Preface, a solemn hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. It should elevate the mind and prepare for the better performance of the second offering, which is immediately preparatory to the most holy moment when God Himself in the person of Christ descends into our gifts. After the "Amen" is answered to the Secret, the priest and people pray in impressive dialog. "The Lord be with you: And with thy Spirit.—Lift up your hearts: We have lifted them up unto the Lord.—Let us give thanks to the Lord our God: It is fitting and just." Then the priest continues the Preface alone. In it he celebrates the glory of God with the angels in heaven, and in the name of all, joins the praises of the community to those of the celestial choirs, ending with: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty! Heaven and earth are filled with Thy glory . . . Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!—Now all are prepared to enter more profitably upon the holy action of the Canon.

CHAPTER V

THE CANON: BEFORE THE CONSECRATION

After the Preface the Canon of the Mass begins. It is a most holy form of prayer, in which the Consecration takes place. The Church indicates the solemn and holy nature of the action by prescribing that the words of this part of the Mass should not be said aloud. Only a deep silence can express the profound sentiments of the soul, with which the mysterious action should be performed. The Canon begins with a second stage of the action of offering. In the previous part the gifts of bread and wine were offered to God, and were thereby set apart for a holy purpose. In that alone we should already have a first sacrificial offering quite complete in itself. But the Christian sacrifice of the New Law is something infinitely greater than all other sacrifices. In it Christ Himself plays a part; and so the first offering, up to the Preface, is only the preliminary for what is to follow. In the first stage the gifts, our gifts, were blessed and made holy. In the second offering, which is now to begin, these gifts are again presented to God, but for a further purpose; namely, the fuller purpose of the sacrifice of the Mass. They are now offered to God for the purpose of their divine consecration into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. In this second offering, the words of the text again mention all the intentions for which the Mass is offered, and ask the prayers of the saints in order to help obtain the aid and protection of God.

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

The first prayer of the Canon offers up the holy gifts in these words: "And now, O most gracious Father, we humbly beg of Thee and entreat Thee, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, to deem acceptable and bless these gifts of Thine, now set apart for the holy and all-perfect sacrifice; which we offer unto Thee especially for Thy holy catholic Church, that Thou wouldst deign to keep it in peace and unity, to protect and sustain it throughout the world . . ." The Mass is always offered for the whole Church. Nothing is more pleasing to God, and nothing is more like the spirit of Christ Himself, as we saw above. To emphasize this universal purpose, the Canon prayer next mentions the reigning pope by name, and the bishop of the local diocese. They are our supreme pastors, the direct successors of the Apostles and the visible representatives of Christ here on earth. We must always pray for them if we have the universal sympathy of Christ in our hearts; praying for them is praying for the Church and for the cause of Christ. Next the prayer mentions "all the bishops and their flocks, who cherish the catholic and apostolic faith."

Then comes the "Commemoration of the Living," in which particular persons are mentioned for whose intention or benefit the Mass is to be offered up in a special manner. At the letters N. N. in the text, the names of these persons should be mentioned. But the Mass is always of special benefit also to those who attend it and pray with the priest. This is well shown by the words of the prayer: "Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants, N. and N., and of all here present, whose faith is known to Thee and likewise their devo-

BEFORE THE CONSECRATION

tion, on whose behalf we offer unto Thee, and who themselves offer unto Thee, this sacrifice of praise for themselves and all who are theirs, for the good of their souls, according to their hope of salvation and deliverance from all harm; and who pay Thee the homage which they owe Thee, eternal God, living and true." Nothing can show better than this prayer how intimately the people attending the Mass are associated with its holy action and blessings.

These prayers of priest and people are not to stand alone. They are to be strengthened by those of the saints in heaven, the tried friends of God. Their intercession will help to make us more worthy of the full blessings of the Mass and of having our sacrifice fully accepted by God. The Mass prayer, therefore, goes on: "United in Thy only Church, we honor the memory, first of the glorious and immaculate Virgin Mary, mother of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ; then that of Thy blessed apostles and martyrs, Peter and Paul . . . and of all Thy saints, by whose merits and prayers, grant that we may be always favored with the help of Thy protection: Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen." Since the Church, with her full power, is officially praying in the Mass, we are assured by this prayer of the help of the saints. We can with all the more hope continue to pray for the acceptance of our sacrifice. It is now our sacrifice and that of the whole family of God, that is, of the whole Church on earth and of the saints in heaven. Hence the Canon continues: "We further beseech Thee, O Lord, to receive in atonement this sacrifice of adoration from us and from all Thy household. Provide that our days be spent in Thy

peace, save us from everlasting damnation, and cause us to be numbered among those whom Thou hast chosen: Through Christ our Lord. Amen."

