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THE EUCHARIST

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

REV. BEDE LEBBE, O.S.B.

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THE EUCHARIST

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

BY REV. BEDE LEBBE, O.S.B.
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THE EUCHARIST, THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

There is no lack of books, and of good books, on the Eucharist. This little work does not seek to repeat what these have said; it is intended rather to serve as a supplement, or better still, as a preface.

It is not a theological treatise, although I have felt obliged to make more frequent appeal to theology than is usual. We can never have too much doctrinal precision at the basis of our piety, and, to maintain the healthy balance of our life, we must accustom ourselves to put into practice and into love, what the Church makes known to us in her teaching. I shall, therefore, try to show how the doctrine of the Church on the Holy Eucharist can, and indeed must, guide, support and animate our devotion.

It is not a treatise on the Mass, nor on Communion. Why should we so often separate what Christ has united in the institution of His Sacrament of Love? In dealing with the Eucharist, let us take it as it is, Mass and Communion, welded into one whole which constitutes the food of our spiritual life.

The need of giving a clear explanation of some of these points will lead to rather extensive developments, and perhaps to repetitions; but there is, I think, no better way of throwing light on truths which are perhaps unfamiliar, than to look at them repeatedly, from varying angles.

The remarks on some points of theory may appear rather sharp. It seems necessary to adopt this tone in order to accentuate the differences. This does not mean that I take upon myself the right to stand in judgment of what the Church approves. Nor do I necessarily condemn that which seems to me to call for some criticism. The Holy Spirit, who watches over the Church and over each one of her children, preserves pious souls from error, and the fundamental truths which lie even at the points of divergence have allowed piety to find pasture where the direct simplicity of the divine Institution has been obscured by exaggeration or omission. The purpose of these remarks is, then, only to point out where piety may lead some souls to stray into paths diverging from the right road along which the simple and fruitful truths of our Catholic

faith should lead them. I think that, if these deviations were avoided, certain manifestations of adoration and of love (of whose sincerity there can be no doubt), would be rendered more pure and more conformed to the spirit of the institution of Jesus Christ.

The whole aim of this work is to enlighten our souls and to draw practical conclusions from our beliefs; that is, to strengthen the logic and order of our piety, and so to make our spiritual life at the same time more comprehensive and more one. To do this, we must always come back to the essential thing: the Mass. It is true that we are left quite free as to our practices of devotion, our methods of preparation for, and of thanksgiving after, Communion. There are numberless manuals, full of helpful thoughts and prayers, and from this treasury each one may draw what he finds most useful. The effort of our prayer outside the Eucharistic sacrifice is good (visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Hour, etc.), and for some it may be necessary, as we shall show later. Nevertheless, the point I wish to stress is the fundamental disposition, the necessary character which our devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament must assume. Before anything else, we must think of union with Christ and His Church. Instead of making the Eucharist a matter of private devotion, a means of personal sanctification, we must venerate it, receive it, incorporate ourselves with it, that we may enter through it into the great stream of Catholic life, the life of the Church; it must be the consecration of our life, by each one in his own measure, to her interests, which are those most dear to God. It is during Mass that our prayer is directed towards union with God, and it is supported by this union in Communion; it then becomes a divine prayer, accepted by the Father as being the prayer of His Son. We are united by grace to His Spouse, the Church, and to our brethren; in a word, to His Mystical Body: "In His light we shall see light,"¹ and we are enabled to offer to God a worship ever more really based on our Faith—"your reasonable service."²

¹ Ps. 35.

² Rom. 12, 1.

CHAPTER I

THE EUCHARIST

In order to get a true and complete idea of the fundamental role of the Holy Eucharist in our lives, we must first of all realize what it is. A simple statement of the facts which every Catholic believes and professes is enough, it seems to me, to make us understand the place of the Eucharist in the whole of that New Order which our Lord came to establish on this earth, and whose organization and government He has entrusted to His Church. We shall thus at one and the same time establish our devotion on a solid basis and prepare for ourselves the way to a true Eucharistic life.¹

A. THE DIVINE INSTITUTION

Let us first ask ourselves how our Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist, so that we may be able to grasp His whole idea and intention, and thus understand the value of the Sacrament.

Naturally, we shall make no deep study of the exegesis and theology of the Last Supper. Certain characteristic points suffice to show the direction of our thoughts.

1. ITS CONNECTION WITH THE CROSS

The Sacrament of the Bread and Wine has not its full meaning if we take it alone, apart from its context. The words: "Take and eat, this is My Body . . . this is My Blood . . .", even if explained by some verses from the sixth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, do nothing more than offer us a support, an enrichment of our spiritual life, but with no definiteness, and no clear purpose. We must listen to the end: "Do this in memory of Me." At once the direction changes. We had thought the Holy Eucharist to be for us, and now our Lord turns it towards Himself. It is for Him, according to His intention, that we must venerate it, and use it. The horizon has widened. This holy act is bound up with another, with the memory of the Master, which will set its seal upon it and give it all its value. The Eucharist is a memorial, commemorating a definite act. In order to participate in it to the full, we must turn our thoughts from ourselves to fix them on Jesus Christ and on the memory He has just recalled. When we receive Holy Communion apart from the Mass, at some odd

¹For a clear and solid explanation of this point see the splendid work of Abbot Vonier: *A Key to the doctrine of the Eucharist*.

hour of the morning, and follow it by a short thanksgiving which we make under the flag, so to speak, of the love of God, but still with an eye in the first place to our own little secondary human concerns, we are bound to forget that we must "do this in memory of Him." Can we even see, in this isolated act, what it is we are recalling?

2. "IN MEMORY OF ME"

The Apostles themselves did not understand this at once, because the event had not yet taken place. But we have no excuse for not recalling it, for not making it the governing principle of our whole attitude towards the Holy Eucharist. This remembrance must be, no doubt, that of our Savior's august Person itself, the memory of His life, spent for us, of the benefits which flowed unceasingly from His Holy and Venerable Hands¹ and still more from His heart. But, above all, we remember the consummation of that life, the moment of His death, which He called "His Hour." All His life had been consecrated to spreading the knowledge and love of His Father. His mission was and still is, to lead us to the Father. He wished to stress this yet more at the solemn moment of His death: "That the world may know that I love the Father, and that I do the will of the Father..." (St. John, 14, 31). And this is the love which has enkindled the world. Saint Paul, writing after the truth had shone forth for the Apostles, expressed it well in his simple but all-embracing phrase: "As often as you eat of this Bread and drink of this Chalice, you will show forth the death of the Lord till He come" (1 Cor. 11, 26).

The Apostles could not see this on the night of the Last Supper. But today we can see why, in order to recall the memory of His Death, in a symbolic but visible manner, to be easily understood, our Lord divided the gift of Himself, separating the giving of His Body from that of His Blood, at the same time pointing out their redeeming and life-giving properties. "This is My Body, given for you... My Blood, shed for the remission of sins." This act of Redemption was to be accomplished, once for all, upon the Cross; but, in memory and in imitation of the Master, the Apostles and their successors would represent His Death (in the true sense of the Latin word *representare*—to make present again). They would gather its fruits, and at the moment of receiving that Body, given for them, they would give themselves to Him with ever more ardent love.

¹ Words accompanying the Consecration, in the Roman rite.

In the works of God there are no conflicting interests. The Scripture says that "God has done all things for Himself" (Prov. 16, 4); yet Saint Paul could write to the Corinthians: "All the works of God are for you" (2 Cor. 4, 15), because our happiness is derived from the glory of God, and can be found only in Him.

"By Thee, O Lord, may this sacrifice be hallowed, which Thou hast appointed to be in such wise offered up to the glory of Thy name, that it may remain to us for a healing medicine in all our ills" (Secret for 10th Sunday after Pentecost).

The Holy Eucharist is offered for the glory of God, to render Him the homage which is His due, in memory of the offering of His Son, through which He received "all honor and glory." But this offering of the Son redeemed us, and through the Eucharist it continues to nourish our new life.

The link between these two ends is our union with Christ, which is brought about by the Eucharist. In order to glorify His Father, not only without neglecting our happiness, but indeed by causing it, our Lord draws us to share His divine work and so makes of this Sacrament the sovereign good of our souls, the most perfect gift of His love. In it He has "loved us to the end" (St. John 13, 1).

3. THE EUCHARIST, MEANS TO AN END

The Last Supper cannot be explained without the Cross. Of itself it concludes nothing. It looks forward into the future, just as our celebration of it looks back into the past. It is a commemoration, complete in itself only by what it represents. It is not the Passion, but it tends to the same purpose. It repeats it and continues to apply its divine efficacy. It would be nothing of itself, but it offers to the Church, and to each of us, a marvelous means of keeping united to that source of life which is the Cross, and of maintaining in our hearts those dispositions with which Jesus Christ offered for us, and in our name, His sacrifice to the Father.

I have insisted on this point, because it has happened that, in order to celebrate the great gift of the Eucharist with more gratitude and fervor, some have fallen into dangerous excesses. "The Eucharist," it has been said, "precedes Calvary in point of time, and even of importance, and follows it up forever; so that Calvary is an episode of the Eucharist, and *is inside the Institution.*" This last assertion could with difficulty be cleared of the charge of heresy, and I hasten to add that the anonymous pamphlet in which it occurs bears no editor's name and has never been put into public cir-

culatation. I have, however, thought fit to quote it as one can see in it a reflection, magnified and distorted perhaps, of certain exaggerations, which, in exalting the Mass, seem to put it in some way above the sacrifice of the Cross.

There are contemporary authors who give to the Mass an almost exclusively sacrificial value and show, intentionally or not, a tendency to lessen the value of the immolation of Calvary; to subordinate Calvary to the Last Supper, even going so far as to assert that without the Last Supper the sacrificial character of the Cross would not be understood. But the Scriptures, the Liturgy and Tradition of the Church are unanimous in giving the first place, the uncontested supremacy, to the bloody sacrifice of Christ, by which He merited for us Redemption and grace. The effects and the constant application of this sacrifice are quite another matter. This work is prolonged throughout the ages, from the Cross into Eternity, when, after the Judgment, the Son will restore to the Father the Church of His elect, so that henceforth "God may be all in all."

The Eucharist, the supreme effort of Christ's love for us, is therefore, if we may so speak, but a preliminary step. It remains always a human benefit; I mean one adapted to the present condition of man; a material means, destined to supply our needs in this world. It will end with time. There is no place for the Eucharist in heaven. It has therefore but a relative value. It is a divinely ordained means to an end, but it is still only a means, and therefore must not be sought after for itself. Its purpose is to guarantee our complete and definite life, which is our return to our beginning—the Father. And how is this done? By uniting us to the Son, so that we take as our own His thoughts and feelings, abandoning all into His Hands, living as He did, "propter Patrem," for His Father and our Father (St. John 6).

4. THE SACRIFICE TO THE FATHER

We must now make more clear what were these dispositions of Christ of which we have spoken. His whole life was one act of adoration and submission to the Father. Saint Paul, in the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, shows Him coming into the world and proclaiming His program. "Behold, I come; in the head of the Book it is written of Me, that I should do Thy Will, O God; sacrifice and oblation and holocaust for sin Thou wouldst not, neither are they pleasing to Thee. . . then I said: Behold I come to do Thy Will, O God" (Heb. 10, 7. 9).

One would like to recall here the visions of Saint Gertrude, so rich in imagery, and at the same time so profound in doctrine. She sees the Sacred Heart of our Lord, not yet as later visions will represent it, sadly inviting us to prayer and penance, but showing us how to adore. She sees it as a golden altar whereon is offered to the Father an acceptable sacrifice; as a harp, which, moved by the Spirit of God, sings His praises; a lamp, shining for His glory; a censor from which rises the perfume of adoration.

All His life He was thus united to the will of His Father. We were already in Him, through His love, and He drew us with Him in His obedience. But this was still invisible, hidden in the intimacy of His life with the Father. The moment came when this offering became concrete, when He could prove to the world His obedience by immolating Himself to atone for the offences offered to the Father; when, at the same time, His holiness would be poured out upon us; when His love for us would go to the extreme limit; when He would admit us into the sanctuary of His love, there to live and act as He did, to the glory of the Father. It was to sanctify us that He offered His Body and shed His Blood upon the Cross. "The will of the Father," says Saint Paul again, "has sanctified us forever by the offering of the Body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10, 10). The Cross was the sacrifice, the one sacrifice, visible and material—for all sacrifice must be material, it cannot be merely interior and personal, being of necessity a corporate and ritual act. He associated His Church with His sacrifice on the eve of it: "*priusquam pateretur.*" It would have been too late to do so afterwards. While He offered us His Body and Blood to be our nourishment, all His love was poured out upon us, all His Will was to sanctify us, to identify us with Himself as co-sacrificers and co-sharers. And that there might remain no doubt, He willed that, as on Calvary, there should be an immolation, an anticipated manifestation of His Body offered and His Blood shed. He offered the representation of this Sacrifice, at once both symbol and reality, to which He gave all its value in commanding that it should be repeated after Him in memory of Him.¹

It is, therefore, only with reserve that we should make use of such expressions as: "Our Lord comes upon our altars to give Himself to us." This is true, but were we to stop there, the truth would not be complete, it would be but half a truth. It would seem to

¹ See Abbot Vonier, *Sketches and Studies in Theology*, London 1940: Concepts of Commemoration and Immolation, pp. 62-72.

make of mankind alone the sole object of the Eucharist and to limit the marvels of Christ's love to the special personal benefits we derive from it. He loved us, miserable sinners, with a boundless love. In spite of our unworthiness He comes to us, to pour into us the treasures of His Heart. It is our right and our duty to have recourse to this love in this Sacrament which He has so marvelously adapted to our human needs, and in which our heart's desire for love can find full satisfaction. But do not let us set limits to His divine intentions; let us enter wholeheartedly into them and associate ourselves generously with His work.¹ He comes to give Himself to us indeed, but it is that we may, with Him, give ourselves to the Father. He does not come merely to form with us a contract of friendship whose only effect would be the enjoyment of that friendship, and perhaps some personal benefit to our own soul. His intentions are far higher, and more beneficent. He comes to take possession of us, to divinise us, to quicken and to steady our progress in the spiritual life. He comes to teach us how to make of ourselves a sacrifice of adoration, a constantly repeated act of donation and of conformity to the Father's will. Thus He will lead us to our true life, that of eternal glory. His work is not completed, and the Eucharistic offering is not a final resting place. He comes to continue working within us, that He may one day offer us with Himself to the Father.

B. THE PLACE OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

If, at the time, the Apostles were not able to understand the full significance of the great act, we can see nevertheless how, after our Lord had ascended into heaven, they carried out what He asked them, with a sureness of touch which has fixed the practice of the Church for all time.

1. A COMMUNAL ACT

From the very first they gathered the faithful around them for the "Breaking of Bread." This was the repetition of the solemn meeting in the Cenacle. There is no ground for supposing that they ever celebrated in private. The Eucharist was the natural assembly of the young community. As the numbers of the faithful increased they grouped themselves 'by houses', but it was always among them, and for them, that the Apostles re-enacted the Sacrifice of Christ.

¹ See Abbot Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, pp. 362-365, and the whole chapter on the Sacred Heart (Sands & Co., 1924).

2. A CENTER OF UNITY

And this was natural. The Eucharist was the bond of their union. If, when but just converted, the first Christians formed a community welded together as a mutual affection and devotedness hitherto unknown, and if, for several centuries, this community remained faithful to its traditions, so that even the pagans marveled, it was because they had taken as their rule of life the commandment of the Master: "Love one another as I have loved you." Now the great act of the love of Christ had been, and was still each day; His sacrifice offered for them, and now offered with them. Their union was the outcome of their union with Christ, which made them live for each other as He had lived for all. The same life animated the whole body, and this life was sustained by the Eucharist.

3. THE GREAT "MEANS"

And this it was that fixed the place of the Eucharist in their lives and continues unbroken the work of Christ—to lead us to the Father: "I am the Way."

The early Christians understood this. Their love of Jesus Christ was full of the ardor of youth, their belief in His divinity clear and unshakable. But never in their Eucharistic piety do we see anything that could be considered as worship of Christ. I mean a worship which turned their thoughts and their practice principally and finally to the adoration of Christ as the end and purpose of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The name of "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" given to God is already frequent in the writings of Saint Paul. Primitive Liturgies give thanks to the Father for the gift of His Son. "We give Thee thanks for Thy Holy Son...for the holy Vine of David." They thank Him for having united, in Christ, mankind, who had been scattered like the grains of wheat of which is made the Eucharistic Bread. But these prayers which breathe forth such love for the Son always end by recalling the incommunicable glory of the Father. "For Thine, O Father, is the glory...." They cannot tarry on the road. Christ is the Way; their journey, sustained by the Sacrament, must end by bringing them to the Father.

And, on the other hand, how well the early Christians understood that Christ gave Himself to them under this simple form to facilitate their intimacy with Him. With what loving familiarity do they not treat the Eucharist. Not only do they take it into their hands, they kiss it, they lift it to their eyes before partaking of it, they carry it to their homes for the days when they will be unable to assist at the celebration of the holy Mysteries. Later they will

adopt the practice of bearing it about with them or on their persons as a protection. Saint Benedict ordered the sacred Host to be placed as a sign of forgiveness and blessing upon the body of a young monk who died outside his monastery in an act of disobedience. The old French epic of the Aliscans tells of the first Communion of little Vivien, during the terrible battle against the Saracens. His uncle, the noble Count William of Orange, has carried the boy, mortally wounded, to the shade of a tree, and kneeling beside him he says: "I have here in my wallet some of the Bread, consecrated by the priest at the Mass; wouldst thou not taste of it?"

No, they did not look upon the Eucharist only as an object of adoration, nor as the end or termination of anything whatsoever. It was theirs, given to them that they might sanctify themselves through Christ. It was to accompany them throughout their lives and afterwards open to them the gates of the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER II

THE EUCHARIST IN OUR LIVES

I should like to return to this fundamental idea concerning the Eucharist, to show that it is the life of our life. "*Vivere Deo de Deo*," to live for God by God; by the God of the Eucharist for the God of heaven to whom the Eucharist, that is to say, the Mass, renders a perfect worship.

A. THE SACRIFICE

Just as sacrifice is the supreme and principal act of all religion, so the Holy Mass is the most important act in the life of the Church and of all Christians. Its influence would, therefore, be felt throughout our whole life. It is not enough to assist with respect and devotion when it is offered in our churches, and then to draw near to the Holy Table in another supremely important act, but one which is after all, quite different. It cannot but be harmful thus to break the unity of the Institution. It turns us aside from the right road.