During this prayer the priest has been holding his hands over the bread and wine. This custom existed in the old Jewish sacrifice, especially in the sacrifice for the Day of Atonement, one of the great types of our Lord's sacrifice for the sins of mankind. In the Jewish sacrifice the high priest held his hands on the head of the animal to be sacrificed. The meaning of the action was, it is said, that through the imposition of the hands of the priest, acting for all the people, the sins and weaknesses of the people were transferred to the offerings, and were then washed away when these offerings perished or were slain, and accepted by God. The action becomes the more significant in Mass, if we remember that the gifts on the altar are now soon to be changed into the very Body and Blood of Christ. And it is the very same Christ who took upon Himself the nature of man with all the weaknesses and sins of mankind, and who, by offering Himself on Calvary, purified this nature and made it again acceptable to our heavenly Father. Of this more will be said in later paragraphs. The prayers of the Canon are now arriving at the sacred action of the Consecration. After the imposition of hands upon the offerings by the priest, only a short prayer follows; and it is the introduction to the Consecration. It mentions the immediate purpose of the second stage of offering, which began with the Canon and is now ending: "Do Thou, O God, deign to bless what we offer, and make it approved, effective, worthy, and acceptable in every way, that it may

become for our good, the Body and Blood of Thy dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now the consecration takes place. The priest recites the narrative of what Christ did at the Last Supper when He “took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and having raised His eyes to heaven, unto Thee, His almighty Father, giving thanks to Thee, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take ye all, and eat of this: for **THIS IS MY BODY.**” In the same way the words narrated in the Gospels and used by Christ are pronounced over the chalice for the consecration of the wine into the living Blood of Christ. With this double pronouncement of the priest, the consecration has been accomplished. There is no longer bread and wine on the altar, but the real Body and Blood of Christ Himself. Christ, our divine High Priest, and the Mediator between God and man, has descended on the altar. He has come into the midst of us in order to help us perfect our sacrifice.

In the Consecration the most holy and solemn action of the entire Mass has taken place. So far, the action of the Mass had been that of all the faithful and of the entire Church. The priest celebrating the Mass has acted by special delegation of the hierarchy of the Church, and with the commission and power received in the sacrament of Holy Orders. So far he was always speaking and acting also for the people, and the people, by uniting their minds with him, were speaking and acting through and with him. In the Consecration this is no longer true. When the priest there pronounces the words “This is my Body,” and “This is the chalice of my Blood,” he is no longer

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

speaking for himself or for the people. By virtue of his power of priesthood, which is the priesthood of Christ, he is in these words speaking for Christ and for Christ alone. Through the mouth of the priest, Christ-Himself is speaking, and it is Christ who performs the action of descending upon the altar and entering by a mysterious change of substances into the gifts there prepared. At the Consecration the people are but silent witnesses of the divine action. The action has for the moment been taken over by God Himself. Hence the Consecration is so sublime in its dignity; it has the full, unspeakable grandeur of the Divine.

Often we think of the consecration of the bread and wine merely as of an event occurring on the altar, and as in so far remote from ourselves; just as we often think of the Incarnation, the birth of Christ, as a distant historical event, without thinking of its intimate connection with our lives. The transubstantiation on the altar is not merely a holy event that occurs so and so many feet away from ourselves, at which we happen to be present more or less accidentally. The holy action of God we are witnessing is most intimately related to us, and to all that are in any way connected with the sacrifice being offered in the Mass. A moment's reflection will show that most clearly. At the Offertory we offered up bread and wine to God. This offering symbolized and indicated the offering of ourselves to God. The gifts represented ourselves. This was emphasized by the imposition of hands by the priest over the gifts immediately before the Consecration. We were most intimately drawn into the Mass, because in our gifts

BEFORE THE CONSECRATION

we had placed ourselves on the altar, together with our joys and sorrows, our hopes, and our weaknesses, as an oblation to God. Now at the Consecration Christ descended into those very gifts, which stood for ourselves. It is our Lord's sublime response to our act of oblation. God has not merely accepted our oblation for what it might be worth; but Christ has identified Himself with it, has entered truly into that which we designated as meaning ourselves.

No words can exhaust or even describe the sublime meaning of this action of Christ. He offered Himself in a bloody manner for us once on Calvary. The evening before, He instituted the unbloody Sacrifice and Sacrament. And as He said, it was with a great longing that He had awaited the moment for doing so. In the sacrifice of the Mass, the Church follows the command of Christ: "Do this for a commemoration of me;" whereupon Christ, with the same infinite longing for us, descends into the midst of us by an action that indicates His desire for a most intimate union with us. Human mind could not have imagined an action so divine, so infinitely expressive; only a divine love could have conceived it. Henceforth we are no longer alone in our pleadings, Christ is praying with us. The moment is therefore of supreme value. Hence the Church does not pause in the progress of her sacrifice, but continues without interruption. This is her greatest opportunity, and she hastens to make use of it.