There are two moments of the Mass I should like to stress, as they lose their full value for us when we look upon Mass and Communion as two distinct actions, even if we do succeed in including one within the other in point of time.

1. THE COVENANT

At the most solemn moment of the Consecration, the Church puts upon our lips words which seem full of mystery. Although inspired by the Gospels and the Epistles of Saint Paul, they do not form part of the actual Gospel narrative, and this very fact shows how great is the importance which the Church, our Mother and Mistress, attaches to them. "*This is the Chalice of My Blood, of the new and eternal Covenant.*"

We cannot doubt that these last words refer to the first Mosaic Covenant made by God with the Jewish people and sealed by the blood of the sacrifices offered on Mount Sinai. To assist at Mass is, therefore, to be witness to an act of alliance, and that not merely as a spectator. It is to accept the new and eternal alliance which, through Jesus Christ, the Father concludes with redeemed man, a Covenant which is to last forever.

Now the making of the alliance includes two fundamental ideas: the agreement to work for the common good of the contracting

parties, and a guarantee given by some accepted pledge. The common interest here is God's glory. To assist at Mass is to assent to the act of Christ who sanctifies mankind by consecrating it to the service of the Father. As for the pledge, God has already given it. As in the first Covenant, He has given the pledge of blood, the Blood of His only Son. But we, we have nothing. We can but receive Christ, and unite ourselves with Him, and then offer Him, and ourselves with Him, so that we can give a pledge equal in value to that of our Partner.

The Mass thus requires Communion to give it its meaning as an act of religion, as an act of divine worship.

2. "BY HIM AND WITH HIM AND IN HIM"

The Canon of the Mass ends on a note of triumphant and joyful homage. We, poor creatures, finite and imperfect, using the words the Church puts on our lips, declare with assurance that we give to God, "to Thee, O Father Almighty... all honor and glory." How is this possible? Solely as the Church says: "By Him and with Him and in Him"—in Him, the Christ, the Eucharist which the priest holds in his hands as he utters these bold words.

Who, then, does not realize that in order to pay this homage in order to fulfill, as we now see we can fulfill, our last end, which is to render to God a fitting honor and worship, we must be really one with Christ?

And here again the Church leads us to Communion. What we say with the priest, we must realize in ourselves, we must unite ourselves to Christ by communion in the same sacrifice.¹

B. COMMUNION

And now we have reached the moment for which every loving heart has been longing, the consummation of the Sacrifice. All that we have said and heard and seen during the Mass is about to take place in our souls. The Mystery of Redemption and Sanctification is about to enter into our life.

Sancti, venite, Christi corpus sumite

*Sanctum bibentes quo redempti sanguinem.*²

What, then, are the fruits, what the significance of Communion?

¹ The prayer after the Consecration, "Supplices te rogamus," is very clear on this point: "We most humbly beseech Thee... that so many of us as at this Altar shall partake of and receive the most holy Body and Blood of Thy Son may be filled with every benediction and grace."

² Come, saints of God (that is, the faithful), receive the Body of Christ, drink the precious Blood which has ransomed you (Hymn of the old Irish Church before Communion).

1. ITS FUNDAMENTAL WORK

We receive the Eucharist in the form of food. Throughout the ages the Fathers of the Church and all spiritual writers have vied with one another in emphasizing the difference between this food and material food; whereas we assimilate the latter, transforming it into our substance, the Eucharist transforms us into itself.

Let us try to grasp this doctrine in its simple and literal meaning.

The natural utilitarianism of our piety often makes us see in this assimilation to Christ a reception of grace with a view to the helping on of our spiritual life. But this life is looked upon chiefly as a system of virtues to be acquired by a laborious asceticism. In this view, one would communicate in order to become more perfect, or to remain fervent. Is it an exaggeration to say that this perfection, although subjected to God's commandments, is nevertheless considered as on a human plane; that it is chiefly the human virtues, justice, chastity, courage, which we put in the forefront and which we seek to strengthen by means of divine grace (when indeed we do not give the first place in our minds to petitions for temporal favors)?

Naturally, these virtues are far from negligible things, and the Eucharist remains the most powerful means of strengthening us in our struggle to obtain them. But to begin by that, often to limit oneself to that, is to make of it a means analogous to prayer, springing, no doubt, from a source of infinitely superior efficacy, but still a means towards the same kind of effect.

The action of the Sacrament is far deeper. The special graces we seek from it, and which we are justified in expecting from it, are but the overflow from an outpouring of more essential grace; they are the final effect, but not the cause which produces them. By Baptism we have been raised to a new nature, to the supernatural order. We have been brought into the divine life through our adoption in Christ Jesus. This first sacrament obliges us to live "as gods"; that is to say, for God, and in a manner worthy of God. But it gives us the right to find in the other sacraments the graces which sustain, form, develop and restore the new nature according to which we should think and act. In this sacramental system the Eucharist is a divine help given to our divinised life. This help is in itself but an infusion of sanctifying grace such as every sacrament produces. The Eucharist reaches the inner depths of the soul; our life is intensified

and strengthened, our transformation into Christ is furthered, and grace produces in us acts conformed to His life.

Now let us understand this by turning our thoughts towards the Sacrifice during which we have received the Eucharist. In it Jesus offers Himself to God for us. He makes it the supreme act of His life for the Father. Our participation, made complete by Communion, must make us live by Christ and for Christ—that is, it must enable us to accomplish His mission with Him by making us capable of “divinised” acts, acceptable to the Father, whose children we have become, and by giving us the strength to put into practice our firm resolution of living for Him, of seeking “first the kingdom of heaven.”¹

2. UNION

(a) *Twofold Fruit of the Sacraments.*

It is well to remind ourselves here that, in the soul that puts no obstacle in the way, every sacrament produces, *ex opere operato*, that is, of itself, a double effect.

First, it confers or increases sanctifying grace, as we have just shown. We have explained how, in the Holy Eucharist, this is as much as to say that it perfects in us the likeness of Christ, the divine nature infused into us by Baptism, and enables us to act ever more conformably to our dignity as members of Christ.

But the Sacrament has also a second effect. The first is common to all the sacraments, the second special, differing for each. It is the very purpose of its institution; for, if there are seven sacraments, and not one only, it is precisely with a view to these specific graces destined to help us in the various aspects of our Christian life. It is, therefore, often called sacramental grace; but it is in fact the same sanctifying grace, but producing a special effect. A fresh air cure

¹ The words of our Lord, quoted by Saint John (6, 58), are given in the Douai version as: *propter me*, thus making the almost inevitable choice between the two causalities which the Greek preposition *dia* includes: the efficient cause, “by Me,” as well as the final cause “for Me.” The Westminster version renders the words “because of Me” which combines the two meanings. So also does the English translation of the commentary of Cornelius a Lapide, though the explanation given by the latter favors the idea of “by Me,” i.e., the efficient cause. The comparison which precedes these words in the Gospel: “As the Father has sent Me, and I live for (or by) the Father” (*di’ auton* in the Greek), can, and must, in some measure, be taken in both ways. Christ lives the life of His Father by His Father, but He lives also to do His Father’s will, for His Father. It seems to me that we are justified in concluding from this fact that the effect of the Eucharist is in the same manner to assimilate our lives to that of Christ in relation to the Father. Henceforth we live by Him, and should live for Him. But if the choice has absolutely to be made between the two renderings “by Me” or “for Me,” the context would lead us to prefer “for Me,” because the comparison used by our Lord refers to the mission He has received from the Father, which is to procure the Father’s glory. He came into this world and lived in it, only “for” His Father.

strengthens the general health; but in one district it is more beneficial to the heart, in another to the nerves. All who have profited by the fresh air experience a general improvement; but the one returns with a sounder heart, the other with calmer nerves. Is this particular effect an habitual grace entitling the soul to receive the special helps offered by the sacrament? Or is it simply a succession of actual graces? The question is disputed by theologians, and I think that, for the development of practical devotion, it has little importance.

(b) *Graces of Charity Produced by the Eucharist.*

What is important here, and it is a point to which we can never give too much attention, is that the special effect of the most blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist is an increase of charity; that is, of the love of God. It is in very truth the sacrament of love, the supreme proof of the love of Christ for us, and the most powerful means of enkindling in us a return of love.

Divine charity is always present in our souls (though often more or less dulled), whenever we are in a state of grace. It follows necessarily on sanctifying grace, and it increases by the infusion of this grace at each Communion. But more than this, the Sacrament makes it operative within us, enabling us to perform acts of love. It is no more a question of a simple general disposition to will what God wills; by this wonderful grace, if we are ready to cooperate with it, our soul is lovingly directed towards God, it sees better His beauty and goodness, it seeks His friendship. It finds in Him its repose and happiness. Each well-made Communion is thus followed by acts of love, of gratitude, submission, of desire and of delight in God. God is nearer to us, and our life is illuminated and strengthened by what Saint Thomas calls "the enjoyment of spiritual sweetness."

This expression, however, must not deceive us. There may be in all this none of that sensible sweetness for which we are so eager and to which we attach too great a value. We may sometimes think—perhaps often—that we are cold and indifferent, that our communion has not been fervent, and yet we have made these acts of love of which we have just spoken. The fervor of this love does not consist in feelings, although it may flow over into them, and so become 'sensible'. It lies essentially in the will which tends more strongly and ardently towards God, it longs for Him above all else, and rests peacefully in Him as one rests when one has found a treasure. The soul desires nothing better than to abide with Him, to enjoy Him,

that is, to use for God the graces received, to live henceforward in conformity to God's will as a true child and friend of God. It is, therefore, by its fruits—by the greater purity and docility of our lives, by our zeal in the fulfilment of our duties, by our placing God above all else—that we can judge of the reality of the love within us. Acts of virtue are made more easily, and the most ordinary actions of the day are performed for God, who has thus enkindled in us the fire of His love.