CHAPTER VI

THE CANON: AFTER THE CONSECRATION

During the holy moments of the Consecration we were silent witnesses of the action of Christ descending upon the altar. Instead of bread and wine we now have the divine Person of our Lord—really present there under the appearances of bread and wine. In the sublime manner instituted by Himself at the Last Supper, He is now ready to continue the action of the Mass with us, to re-enact the sublime sacrifice of Calvary. At this holy moment the identity of the sacrifice of the Mass and that of Calvary becomes real. Through the official priest the whole action of the Mass was performed by Christ, but vicariously. Now Christ has placed Himself on the altar as an acceptable offering to God. From this moment on there is in the Mass the same divine Priest and the same divine Victim as on Calvary. It is now that the Mass begins more particularly to be a special application of the fruits of the Redemption.

We have mentioned before that in His sojourn on earth and His sufferings and death, Christ united all humanity to Himself by reason of His taking on a human nature. On Calvary all mankind was offered with Him. But not all men there had the opportunity of actively associating themselves with His sacrifice. That opportunity was to be given to men throughout the succession of time by reason of the fact that Christ gave His mission and His priestly powers to a living Church, and that the Church was

to continue His sacrifice day after day in the Mass. At the Consecration, Christ did not descend on the altar in order to receive our adoration as the supreme Judge and divine King, but in order to act as our Mediator in the same way as He had on Calvary. Our Lord is now on the altar in order that He may again be the victim offered to the heavenly Father for us, and in order that this time we may have the opportunity of actively uniting ourselves with Him in this oblation. In that way every Mass is an extension of the sacrifice of Calvary, insofar as it actually effects for many individuals, especially those attending the Mass, what was made possible for all on Calvary. On Calvary all men were offered up to God in Christ as acceptable victims, but it was, so to say, apart from their consent. In the liturgy of the Church, and especially in the Mass, men have the opportunity and the great privilege of giving their consent to this union with Christ, and therefore of actually deriving for themselves the great fruits of the Redemption first earned for them on Calvary. For this reason the action of the Mass after the Consecration continues to be one of offering. It is the third stage of offering, in which Christ Himself comes to our aid and gives Himself to us as an oblation that will be fully accepted by the heavenly Father.

The first prayer after the Consecration well exemplifies this: "Wherefore, we Thy servants, and likewise Thy holy people, calling to mind not only the blessed passion of the same Christ Thy Son, but also His resurrection from the dead, and finally His glorious ascension into heaven, offer unto Thy supreme majesty, of Thy gifts bestowed upon us, the

pure, the holy, the all-perfect sacrifice of thanks for our redemption—the holy Bread of life eternal and the Chalice of unending salvation.” These words also indicate the purpose of the sacrifice which is the same as the purpose of Calvary, our eternal salvation. This purpose is likewise expressed by the words referring to the resurrection and ascension of our Lord. We are now celebrating not only the passion of Christ, but also the fruits thereof, the resurrection and ascension, in which we all hope to share.

The next prayer asks God to look favorably upon our present sacrifice, as He did formerly upon the sacrifices of Abel, Abraham, and Melchisedech. This may at first thought seem strange to us, since it is impossible that God refuse to accept His own divine Son, who is now being offered. But we must remember the fuller purpose of the Mass. As has been explained before, it is this: That those attending, or connected with the Mass, may be intimately united with Christ, and be accepted with and through Him by the heavenly Father. There is no doubt of the Father’s accepting Christ—in fact, He has accepted the victim Christ on Calvary for all eternity. But whether He will accept us with Christ, depends on the state of our soul, and on God’s mercy. Hence we ask Him most insistently, even after the Consecration, to accept the full oblation of the Mass, namely, Christ and us with Him. A third prayer continues this petition, and at the same time speaks of the special way in which we are in the Mass assured of a most close union with Christ: “Most humbly we implore Thee, almighty God, cause these our mystic offerings to be borne by the hands of Thy holy Angel unto Thy altar

AFTER THE CONSECRATION

above, before the face of Thy divine majesty; that those of us who from this sharing in the heavenly sacrifice, shall receive the most sacred Body and Blood of Thy Son, may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing: Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.”