(c) *Union.*

This transformation by love into the likeness of Christ whom we have received in the Sacrament is also called by another name: Union—Union with Christ.

Whatever may be the material oneness resulting from the act of Communion, we must nevertheless understand this union in its spiritual sense. The word too easily awakes in our minds the picture of two friends who rejoice in each other's company, who spend their hours of work and of leisure together, and is never thought of apart from the joyful emotion of friendship. But between Christ and ourselves all is spiritual, and if this spiritual union may, as it often does, bring about a sensible joy, this is merely a secondary thing. It may not be felt, but this does not make the union less real or less fruitful. The essential thing is the spiritual union by which we deliberately will to think and act as Christ thought and acted. To be united to God and to His Christ means, therefore, to feed our minds on the truths He has revealed to us; to form our thoughts to a life of Faith; to meditate on the divine perfections, on the marvels of the divine life unveiled for us by Christ in the mystery of the Trinity; on the unfathomable goodness of God shown in our creation, in the Incarnation, in the whole life of the Church. It means, to fill our hearts with the contemplation of His beauty, of His glory, of His greatness. It is to think as Christ thought on all the questions of public and private life, on religion, family, justice, on all human intercourse, on happiness and sorrow, on our duties and on our joys. It is to will what He willed, to approve of that which He has told us is good, and to seek and to spread His kingdom; to love those He loves, to interest ourselves in them, to overcome ourselves daily in order to serve Him better. In a word, it is to seek and fulfil the will of God in all things.

All this can be done, and is often done, in our souls without our experiencing any sensible joy. Father Mateo Crawley-Bovey, in a book which is the echo of his burning eloquence, complains:

"I protest angrily against those who say that all love is sentimentality."¹ It is by our works that our love is to be recognized, not by the joy which that love may bring us.

It would be well, then, to explain this word *sentimentality* once and for all. Its meaning is clear, but its application is often elusive. Without wishing to define it, one could reach a fairly accurate explanation by saying that a sentiment or feeling is the movement of sensibility (fear, love, etc.) confronted by a real object presented to it by reason. Sentimentality, on the other hand, flings itself into emotion without seeking to justify itself by either reality or reason.

This distinction is especially marked—but with most important results—in matters of religion. True sentiment must rest on Faith. Sentimentality, without definitely excluding Faith, has no recourse to it, but feeds itself on side issues appealing to the senses and to human emotions. Sentiment needs truth to enable it to develop; sentimentality prefers the striking picture, the exciting exaggeration. On the subject of the Eucharist, with which we are here concerned, we find a harassing insistence on its sensible and human aspect. "The Mass," we are told, "does not speak to the heart"—we want to go back to the human Christ, to His human heart, to His natural affections, to the sufferings of His mortal life which we look upon as being lived through again in the Tabernacle, and it is on such ideas that we base our love and our devotion.²

This is to take the wrong road. We cannot love God, nor even Jesus Christ, in the same way as we love men. The latter have possible bodies through which their impressions pass to the soul. They suffer, they are hurt by other men and by exterior circumstances. God is pure Spirit and the glorified Christ cannot suffer either in His body or in His soul. The remembrance of His past sufferings must arouse our emotions, make us feel our unworthiness and our ingratitude; but our love for Him must go beyond this. From the feelings we must pass to the oblation of the will, and not forget the latter in the tumult of our sighs and groans.

If our love afterwards finds an outlet in the feelings and takes hold of our heart of flesh, so much the better; there is no danger in

¹ F. Mateo Crawley-Bovey: *Jesus, King of Love*. Third edition, 1939.

² See, for instance, the chapter headed: "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament" in Father Mateo's *The King of Love*. In it the author represents our Lord as suffering and humiliated in the Tabernacle. (There is no question of Holy Mass.) "The Tabernacle is still the prison of Holy Thursday. Surely the darkest and most terrible amongst the darkest hours of Jesus are those He spent during the Agony in the Garden, and those of His Eucharistic life." (The italics are mine.) And yet next to this are such excellent chapters—for example, on Faith and the Spirit of Truth. If only this latter doctrine were applied throughout the whole book!

that. But sentimentality tends to make us stop at the emotion of human love for the Man, Christ Jesus.

It may be thought that certain theologians, such for example as Dom Graham,¹ are too dry and cold; but one can understand the reactions of a serious mind against the floods of sentimentalism. There is enough in self-oblation, in the need to lose ourselves in God, to render Him love for love, in the contemplation of His greatness and of the ineffable mercy of the intercession of Jesus Christ, and in the grand and simple yet complete memorial of His Passion—to satisfy a heart hungry for love, a heart which longs only to love and to make love its life.

We can say in another way that this union, effected by the Sacrament, is brought about by an increase in the theological virtues of Faith and Charity. They are called theological, that is divine, because, unlike the moral virtues, which a moment ago I called 'human', they have God Himself for their object. They unite us directly to Him. The moral virtues perfect our human qualities and only enter into our new life, our supernatural life, when attuned to that life; that is, when made fruitful by grace and directed towards God as a means of imitating our Savior, and of forming His image in ourselves.

The first thing, then, that we must do in our Communions is to unite ourselves to Christ by Faith and Love. We must make these two virtues our chief aim and seek with a firm will and ardent love to adhere to God by Faith and to increase in Charity. To souls thus united to Him, God will naturally give the special graces of the virtues, the particular help and support called for by our daily needs.

This, then, is the union brought about by the Eucharist. It gives grace to will and to understand as Christ did, to know and love Him better. Proofs are not wanting to show that this is the special purpose of the Sacrament. There is, in the first place, the outward sign itself. The Eucharist is given to us in the form of food; that is, by assimilation, which is the most perfect form of union between natural substances. Hence its name: Communion. Then there is the ceremonial rite. Into the liturgical setting of each sacrament the Church has introduced prayers and ceremonies which open the mind and dispose the heart for the reception of each special grace. In the case of the Eucharist, the abbreviated ceremonies of a Low Mass, and still more, of Communion distributed apart from the

¹ Dom Elred Graham, *The Love of God*, London, 1935.

Mass, do not always enable us to see these signs. But of old, the full Eucharistic rite included the offering by the faithful of the bread and wine destined for the Sacrifice. In this act the people showed that their gift, representing themselves, would be changed into Christ. Even today, the mingling of the water with the wine and the marvelous prayer which accompanies this act express still more clearly the truth of our union with Christ. The kiss of peace which precedes the Communion, the movement of the worshippers advancing side by side to the Holy Table, all remind us that we must, by and in this Sacrament, unite ourselves to our brethren, as we shall later explain at greater length.

(d) *Duration of the Sacramental Action in the Soul.*

At what moment does the Sacrament produce grace in our souls? How long do the special effects of this grace last? These may seem to be but idle questions; but they have a repercussion in practice which should not be overlooked. Inaccurate ideas may lead either to scruples or to superstition. These inaccuracies may not be important in themselves; they do not endanger our piety; but they do prevent us from co-operating with grace as fully as we could do if our judgment were more sound. We commit no fault; but we fail to gather from the Sacrament all the fruit we could.

The grace of the Sacrament is produced in our souls at the moment we "eat" the sacred Host, since the complete sign is the feeding of our souls. The objection has been raised that just as the mere fact of eating does not suffice to nourish us, so, in the spiritual order, the production of grace must continue so long as the Sacred Species remains within us. This comparison, however, does not hold good. To press home an analogy between material and spiritual life often leads to impossible consequences. It is true that our material food does not nourish us at the moment we eat it, but only after a long period of digestion. To compare the action of the Eucharist to this physiological process would lead us to say that the action of grace is only felt after the destruction of the species, that is, after the disappearance of the Real Presence—a view which no one would admit. We say we have eaten or received food when we have not only taken it into our mouths but have swallowed it.

It is clear, then, that if the Sacred Host had been placed into the mouth, but could not be swallowed, and had been rejected, there would be no Communion, and no production of sacramental grace. Therefore it is a mistake, or should I say, merely childish, to wish to keep the Host a long time in the mouth, as though some special

grace were thus prolonged. To show their respect and their love for the Eucharist, the early Christians, as we have said, held the Host to their eyes and their lips; but directly afterwards they put it into their mouths and swallowed it.

We must now see the counterpart of this doctrine. Once produced in the soul, how long does the sacramental grace remain?

We are not here speaking of the profit we derive from Communion in the fervor, the greater fidelity, which has been its fruit. It is with a view to such things that we approach all the sacraments, for which we undertake any work of piety; they constitute our spiritual progress. They are not sacramental grace, but the result of co-operation with that grace. Neither are we dealing with the increase of sanctifying grace. By its very nature this is infused into our souls without limit of time, and can be lost only by mortal sin.