After thus laying our offering, that is, Christ and ourselves, on the altar of Heaven, we turn our thoughts a moment to the helpless souls in purgatory. They are completely dependent on our prayers and on the sacrifice of Christ. In praying for them we are showing in our hearts the sympathy of Christ; we thus become more closely united to the divine Victim and therefore most acceptable to the heavenly Father. The same end is attained by the commemoration of the saints that follows. The prayer mentions the Apostles, early martyrs, and “all Thy saints;” but this time not in order merely to ask for their intercession. We now ask God to unite us to them through the merits of Christ: “. . . all Thy saints, into whose company we implore Thee to admit us, not weighing our merits, but freely granting us pardon: Through Christ our Lord.” Admitted into the company of the intimate friends of Christ, we shall be also more closely united with Christ, and, as living members of His mystic body, shall be accepted by the Father because of our living union with our divine Head and Mediator. Thus the sacrifice of the Mass continues to exercise the same mediatorship of Christ that was exercised on Calvary. Christ Himself comes down on the altar in person, in order to offer us together with Himself. All that was ever done for us, all that we can ever expect to

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

obtain, comes only through Christ, our divine Mediator. Hence the prayers of the Canon, of the whole Mass, so often mention this fact.

This idea is also the closing note of the Canon. Our whole hope lies in Christ; and properly so, because He is the right hand of the Father and His only-begotten Son. Our prayers of oblation in the Canon end most appropriately by reminding the Father of the universal mediatorship of His divine Son, Mediator of the sanctification of man as also of the glory given to God. "Through whom, O Lord, Thou dost ever provide, make holy, fill with life, make fruitful of good, and bestow upon us all these Thy gifts: Through Him, and with Him, and in Him, is to Thee, God the Father almighty, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen." "A sacrifice of praise" the Mass was called in the second prayer of the Canon, and with this note of praise to the divine Trinity the Canon closes. We have now come to the end of the sacrificial action proper of the holy Mass. In three stages the action of offering has unfolded itself from the Offertory to the last words of the Canon, ending in a sort of mystic union of ourselves with the divine Jesus, by which we are offerers with Him through the mediation of the officiating priest, and are with Him the acceptable victims offered.

The entire action so far has had for its purpose our intimate union with Christ and through Him with God. This is accomplished first of all by a proper sacrifice of ourselves, by a stripping off of the old self and a putting on of the life of Christ. But there is a still more perfect consummation of this

AFTER THE CONSECRATION

union possible, that of sacramental union at the Communion. The sacramental reception of Christ by the people at the Communion is not essential to the sacrifice of the Mass. But the Mass is not only a sacrifice; it is also a sacrament. And the sacrament is the natural consummation of the sacrifice, insofar as it perfectly realizes the union which is mystically enacted in the latter. In the Mass, therefore, the sacramental communion is the consummation of the sacrifice in us. Therein we may find the explanation of the mention made in the third prayer after the Consecration, which refers directly to the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. And therein alone do we find the explanation of the part of the Mass that comes after the Canon. This part has been most properly called the eucharistic banquet or repast. It centers around the Communion, being in part preparatory to it, and in part a rapid after-action. The sacred and mystic action of the Canon, centering around the Consecration, now being over, the priest again prays aloud, or chants, and the people through choir and server again participate more actively in the action of the Mass.



CHAPTER VII

THE EUCHARISTIC REPAST

The second part of the Mass of the Faithful begins with the Our Father. The act of oblation having been completed in the sublime offering up of Christ Himself, the eyes of priest and people, under the guidance of the Church, turn towards the consummation of the sacrifice through the sacramental communion. Most appropriately is the new turn taken by means of the Our Father. It is the perfect prayer given to us by Christ Himself; and like all true prayer, it directs the mind first of all to God and only after that thinks of the needs of the creature. In it God is addressed as our common Father. As He presided at the sacrificial offering, so He now presides at the holy table. As the sacrifice was offered to Him, so it is He who will now give Christ to us, insofar as Christ ever did all things according to the will of His heavenly Father and at His command. As with a family at table, all minds are associated with the priest, who says the prayer aloud. The words "give us this day our daily bread," and their sequel are specially significant. They can be taken as the keynote of what is to follow in the Mass. The daily Bread of Life will be profitable to us only in the degree in which we are freed in mind from all the vestiges of sin. After the mystic ecstasy—using the phrase in figure—of the second part of the Canon, our thoughts are again directed to this our great need. Hence the petition with which the Our Father ends:

"Forgive us our trespasses, . . . Lead us not into temptation," to which the people respond: "But deliver us from evil;" while the priest again answers: "Amen—So be it."

Purity of mind and heart is essential for Communion and its full fruitage of graces, and this purity comes from God. Accordingly the next prayer continues the closing petitions of the Our Father. It asks that we be freed from all evils, and that by the intercession of the saints "we may be always free from sin and safe from all disturbance." Thereupon the priest breaks the Host. Formerly this was the actual breaking up of the heavenly Bread into individual portions for each one sitting at the great family table of the altar. Today it still symbolizes this action, and is therefore significant in the part of the Mass before the holy Communion. Making the sign of the cross over the chalice with one of the particles, the priest addresses the people with the beautiful wish: "May the peace of the Lord be always with you," to which they answer: "And with thy spirit." Peace should indeed reign in those hearts into which Christ Himself is to enter. And it must be the peace of the Lord. Christ said long ago that no offering or prayer is acceptable to God, if there is any hatred or rancor in our hearts. The mutual wish of priest and people expresses the fact that a universal charity reigns in the hearts of all—truly the peace of Christ. It is a practical sequel to the petition sent up to God in the Our Father, that He forgive us even as we forgive our neighbors.—After dropping the small particle of the Host into the Chalice and praying that the mingling may "help

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

us who receive it unto life everlasting," the more immediate preparation for the reception of Christ takes place.