The point upon which all do not agree is the duration within us of the special grace of the Sacrament, its particular effect, which consists chiefly in establishing a living union between ourselves and Jesus Christ. I think that, even here, there would be little hesitation if some theologians had not wished to set up a certain relation of casuality, arising from coincidence of time, between the Real Presence and sacramental grace. It is not possible, they say, that this intimate contact with the sacred humanity of our Savior should not be for us a source of grace. Therefore they think that as long as the sacramental species remain within us, they continue to produce grace. I cannot but see in this opinion a confusion between actual, ordinary and accidental graces on the one hand, and sacramental grace on the other, and even between the Real Presence and this same sacramental grace. Yet all agree that the Real Presence is Christ, God and Man, Body and Soul, substantially present under the species. It is brought about by the words of consecration; begins as soon as these have been pronounced, and ends with the disappearance or destruction of the species. The grace or action of the Sacrament is a quite different thing: it is the divine action of Christ, that is the communication of the divine life to the soul in greater or less measure, and not simple accidental or actual graces of increased fervor. It is effected when we receive the Sacrament, and only then. The accidents or species which are the necessary support of the Real Presence are the means by which the sacramental grace is given to us. But that this grace may be produced, the complete reception of the Sacrament is necessary; we must *communicate*. It is at the moment we receive the Eucharist, and only by this very definite

and limited action, that this grace is conferred. Mere contact with the sacred species, however close it may be, has no power to produce sacramental grace.

And this is the point on which the theologians disagree. It seems, however, perfectly clear to me, that at the very moment we receive Communion the sacramental grace is given us in full. The species remain within us only as a consequence of natural laws. They have fulfilled their essential role, and could disappear without depriving the soul of the graces of sanctification it has sought in the Eucharist, that spiritual presence of Christ which is the sacramental grace. This, of its nature, once received remains with us always. If we regulate the time spent within us (and we little know how long that is), we risk being drawn into mere imagination and sentimentalism. This contact with the species does not differ from that of the Host upon our tongues; there is no essential difference between it and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or, if we prefer, the great privilege enjoyed by the priest who can hold the sacred Host to his breast as he carries it to the sick; and still more, when he takes it in his hands at the Mass, or when he distributes Holy Communion. This contact, this nearness of the sacred humanity, cannot, if we are attentive and devout, but bring us actual and passing graces; but it does not constitute the reception of the Sacrament. These actual graces consist especially in a greater recollection, due to the thought of God so close to us; they act chiefly on the imagination, but they are not the sacramental grace, which, we repeat, is only produced by the act of communicating. Therefore, to attach too much importance to the preservation of the sacred species in us is to think more of an accidental, sensible and material contact than of the vital grace with which we must collaborate, and which is purely spiritual.

Therefore, to put the matter in another way, we may consider the special fruit of the Eucharist to be either a habitual grace, or a succession of actual graces. If we reduce it to the latter, we must say that they are bestowed upon us according to our needs, and they are bestowed in virtue of the Sacrament; that is, of the outward sign, as Christ instituted it. "Take and eat, this is My Body." Why, then, should the prolongation of the Real Presence be their cause? One might as well attribute them to a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or to the carrying of a consecrated Host. The Sacrament is received by eating, not by a mere contact, even interior. The duration of the grace in the soul depends only upon its own nature. If,

on the other hand, sacramental grace is nothing else than sanctifying or habitual grace but producing a special effect, it cannot be lost except by sin, and is not limited by time or by any other agent than the will of man.¹

There are, to my mind, other strong reasons for denying that the duration of the sacramental grace is connected with that of the Real Presence in our souls.

(1) If the effect of this grace is not indefinite and unlimited in duration, what is true of the Eucharist must be true of the other sacraments. But what sets the limits for these? Is it the character, that ineffable mark upon the soul, which gives us a perpetual right to the graces of the Sacrament? But only three sacraments set this seal on the soul. What can put a limit to the special grace of Matrimony, or of Extreme Unction, and especially of Penance, which can be so frequently repeated?

(2) One is often led to absurd conclusions. The strength or weakness of digestion of the communicant and also the size of the hosts would of themselves determine the duration of grace in the soul.² In the rather frequent case of an invalid who rejects the sacred species almost immediately after communion, the patient would be deprived of the special grace of the Sacrament.

(3) Finally, the effect of the Eucharist would be limited to showing us the way, to clearing the path, imparting to our life of union its first movement only. The rest would be our own work, and would no longer come under the causal influence of the Sacrament. Our Eucharistic life would be confined to the passing acts of the morning, to the time of preparation, reception and thanksgiving.³ After this the sacramental grace would be withdrawn until the next Communion.

How much more worthy of Divine Providence, how much more in keeping with the very nature of the sacraments, is that full sacramental life of which we have been speaking. Springing from a living fountain, it is ever in contact with the permanent "deifying" action of grace in our souls.

I shall, for the moment, only point out one result of this. "Spiritual Communion," a practice so fruitful and so often recommended to us, should be not merely an act of our will, a desire, a longing;

¹ Dom Marmion *Christ the Life of the Soul*. "Panis Vitae," p. 281.

² Tanqueray, *Synopsis*, t. III de Eucharistia, does not hesitate to admit this.

³ In fact, sacramental union has been spoken of as consisting of "a few fleeting instants." P. Canice, *Mary, a Study of the Mother of God*, p. 172.

it can and should be a renewal of the grace of the Eucharist still living in us. Its efficacy is divine, arising from our participation in the Passion of Christ, through our reception of the Sacrament. Would not this thought urge us to multiply our spiritual communions?

We are, it is true, encouraged to receive Communion daily. This may make us think that it is necessary to give, as it were, some new impetus to sanctifying grace, to enable it to renew in us the special effects of the Eucharist. The expression must be forgiven, for how can I define what tomorrow's Communion has to renew in the soul that has communicated today, since it is recognized that the fundamental grace of the Sacrament is still present? I do not speak of the analogy so often drawn with our daily meals. It has always seemed to me defective, for who is content with but one meal a day? The reasons for frequent Communion must be sought elsewhere, and I think that they are not hard to find.

(1) Sanctifying grace is still ours, indeed, but it is increased by each Communion, and at the same time the special effects of which we have spoken are increased. Although there may be no necessity, no pressing need to multiply our Communions, surely our love would urge us to draw ever more close the bonds of our union with Jesus Christ, and so to develop His life within us.

(2) We must collaborate with grace in order to receive its specific fruit. But our fervor soon grows cold, it evaporates, our good dispositions are apt to wither away. The external act of Communion reanimates them, and with the active co-operation comes a renewed influx of grace.

(3) The Real Presence of Christ in our souls after Communion revives our reverence and our devotion, just as we pray better before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. It is not for nothing that the sacraments are sensible signs. Our piety often needs a stimulant, and we can derive great profit from such. They are only harmful when used to excess, or when we stop there, when we consider that the sensible joy we experience is the real fruit of the sacrament, or that our Communions are good in proportion to the happiness they bring us.

(4) In this sense, too, our devotion, which Saint Thomas calls a "spiritual delectation" and which in his opinion is one of the effects of the Sacrament, is greater in the moments after Communion, during our thanksgiving. We must not neglect this, for it may be an efficacious help in our spiritual life.

(5) Finally, one of the effects of the Sacrament is to remit venial sins. As we fall into these every day, this alone should make us eager for our daily Communion.

From these few points, it is clear that the arguments in favor of frequent Communion are chiefly on the side of man, not on that of God, nor drawn from the efficacy of the Sacrament itself. Hence arises the paradox, so often noted by spiritual writers, that a fervent soul who continues to co-operate with the grace received has less need of frequent Communion than one who is tepid. Saint Theresa, too, says somewhere that a single Communion should suffice to make one a saint, not taking into consideration the increase of sanctifying grace produced by each repeated Communion, as has been said.

If Christ had not bidden us: "Do this in memory of Me," we would scarcely understand why the Church so insistently urges us to daily Communion. But Communion is part of the commemorative Sacrifice, an act which must be often renewed, to perpetuate the memory of Christ's Passion. For us, in our human life, cut up as it is into "days," to renew often has come to mean daily. We might even wonder why Communion is not allowed more than once daily, for example, during each Mass we hear.¹ The Council of Trent urged that all who assist at Mass should communicate, not merely spiritually, but by the actual reception of the Sacrament.² This recommendation must naturally be taken in conjunction with the restriction upon priests to celebrate but one Mass a day, which, for most people, settles the question. Nevertheless, I have often wondered if there were not a certain inconsistency in the Christmas celebration of three different Masses, at two of which the faithful may not communicate.

3. SPIRITUAL FOOD

We must now say a word about the different effects of the Sacrament in what is called the work of our spiritual life, although the subject is fully dealt with by all Catholic spiritual writers, who usually follow Saint Thomas, and treat of them under the analogy of material food.

We have often repeated that, in practice, it is a good thing to remember the origin of these effects. Instead of seeing in them so

¹ From another point of view, Canon Law recommends all the faithful who are in danger of death to receive Holy Viaticum, even if they have communicated in the morning.

² Sess. XXII, Chap. 6.

many separate benefits, let us rather seek to draw from the Eucharist an increase of life, a stronger and more vital union with Christ, raising our thoughts to a higher plane that we may the better uproot our vices and increase the growth of our virtues.

The special effects of the Eucharist may be grouped under three heads:

(a) *Purification.*

Whether it be a question of our personal sins, or of evil inclinations more or less inherent in the soul, the contact with the most pure Body of the Son of God must be a purifying force, detaching us from all that is base as well as from what is actually blameworthy, and enabling us to unite ourselves with Christ, entering into lasting and efficacious relations with Him: "that no stain of sin may remain in me, who have been refreshed by this pure and holy Sacrament."¹

The sound good sense of our Mother the Church, as far removed from the spirit of the Pharisee who will not recognize his sin as from that of the Jansenist who will not believe that he can be cleansed from it, has filled the Post-Communions of her Masses with prayers for purification. Let us remember that this Sacrament, through the acts of love it arouses in us, has the power of remitting venial sins (provided that we keep no attachment to them), and of blotting out our debt to God by canceling something of the temporal punishment due to them. It also lessens the influence of bad habits and sinful inclinations, and accustoms us to dwell in an atmosphere of greater purity of soul.