Now the prayer of the Mass turns directly to Christ. "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us," say the priest and the choir, and the people in union with them. Christ is now directly appealed to. He is already very near, and we are on the threshold of holy union with Him. The words here used are the same that St. John the Baptist made use of when Christ was about to enter upon the active mission of His sojourn on earth. Jesus is now about to renew the saving activity in a special way in our hearts. Hence in the very same words we now beseech Him to come in the fulness of His divine mercy. The "Agnus Dei—Lamb of God," is repeated three times. After the last invocation the petition is changed to: "Grant us peace." Again we have the thought of the peace of heart that distinguishes the true follower of Christ, the peace of heart that the world can not give. It also recurs in the first of the three prayers that follow. In it the priest takes up the same idea, and in the true spirit of Christ, asks that this peace may be given abundantly to the whole Church: "O Lord Jesus Christ, who hast said to Thy apostles: Peace I leave unto you, my peace I give unto you, regard not my sins but the faith of Thy Church, and deign to keep it in peace and unity, according to Thy will; who livest and reignest God through all eternity. Amen." The priest is indeed always the mouthpiece of the Church, and through her of Christ. We can not be of Christ unless we are filled with these same holy sentiments.

The prayer for the entire Church is prompted by a conviction of the solidarity of all the members united in Christ, and of the fact that in the Church is to be found the fuller manifestation of Christ Himself and the realization of His mission.

Two further prayers are more personal, and ask for the full grace of the Communion for the priest who is officiating. But the words apply equally to all others receiving the Communion, and can most fittingly be used also by them. Then, after the simple statement, "I will take the Bread of Heaven, and call upon the name of the Lord," and the thrice repeated "Lord, I am not worthy, etc.," the priest consumes the sacred Host. In like manner the Chalice is consumed after the equally simple but meaningful words: "What shall I offer the Lord for all that He hath given to me? I will take the Chalice of salvation, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. Praising I will call upon the Lord, and I will be saved from my enemies."

After the communion of the priest comes that of the faithful. Today a special prayer occurs before it. The server recites for the people a general confession of guilt, and calls upon the saints and the priest to pray for their forgiveness. Again we have the idea of greater purity of heart for a more fruitful reception of the Sacrament. The priest, who acts officially for the Church, therefore with the power of Christ entrusted to the Church, turns to the people and prays for their forgiveness: "May the almighty God have mercy upon you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to life everlasting." The server and people answer "Amen" to this and to the fol-

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

lowing similar prayer: "May the almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, absolution, and remission of your sins." The priest now holds up a sacred Host with the words: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold, which takes away the sins of the world." After saying "Lord, I am not worthy, . . ." three times, he gives Communion to each person with the prayer: "May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul to life everlasting. Amen." Through the lips of the priest this is prayer of the Church, nay, of Christ Himself as He is entering into the heart of His beloved child. For Christ is now again realizing the great love with which He came upon earth, and with which He instituted the Sacrament at the Last Supper and commanded its frequent celebration.

Formerly the prayers of confession and forgiveness were not recited before Communion. They are, in fact, part of the preliminary prayers for the Mass of the Catechumens, the first part of the Mass. Only when the custom had arisen of giving Communion, quite regularly outside Mass, were these prayers attached immediately to the rite of giving Communion; and only then did they enter into the text of the Mass immediately before the communion of the faithful. Before that time the communion of the faithful took place ordinarily at Mass, and was attached immediately to that of the priest. Even today the Mass is the natural setting for the reception of holy Communion, and the practice of general distribution of Communion before or after Mass, or outside Mass, is only tolerated by the Church, not at

all desired.¹ While the communion of the people is not an essential part of the sacrifice of the Mass, so that the sacrifice would be complete without it, we must repeat here that the communion is the natural and logical consummation of the part the people take in the sacrifice of the Mass. As we have just seen, the very text of the Mass after the Canon is preparatory to the sacramental reception of Christ in Communion. Here, as elsewhere, the priest prays in the plural, for himself and for the people attending. Just as in the sacrificial action the people all acted with him, so in the preparation for Communion they should all join with him in the same sentiments. In fact, the active participation of the people in the action of the Mass again becomes more pronounced here, after the solemn silence of the Canon is ended.