(b) *Strength.*

With the grace of Jesus Christ within us, we must affront life with courage, face it in all its grandeur, and accept its difficulties, whether these be temptations from within or trials from without. A Christian is a man whose whole life is dedicated to warfare, and he cannot, as long as he remains in this world, carve out for himself a life of ease. It is because of this that the Eucharist is called the Food of the Strong. The best way we can envisage the special helps we can expect from it, is to confide to Him our needs and to lean on His strength in our frequent weaknesses and discouragements.

(c) *Joy.*

Saint Thomas gives the name of "*spiritualis dulcedo*" to that overflowing joy of which more modern writers are afraid to speak. Nevertheless, joy is a true need of the soul. Man cannot live without

¹ Words of the Ordinary of the Mass.

happiness, and this he gathers in full measure from the Eucharist. Jesus Christ Himself brings it to us, in the full development of our life informed by His. "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet."¹ We should not make this spiritual sweetness the one object of our efforts, the sole barometer by which to judge of our fervor; but we may enjoy it, so that "moderating our earthly desires we may learn to love the things of heaven."²

Let us, then, thank God who bestows this joy upon us, and let us try to live with that purity, uprightness and generosity which will enable it to flower in our souls. God is good and He will not fail us; but let us not fail Him. Spiritual joys must withdraw us from false joys, the fleeting joys of this world: "*Terrena desideria mitigantes. . .*" May this joy, deep and holy, strengthen our union with God, and our longing for the good things that do not pass away.

C. COLLABORATION WITH SACRAMENTAL GRACE

Before going on to speak of how we must live by the Eucharist, let us briefly recall the way in which grace and the human will must collaborate in this life. Grace is infused into our souls by the Sacrament, but partly escapes our grasp, if I may speak so; that is to say, by our own activity we can further or hinder this infusion—its effects must be made practical within us before we can count its fruit as really ours.

1. THE SACRAMENTAL "OBEX"

(a) *Doctrine of the Council of Trent.*

There is one point of the sacramental doctrine laid down by the Council of Trent, whose importance and practical significance Dom Marmion so often emphasized.

The Council did not develop the general doctrine of the sacraments. It was content to give but a very summary enumeration in the form of a prologue (*proœmium*) to the detailed decrees concerning each sacrament in particular. This summary opens the seventh session and is followed by canons fixing certain essential points.

Now the sixth Canon says: "If any one should say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain what they signify and that

¹ Ps. 33, 9.

² Secret of third Sunday after Easter. See also Post-Communion for the feast of the Sacred Heart: "May Thy holy gifts, O Lord Jesus, endue us with a divine fervor, so that thereby, having tasted the delights of the most sweet Heart, we may learn to despise the things of earth and love those of heaven."

they do not confer (and the eighth Canon adds '*ex opere operato*,' that is by the application of the sacrament alone) grace to those who put no obstacle to it (*non ponentibus obicem*), let him be anathema."

If we put this condemnation in the form of a positive doctrine, we must say that, according to Catholic teaching, the sacraments, by the mere fact of their reception, confer grace on all who, in receiving them, put no obstacle to their action.

Neither the Council nor the Catechism, published by its orders to explain its teaching, speak further of this *obex* or obstacle. But we can deduce from it results of the utmost importance.

All the grace of the sacraments comes from God alone; but man must dispose himself for it. He must make some effort which will enable grace to be received, to take possession of him, and to act in him. We cannot, of ourselves, love God as He wishes to be loved, nor blot out our sins; that is the forgiveness, the divine charity which must be God's gift to us. But our soul must be so disposed that it may be forgiven, that it may love God above all things.

The first thing to be done, then, the most efficacious is to remove from our soul all that is opposed to these graces of God; feelings of hatred, of indifference, attachment to sin and so on. That is, in the first place, what the Council means when it speaks of the *obex*. If we put no obstacle—that is, if we turn our will away from them and do what is in our power to correct them—then the grace of the Sacrament will find free access, and of itself, by its own power, will sanctify us.

Doubtless, this is not all. Our co-operation should not stop there; but the first step has been taken and sacramental grace has been received. To see that it bears fruit, we must now make use of all the means put at our disposal by Christian asceticism; above all, we must be on the watch that the obstacle does not crop up again on our path (*non ponentibus obicem*) to hinder or check the stream of divine life.

(b) *The 'obex' of the Eucharist.*

Just as the Sacrament bestows grace in two different ways, as we have seen, so there are two 'obstacles' to be considered.¹

(1) Mortal sin is opposed to sanctifying grace. It is not opposed in the same way, for example, to the Sacrament of Penance, which was instituted for its remission. The obstacle to grace in the sacrament of Penance is attachment to sin, not its mere presence.

¹ Dom Marmion, *Christ the Life of the Soul*. Panis Vitae, p. 267.

But, as regards the Eucharist, the presence of a mortal sin in the soul is the fundamental *obex*. As long as we are conscious of such a fault we can receive no grace from the sacrament of the Eucharist; more than that, Communion under such conditions is a sacrilege. In a different degree, infidelity, that is lack of Faith, bars the way to the infusion of sanctifying grace, for the Eucharist is the supreme Sacrament of Faith, *Mysterium fidei*.

(2) It is, however, more important perhaps, in considering the increase of our devotion towards the Eucharist, to enter with some detail into the question of the special *obex* to the Sacrament.

We have seen that the particular grace of the Eucharist is union with Christ. There is no doubt that our own efforts in prayer and meditation may help to bring our thoughts into line with those of Christ, and make us conform our lives to His will. But they cannot—no human agent can—bring about that intimate, reciprocal, strong, living union which is necessary for real life with Him, under His immediate control. Although it was not of the Eucharist that Saint Paul was then speaking, we may take as a very just expression of this union the word in which he resumes his own life: "Not I, but Christ liveth in me."

By the *obex*; then, is implied all that prevents union, all that separates us from Christ, all that tends to turn our interests elsewhere. How wisely the Church makes us ask (in the second prayer before the Communion of the Mass): "*fac me tuis semper inhaerere mandatis, et a te nunquam separari permittas*"—that we may always do His will and never be separated from Him.

Accumulated infidelities lead to indifference; and eagerness for pleasure, and especially for human affection, little by little absorbs us, and separates us from Christ. A too great preoccupation with worldly interests, affairs and ambitions reverses the axis of our lives so that instead of living for Heaven as a Christian should, by means of, and if necessary, in spite of, temporal things, we stop at this life and its attractions as if they were our only good. We shut our eyes to our immortal destiny and live as though there were no hereafter. Such things constitute obstacles to the development of Eucharistic grace within us. So long as we live thus attached to passing things, thinking as the world thinks, having all our desires and our actions controlled by worldly considerations, any true union with Christ is out of the question. We can feel no real desire for the Eucharist, nor can we taste its strength and its sweetness. Our Communion is most probably limited to the minimum prescribed by

the Church; they are tepid and bear no fruit. We are here speaking of a total servitude; but what we have said holds good, in all due proportion, to any degree of attachment to the world and to its pomps.

Frequent Communion will no doubt be the most efficacious antidote to these dispositions; but if, by a steady application of our own will, we do not remove the obstacle and disentangle ourselves from these bonds, our Communions will never be fervent; grace will not be able to penetrate into our souls, and we will never enjoy the full benefits of union with Jesus Christ, the true good of our hearts.

But there is another aspect of this union with Christ which we must not overlook. The Fathers of the Church constantly remind us of the social character of the Eucharist. Since the Son of God assumed our human nature, He has made us His brethren, members of His Body. It is through this Mystical Body in its entirety that He now acts, and by it He wishes to be loved. We cannot offer Him an acceptable homage if we do not include our fellowmen. This truth was ever present to the early Christians. One Bread, one Banquet, unite us to one another, and so to Christ.

To wish to be united to Him, and at the same time to nourish feelings of hatred or even of contempt for our brother, is a vain desire. We must remember the Master's warning: "If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar. . . ."¹ This, for the Jews, evidently referred to some sacrificial act of the Old Law; but to us Christians it applies to the New Covenant, to the complete and pure offering which we bring to the altar at Mass, and which will be consummated when we are united to Christ in Communion. "If then thou offer thy gift at the altar and there thou remember that thy brother hath something against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother; then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift."²

Now, it is surely worthy of note that this commandment of our Lord is made in reference to the Sacrifice only, as being the condition of its acceptance by God; it is not given to the man who is about to give up all to follow Him, nor to the poor man who comes to beg for a cure, nor to him who comes to be forgiven; and it is the only condition imposed. No doubt, the fundamental dispositions of faith and self-abnegation are necessary; but the supreme preparation, the "pass" so to speak, which we must present before being admitted

¹ Matthew 5, 23.

² Ibid.

to the Holy Table, is Charity—"go and be reconciled." Our Lord Himself prepared His Apostles at the Last Supper by the washing of the feet, a symbolic act which He immediately explained to them by giving "His Commandment": "Love one another as I have loved you." Hence the insistence of the Fathers upon unity. For them, nothing is more opposed to the spirit of Christianity than division. The name given to the Eucharist, not merely "union" but "Communion"; the name of the penalty which cuts off an unworthy member from the society of his brethren, "excommunication" — these things emphasize the fact that it is above all by the Eucharist that we are brought together, and that, therefore, the Sacrament of Love cannot bear its fruit unless we are united in fraternal charity.