Apart from the text of the Mass, the action of the sacrifice itself points to its consummation in holy Communion. A brief survey will indicate this. The Mass is at once the commemoration of Calvary and of the Last Supper. At the one Christ sacrificed Himself for all, at the other He gave Himself sacramentally as the Bread of Life. At the Offertory gifts were offered to the Father that came from the people and stood for the people. In offering them with the priest, the people offered themselves to God and thus strove for a closer union with Him. The first part of the Canon repeated the offering of the gifts with a more direct emphasis on the holiness of the purpose of the sacrifice. After the Consecration, Christ Himself has entered into the gifts of the peo-

¹See Caronti, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp. 72 ff., for a brief statement. *Popular Liturgical Library*, Series I, No. 2.

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

ple, thus putting Himself into the hands of the people as a victim fully acceptable to the Father and at the same time symbolizing His union with the people offering. The action after the Consecration cements this union, insofar as the people now offer in union with Christ, and offer themselves together with Him. The people are therefore united with Christ both as offerers and victims, and this by reason of the sacramental presence of Christ on the altar—the type of presence instituted by Him for sacramental Communion. Thus the triple action of offering, the end of which is a more intimate union with Christ, is naturally consummated by the reception of Communion. For the sacrificial action of the Mass, to repeat, the people's reception of Communion is not essential, but in the progressive attainment of union with Christ, it is the one higher type of union possible after the action of the second part of the Canon. So much being clear, there is no need to point out further how appropriate a preparation for sacramental Communion we have in the preceding action of the Mass.



CHAPTER VIII

AFTER THE COMMUNION

In general, the progress of any public liturgical function of the Church works up to a culmination by successive steps. But once the culmination is reached, the closing action is short and rapid. This feature we find well illustrated in the Mass. In one sense the Consecration can be called the peak of the sacrificial action, for the moment when Christ Himself descends upon the altar is the most sacred of all. With the Consecration, however, as we have seen, the sacrificial offering is not yet completed. Even after the completion of the latter, that is, after the end of the Canon, the liturgy continues its progress. Because the Eucharist is both sacrifice and sacrament, and the sacrament is the logical outcome of the sacrifice, the liturgical action goes forward up to the Communion. The latter is the most perfect consummation of our union with Christ. With it the purpose of the entire action of the Mass has been most fully achieved. Hence with her fine understanding of human nature, the Church does not linger over the conclusion of her eucharistic worship. We shall briefly examine this last part of the Mass.

If the texts of the Mass from the end of the Canon to the Communion are an immediate preparation for Communion, then the part after the Communion is likewise a thanksgiving, and a common thanksgiving for all attending the Mass. While receiving wine into the chalice after the Communion,

the priest says the following short prayer: "What we have taken like bodily food, may we treasure with a pure mind; and may what is given us in time be our provision for eternity." A second prayer is recited by the priest in the first person. Like the former it is a prayer for the fuller fruits of the Communion: "May Thy Body, O Lord, which I have eaten, and Thy Blood, which I have drunk, affect me to the depths of my being, and grant that no trace of sin may be found in me, whom these pure and holy mysteries have renewed; who livest and reignest through all eternity. Amen." Next the priest says the Communion verse, which is also sung by the choir. This is an aspiration of praise, of petition, or a meditative thought, connected with the special feast or mystery of the day. It is a holy sentiment, which should unite all hearts, of priest and of people, in the one, common worship. Then by means of the "Oremus," the priest exhorts the people to pray with him, after giving them the customary greeting: "The Lord be with you." The prayer he next recites is for all. It is in the plural; and at the end of it, the people answer the customary "Amen" through the server or the choir.

This prayer is worth noting. It is called the Post-communion and varies from day to day. With very few exceptions it refers to the reception of the Sacrament that has just taken place, and always prays for some special grace to be bestowed on all the faithful present. It is remarkable for the fact that the reference to the reception of the Sacrament seems to take for granted that Communion is received by all who are present. The plural expressions of the prayer

make no discrimination. They are exactly the same as those of previous prayers, in which the priest prayed publicly as the official spokesman of all present and offered up the gifts and the sacrifice officially for all. These prayers are all of ancient date, and not only indicate that Communion was ordinarily received in the Mass, rather than outside, but also that the reception of Communion was taken for granted by the very texts of the Mass, that reception of Communion was the ordinary way of more completely taking part in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

At the middle of the altar the benediction is given to the people. Previous to that the priest recites a prayer, asking that his personal infirmities may not hinder the effects of the sacrifice, but that it may be most profitable to all for whom he has offered it. This prayer is addressed to the Holy Trinity: "May the tribute of my worship be pleasing to thee, most Holy Trinity . . ."

Only a few times is the Holy Trinity thus directly addressed in the Mass. Still the latter is truly one continuous act of homage to the Trinity. In the praises of the first part of the Mass, the three divine Persons receive separate mention. In the various prayers there is mention of the Trinity, these prayers being with few exceptions addressed to the Father and ending: "Through Jesus Christ, . . . in the unity of the Holy Ghost." The Canon ends with praise to the Trinity, and the entire sacrifice, offered up to the Father, is thus offered up to the Trinity, of which the Father is the eternal, divine Source. In the same manner, after the prayer just mentioned above, the final blessing is given in the name of the

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

three divine Persons: "May almighty God bless you: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." The people again answer "Amen."

Today the Mass closes with a further prayer, the beginning of the Gospel of St. John. It is a sublime hymn to the glory and power of Christ, the Word, the eternal Mediator between God and man. It was through Him that all was made; and it was Christ, who was made flesh for us. Likewise is the fruit of the sacrifice and the sacrament of the Eucharist given only through Christ. The Eucharist in fact is Christ. In it He continues the mediatorial mission, so gloriously described in the Gospel of St. John, for the realization of which He descended upon earth. Most fittingly has this Gospel hymn to Christ been set down as the closing prayer of the sacrifice of the Mass.¹

¹Attention was called above to the fact that, once the whole purpose of the eucharistic celebration is attained in the Communion, the action comes to a rapid close, and that this is in harmony with liturgical functions in general. But other reasons can also be assigned for the fitness of a very short collective action after the Communion. Christ has given Himself sacramentally to the individual soul. It is a supreme moment for intimate converse between the latter and Christ. All attention and aspirations should now be centered on Christ present in the heart, so that the short official action after the Communion can well be viewed as a natural transition from collective action to the intensely intimate communion that should ensue between Christ and the individual soul.

CHAPTER IX

THE MASS OF THE CATECHUMENS

The Mass of the Catechumens is the part of the Mass from the beginning to the Offertory. In early times all who were taking instructions in the Christian religion could attend it, even while they were forbidden to be present at the holy action of the Mass of the Faithful. The latter was only for those who had been signed with the seal of Baptism, who had been received as approved followers of Christ, to be faithful unto death. The distinction made in this fashion disappeared after the violent persecutions of the early Church were over. But the Mass of the Catechumens continues to retain its ancient character of being in part a sort of initiation into the truths of the Christian religion, especially through the Epistles and Gospels. More than the rest of the Mass it emphasizes the truths of religion connected with the special feast of the day, and it helps to link up the general celebration of the Eucharist with these divine truths.

In this final chapter, the Mass of the Catechumens shall be treated only in its function of being introductory or preparatory to the Mass of the Faithful. The latter, as we have seen, is a holy action in which Christ Himself takes part. It is an action performed by the priest officially for the Church, and by all the faithful in union with Him. The more closely the faithful have associated themselves with the priest, and the more intimately they are united among them-

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

selves in mind and soul, and the more they have detached themselves from the thoughts of earth and lifted up their hearts and minds to God, the more perfect will be their celebration of the Eucharist. The Mass of the Catechumens has precisely this object in view, namely, to produce in the faithful the state of mind most suited to celebrating the Eucharist perfectly; to lift their minds from the things of earth to those of God, to purge their hearts of all that is not of God, and further to unite the hearts of those assembled in a unity of holy thoughts and sentiments, so that they may all be of one heart and mind in celebrating the one sacrifice and sacrament. The Mass of the Catechumens should make the faithful more conscious of their relation to God through Christ, and of the bond of unity existing between the individual members of the mystic body of Christ, which is about to celebrate the divine mysteries collectively.

The Mass begins with the "introductory prayers" at the foot of the altar. The priest and the servers recite Psalm 42 alternately. It is a dialog prayer, in which the server, as usual, speaks for the people. This form of dialog prayer continues with more or less emphasis throughout the first part of the Mass of the Catechumens. The keynote of Psalm 42 is given in the verse which is also said as an antiphon before and after the Psalm: "I will go in unto the altar of the Lord." It is a conscious declaration of purpose on the part of priest and people. Knowing the sublimity of the action to be performed on the altar, and the unworthiness of all men, the Mass text most appropriately continues with an official prayer confessing human guilt and asking for forgiveness. The priest

is the first to recite the *Confiteor*. He confesses before God and all the saints that he has sinned, and asks the saints and the people to pray for him. The people respond through the server: "May almighty God have mercy upon thee, and forgive thee thy sins, and bring thee to life everlasting." After the priest's "Amen," the server makes the same confession for himself and the people and receives the same prayer of forgiveness from the priest. Thereupon the priest, speaking officially for all, prays a second time for forgiveness: "May the almighty and merciful Lord grant us pardon, absolution, and remission of our sins."