Let us think of this when we go to Communion. The union with Christ which we seek in the Sacrament is not individualistic. It is, indeed, effected in the depths of each soul, and sealed by the contact of the grace of Jesus Christ; but it is a union with the "whole Christ"; that is to say, all His members with Him.

Let us think of it in our intercourse with our brethren, who, like us, live by the sacramental grace of the Eucharist, and who are united to us by the same ties which unite them to Christ, who are loved by Him, as we are loved, because they are members of His Mystical Body.

This is easy during the liturgical celebration of the Mass, where all together take part in the Sacrifice. But we should not forget it when we communicate apart from the Mass; for, although our brethren are then unseen by us, it is nevertheless united to them that Christ comes to us. If we wish to make our Communion fervent and to feel the benefits of these repeated visits of our Lord, we must remove all obstacles on the part of Charity; then will grace be given to us in full measure, we shall be carried along by it, and our progress will be greater than we could have imagined.

2. OUR POSITIVE WORK

This is in fact but a repetition, in positive form, of what we have just said; but I do not think it waste of time to dwell a little longer on so important a point. The object of these notes is above all to sketch the main lines of a life nourished by the Eucharist.

(a) A certain immediate preparation for Communion is necessary. Ever since the piety of the faithful has been in large measure separated from the Liturgy, it has been found necessary to multiply these "methods" and these prayers. Some of them are excellent, and,

if time permits, one may make use of them with advantage as a preparation before Mass. A number of these are to be found in the Roman Missal.

There is, however, one characteristic of most of these preparations to which I would draw attention. They are composed of what we call *acts*.

I do not refer to their often exaggerated form, "O my soul," nor to the fervid exclamations which exceed by far what one might, in fact what one should, expect in the ordinary Christian. To make people recite these formulas is to accustom them to pretence, to insincerity in their intercourse with God.¹

But in addition to this, the principle underlying these formulas is that our piety should be based on categorical assertions according to established rules of thought. Faith is not enough; there must be an explicit and reasoned "act of Faith." According to a frequent complaint, the love of the Church, living and throbbing all through her Liturgy, speaks no longer to the heart; such love, they would have it, is not sufficient. The soul must assert its love, and base its assertion on the theological grounds which inspire our love.

It will be said that these acts are but a form of those aspirations by which in general we express our feelings. This may be true; but is it wise to multiply them, to make our prayer consist almost exclusively of them, to force our souls perpetually up to this pitch when we are preparing to receive the Master, who is Himself Sincerity and Truth? Our most intimate and vital feelings, those which belong to our religious life, are thus compressed for rapid use and for immediate effect, as if we had no time to steep ourselves in them by following the harmonious unfolding of the Liturgy, and no idea of putting them into practice throughout the day.

Once more, I repeat, these remarks refer only to an exaggeration, an excess. The assertion of our convictions may strengthen our Faith, the declaration of our affection may deepen our feelings for those we love; this expression of them is almost equivalent to a resolution to persevere in them. Our Lord Himself at times called for such acts; but these public declarations were usually for the profit of the bystanders as much as for those who made them. From many sick people He demanded an act of Faith; and was it not after a

¹ Compare the prayers of preparation and of thanksgiving of the Roman Missal. Most of these have been composed by saints, whose love was certainly more ardent than our own. But how measured is the expression of their feelings! And what can one say of the prayers of the Liturgy itself, so sober, yet so rich in meaning and in intensity of devotion!

triple act of Love that He invested Saint Peter with the government of His Church? But these protestations were rarely called for; they should not absorb the whole attention of those about to communicate.

How far more intense, more eloquent and more captivating, is the "method" followed by the Church. In the Mass, she prepares us by awakening our whole Christian life. She recalls the Gospel teaching and the preaching of the Apostles. She makes us praise the greatness and the goodness of God. She offers our prayers to Him, not omitting the act of Faith in the *Credo*. Today, one mystery of Christ's life is brought before us; tomorrow it is the lives of the saints and the thought of their intercession that encourage us. And when the essential moment of the Consecration draws near, the Church brings us back to the heart of the Eucharist mystery. She recalls the facts; she re-enacts them before us. She makes us breathe the very atmosphere of faith and love of the Cenacle. And then she leaves grace free to sink into our hearts, there to arouse those feelings which will best enable us to respond to the call of Christ.

Neither are our personal needs forgotten; but even there she continues to be our guide. At the moment of Communion she lays aside the plural forms she has been using so far. After the great Common Prayer comes the quiet and recollection of our private speech with God, and she resumes for us our essential needs; peace and union in the Church, inviolable union with Christ, and His purifying and life-giving influence; finally, the healing and protection of which the precarious condition of our souls makes us always stand in need.

As Saint Thomas insists, every sacrament, but more especially the Eucharist, is a reminder of, and an appeal to, the Passion of Christ. Did not Saint Paul say: "As often as you shall eat this Bread . . . you shall show forth the death of the Lord"? Although he does not exclude the idea of sacrifice, he here accentuates that of communion. Can there be a better preparation for the reception of the Eucharist than that Sacrifice in which we live again through the moments of the Last Supper and of the Passion, in memory of Christ?

(b) Remote preparation. Yet more important is our remote preparation; that is, the constant effort to maintain in ourselves those dispositions which will enable us to draw the greatest fruit from the Sacrament. The immediate preparation is but passing and may even be rather superficial; the remote preparation must of necessity be deep and lasting. It consists in fact only in what is called "living the Eucharistic life," a life nourished on the sacramental

grace of the Eucharist. Now the activity of this grace is not limited to the few moments which follow the reception of the Sacrament; it remains in us as a perennial spring, flowing ever more abundantly, as we give it free course in our lives.

According to what has been said about the *obex*, this Eucharistic life will mean, in practice, the continual removal or lessening of this obstacle; that is to say, to strengthen by our habitual thoughts and our actions the opposite virtues. Then grace will be able to act freely, inspiring and sustaining our efforts; it will become the vital principle acting in us and transforming us. Not only the few happy moments of our "thanksgiving," but our whole life will be lived for God and by God: "*vivere Deo de Deo.*" How consoling and how encouraging it is for us to know, even if we do not feel it, that the love which inspired the "acts" of our morning's Communion, continues in our hearts throughout the day with the same intensity and efficacy, because the same grace flows into us at every attempt we make to remove the obstacles in its path.

What, then, are the acts or the dispositions which will allow the grace of the Sacrament to act within us? The chief are:

(1) The spirit of Faith. To live by Faith, and, in all that touches the Eucharist, a Faith joined to reverence and love.

(2) Desire of spiritual Good. This is a special form of Charity or the Love of God. It means: an efficacious longing for all those things which unite us to Him; a spirit of prayer, showing itself in recollection and affective prayer and in attention to all that concerns the service of God, and, in the midst of the occupations and attractions of the world, a gaze ever fixed on the fuller joys of the world to come.

(3) Besides this divine Charity, there is required a true and practical love for our neighbor. This is not the place in which to develop this point and to show what ought to be the role of true fraternal charity in the various circumstances of life. Dom Marmion used to say that anyone who was faithful in this respect, not merely to the extent of not sinning against charity, but in a positive way, really and sincerely living for the advantage of his brethren, was always in a fit state to receive holy Communion, without further preparation.

(c) Thanksgiving. A word must be said about this most important duty. I am thinking here rather of the disposition of the soul than of any special "exercise."

In many places the Church, following Saint Paul, makes us ask for the grace to be always "giving thanks."¹ After having received the Sacrament of Love, it is fitting that we spend some time in prayer, thanking God for the ineffable gift of Himself which we have received. We should do the same after the reception of any of the sacraments; but none calls for more recollection and prayer than the Eucharist. Without such, we could not enter thoroughly into the union which God has once again effected in us. It is the special moment in which we should yield ourselves to Him, in which our souls can be steeped in a supernatural atmosphere, acclimatising us to the life of the children of God, which should be our life.

But this prayer is only a starting point. The Church makes it very short; so short indeed that some people have been surprised at the simplicity of the end part of the Mass. It has even been said that the Church seems in a hurry to set the priest at liberty, that he may be able to open out his heart to God in private prayer. Such an idea is in direct opposition to the Church's attitude of respect and to the spirit of the Liturgy. If it were true for the priest, it would be true also for the faithful, who should then stop "assisting at Mass," to busy themselves with mental prayer alone.

Here, as in so many parts of the Liturgy, we cannot fairly judge by the abbreviated and hurried ceremonies of the Low Mass.

At the High Mass, the ordinary Mass of the early ages, where all the faithful communicated, the greater number of them had plenty of time for quiet prayer while the rest were still going up to the Holy Table. "When you have received the Eucharist," Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorted his newly baptized, "as you await the moment of the Prayer (i.e. the Post-Communion), thank God who has deigned to make you a sharer in so great a mystery." And for the priest himself, what a consoling thanksgiving it is to be able to carry to his brethren the Christ whom he has just received.