After a short continuation of the dialog, in which holy prayers are exchanged between priest and server, the priest repeats a prayer for purity of heart, and, kissing the altar, asks that the merits of the saints may aid in accomplishing this: "We beseech Thee, O Lord, by the merits of Thy saints whose relics are here, and of all the saints, that Thou wouldst deign to forgive me all my sins. Amen." The Introit verse is then recited by the priest, and chanted by the choir. It expresses some special thought for the day or feast, or some holy aspiration, which the faithful should take into their hearts. The Kyrie follows, a triple prayer of mercy, directed in turn to each of the divine Persons. The priest alternates with the server in these petitions, while in chanted Masses the choir also sings them. The first, or more negative preparation of mind, that of purgation from sins and faults, has by this time turned into a more positive attitude of spiritual aspiration. The sublime hymn of praise, the Gloria, follows, in which the hearts and minds of priest and people are united with those of

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

the angels in heaven, in singing the praises of the divine Trinity. "We praise, Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee."

All are now prepared for lifting their souls higher and higher in the unity so much desired by Christ. The priest turns to the people with the greeting, "The Lord be with you," and receives the customary answer: "And with thy spirit." Then his "Oremus—Let us pray" exhorts all to join in his official prayer, to which they give their assent by their "Amen," as we have already mentioned. The elevation and sanctification of mind continues by means of the holy instruction of the Lesson or Epistle. The latter is always the inspired word of God taken from the Old or New Testament. It is generally a prophet of the Old or an Apostle of the New Testament, who therein speaks to the people, giving them a holy exhortation, inciting their hearts with the zeal of the Lord, telling them of the great things the Lord will do for all who are faithful. The Epistle concluded, priest and choir proceed with the Gradual or Tract. This is a series of verses that varies with different days, like the Epistle. It consists chiefly of holy aspirations tending to enkindle in the mind a keener ardor for the sacred mysteries of the Lord. The official chant, in sung Masses, is generally at its height musically in the Gradual. Heart and mind are lifted up in a unity of thought and desire that most fittingly prepares them for the great blessing that is to come.

The climax of the formation of soul comes with the Gospel. It is the word of Christ Himself, and out of reverence all the faithful receive it standing. In the customary form of parable, intelligible to the

most simple minds, and attractive to the most cultured, the seeds of divine truth and love are planted in our hearts by Christ Himself. It is the last word of instruction given us in the Mass of the Catechumens. We are now true disciples of Christ and ready for the divine action of the common sacrifice. But with a fine psychological feeling our Mother Church holds us to another step on all the more solemn feasts and occasions, namely, the common recitation of the Credo. In simple phrases the priest and the people make their confession of faith, a fitting transition to the most sublime religious act of that faith. Belief is confessed in God as the Creator of all, in the Father, and in the Son, whose mysteries of redemption are mentioned one by one. How well it is to emphasize these holy mysteries of the Second Person here! Is not the action to follow a renewal of the most solemn acts of His life here on earth? Is he not the connecting link between us and the heavenly Father? A confession of belief in the Holy Ghost, the divine Dispenser of graces, the Sanctifier, completes the Trinity. After the triune God, the Church is properly mentioned, as she is the trusted heir of the divine life and powers, the distributor of the divine unto men; and then the means of the distribution, the liturgy, exemplified in the mention of baptism, through which we indeed "expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen." At the words expressing the mystery of the Incarnation, *et incarnatus est*, all kneel. It is the key-mystery that binds us to God, and the mystery whose accomplishment is represented in the descent of Christ upon the altar for the fulfilment of the very mission for which

MY SACRIFICE AND YOURS

He once became human flesh. With the end of the Credo the Offertory has been reached, and then begins the holy action of sacrifice described in the preceding chapters.

The entire Mass, viewed as the holy action which it is, is seen to be a progressive drama re-enacting the mystery of our Lord's great sacrifice on Calvary. It is rapid in its development. From the preparation of mind and heart in the Mass of the Catechumens, it goes on immediately to the sacrificial act of oblation. The latter proceeds rapidly in three stages, the sublime height of the third stage being ushered in by the Consecration. Thence a short transition prepares for the consummation of the sacrificial act in the Communion, in which our union with Christ our Mediator is sacramentally sealed, and after which a few short prayers bring to a close the entire eucharistic celebration. We have seen that it is an action which is made possible first of all by the sublime Person and sacrifice of Christ, and then by the official priestly powers which Christ our Lord transmits from generation to generation through Apostles and bishops to the priests of the Church. It is fully realized by the co-operation, as active as possible, of the people with the official act of the priest. Thus it best becomes a wider fulfilment of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, the true means of uniting the members of Christ ever more closely to Him, the divine Fountainhead of their life, who is indeed the beginning and the end of all. "To Him be glory and empire forever and ever. Amen" (Apoc. 1, 6).

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