The Church does not hurry; her thought is far wiser and more profound. The thanksgiving does not consist, strictly speaking, in the few words of gratitude we are able to say to God during the quarter or half hour. It must be both longer and more complete; it should continue throughout our whole life. Let us, indeed, open our hearts to God during those few moments; but let us keep them open, and continue, during the ordinary occupations of our day, that life with Him to which the Sacrament has just given new vigor. It is not only at the moment of Communion, even including a short pre-

¹ See Post-Communion of Sunday within the Octave of Ascension.

paration and thanksgiving, that we must give our Lord free access to our souls, that He may penetrate them with His grace and act in us. We receive this grace that we may live by it, not during a few moments of intimacy, but in the performing of our daily duties for God. That is the proof we can give Him that we understand the gift He has given us, and that we are grateful to Him for it.

D. THE EUCHARIST, LIFE OF THE CHURCH

We have now reached the main point of this study. All that I have so far tried to say of the splendor of this Sacrament, of its place in our lives, of its effects, has been with a view to this thought: by the Eucharist, Jesus Christ contracts on earth (while awaiting its full consummation in heaven) a union with His Church, to which He imparts His own life. He applies to her the merits of the Sacrifice He offered for her to the Father, and He continues the mission confided to Him by the Father, unceasingly gathering us all into this unity which is modeled on the life of the Most Holy Trinity itself. He draws His Church towards the final consummation, in which God will be all in all.

1. THE CHURCH AND DIVINE WORSHIP

The Church is the society made up of the souls whom Christ has redeemed by His blood, in order to bring man back to his one essential end: the worship of God. Now the Eucharist is the supreme and most expressive act of this worship; the perfect Sacrifice, whether we consider the Offerer, Jesus Christ, or those who share in it, and whose adoration it expresses; that is, mankind. For us it is the great comprehensive act which gathers into one all the efforts of our progress towards God. By it we are enabled to fulfil perfectly our calling of "rational creatures." This Sacrifice gives adequate answer to man's double duty and need; the adoration and service of God, and his own personal sanctification by the imitation of God. We may apply to it, with reference to our piety, our spiritual life, that which Saint Paul says of the whole Christian life: "Other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 3, 11). Our Divine Founder has enriched His Church with this marvelous means of leading us in Truth. She is the Mystical Body of Christ; and it is from her, in her doctrine and in her practice, that we must learn how to act. It is she who must teach us, that we may be caught up into the vital action of Christ, our Head. All His life was a preparation for "this Hour"; the hour of the Sacrifice of the Cross, which we re-enact in the Eucharist. The life of the mystical Body is, then, most

intense and perfect in the Eucharist, which, in memory of Christ, repeats His action and each day shows forth His death, in expectation of His coming. Perhaps we forget this coming; our expectation, because it is for something so far distant, has lost its keenness and its love. The Eucharist reminds us that we are not here for ever; it warns us that the order in which we now live, in which others will live after us, is passing, and that we are made to desire and love above all that Kingdom where Christ shall reign for ever at the right hand of the Father.

2. THE COMMON LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Although our priests seek to unite and to gather together the members of their particular flock, as often as possible, for prayer, for preaching, for good works, and also to multiply for them the different helps, spiritual and temporal, of which they stand in need, there is one act which they do not perform alone. There is one act which cannot be the possession, the special property of any particular group alone; one act which is, of its nature, the act of all, performed by all together, for one single purpose; that is, the Eucharist. It is, as it were, the congregation, acting as the Church. There is nothing which gives us a better idea of oneness of life than a parochial Mass fittingly celebrated. Its notes ring out louder, more vibrant, more clear, than any congress, pilgrimage, or other religious manifestation. Any well organized work in full activity may give us the same impression; but there it is the harvest that we see; the root, the seed is in the Eucharist.

In order to participate in it to the full, we must do so, not as individuals, but as members of Christ's mystical Body, in the unity of the Communion of Saints, each acting with and through the others.

3. THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

The work of the sanctification of the Church is carried on by the sacraments, of which she is at once the guardian and the minister. These are all centered in the Eucharist.

Apart from Baptism, which is as it were the entrance gate, the condition *sine qua non* of sacramental life, they are all special graces corresponding to special aspects of Christian life. The Eucharist gives and supports this life and enables us to praise God as He wishes to be praised.

On the other hand, as Saint Thomas teaches, the sacraments incorporate us into Christ from different aspects, drawing us into

His priesthood, and so preparing us to take an ever greater part in His Sacrifice. This Sacrifice entrusted to the Church is the crown of the edifice built up by our Lord in which He continues His mission. By it the Church is rounded off, complete. All converges to this point. By means of the Eucharist we are made one, all subjected to Christ as His possession; and He will be able, at the end of time, to give us back, all together, to His Father.

When I say that the Eucharist is the crown of the edifice, I do not mean to imply that it is a termination, an end. On the contrary. The whole edifice has a purpose. The Church is Christ on earth to be "our Way." To stop at the building would be to make of "The Way" a "No thoroughfare." In the Eucharist Jesus Christ leads us to the Father. To refuse to go so far with Him, to suggest, as did Saint Peter on Thabor, that we pitch our tent there, because "it is good to be there," would be to have misunderstood everything. "For he knew not what he said." The Church leans on the Eucharist that she may go forward. She draws from its unfailing fountain for all her needs. She calls us together round the Altar, that we may share in it, and find there the strength necessary for each day's work, that we may grow daily in the divine life, as the Apostle says, "until we reach the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4, 13): that is, until we have perfected in ourselves, as far as in us lies, the likeness of Christ, and are ready to pass from the labors of a life of faith to the glory of the vision of God.

Let us then broaden our piety. Let us have recourse to the Church that she may lead us to God. Let us keep ever before our eyes her full life-giving doctrine, which our own individualism will always seem to contract to its own private advantage. Let us unite ourselves with the Church who draws from it her joy and her glory. Let us be proud to belong to this Eucharistic society, to live the same life as our brethren, to feed on the same Bread received at the same Table, in a spirit of indissoluble brotherhood.

This point seems to me so important that I venture to repeat it in another form.

The aim of the Church is to unite us all to Christ, to build us up into His mystical Body (Eph. 4, 12), to lead us to the Father.¹ Now this union and this movement is effected by the Eucharist. This is so clear from the whole doctrine of the Eucharist, Sacrament of life and of incorporation into Christ, that is to say, of the union

¹ Cf. Eph. 2. 10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works which God hath prepared that we should walk in them."

of the Head and the Members, that it does not seem necessary to develop this teaching further.¹

The Eucharist, therefore, is the essential *means* in the present order of our Redemption, and our spiritual life, by which the Church lives, and it is at the same time its crowning glory.

This Sacrament would suffice (Baptism being presupposed), for the whole of our divine life, its maintenance, its development and its increase. We can see, then, how important—dare I say again?—how essential for us is a full understanding. It cannot bear its fruit if it is not accompanied by the normal conditions of its institution. All that we add or modify, even the narrower spirit in which we receive it,² all must react upon its sacramental efficacy; that is, “worship” of the Eucharist, and the separation of Communion from Mass. That is, to speak plainly, to turn aside from the idea of sacrifice, to see only the good of the soul; putting in practice, and often in theory, our own perfection before the honor and glory due to God. The Eucharist should be for us a participation in the life of the Church. We are one Body; we feed upon one Bread. To communicate should be, above all, to share in the celebration of the Eucharist by the Church. Whatever may be said of other methods of preparation for Communion, it will always be by this divinely ordained channel that grace will flow most abundantly into our souls and increase in us the fruits of devotion and of Charity.

*O SACRAMENTUM PIETATIS! O SIGNUM UNITATIS! O
VINCLUM CARITATIS!*

¹ “That we may in all things grow up in Him who is the Head, even Christ . . . who maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in Charity” (Eph. 12, 15-16).

² I refer to the pre-eminence given to what is only secondary, the “Worship” of the Eucharist, and the separation of Communion from Mass. That is, to speak plainly, to turn aside from the idea of sacrifice, to see only the good of the soul; putting in practice, and often in theory, our own perfection before the honor and glory due to God.

CHAPTER III

SOME SECONDARY ASPECTS OF EUCCHARISTIC WORSHIP

1. THE WORSHIP OF THE EUCHARIST

The Eucharist is our life, and this life is imparted to us solely by our participation in the Eucharistic mysteries: Mass and Communion. These constitute the Eucharist, in the full and true sense of the word, the Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, the piety of the faithful has overstepped these limits; outside the essential Eucharistic worship it has expressed itself in accessory devotions, which to many have assumed an ever increasing importance. The Church has not opposed these manifestations of piety in her children. Making use of the authority over the sacraments conferred on her, she has admitted and sanctioned many pious practices which in the end have grown into a sort of Eucharistic *cultus*, parallel, as it were, to the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Some have even gone so far as to think that these different proofs of adoration and love given to the Blessed Sacrament were the important, if not the principal thing. Eucharistic worship would seem to them to be centered round the adoration of the Sacred Host; a public profession of faith in the Real Presence. The end of institution of the Eucharist would have been to offer to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, our Savior and our Head, of whom the Old Testament knew nothing, the homage due to His Divinity. The Jews adored God in general; we would specially adore Jesus Christ.

Such an idea is contrary to the whole economy of the New Testament. Our Savior did not come to found a new religion, of which He was to be the object. The revelation He has given us of the Trinity, and of the relations of the Three Divine Persons among Themselves and with us, was to bring about a new form of worship indeed, and above all a more exact hierarchy of values for the different acts through which that worship was to be paid. Of course, the whole Trinity is the object of the worship of *Latria* or Adoration, which is expressed by sacrifice; but the pre-eminence of the Father, Source and Origin of all that exists, even in the bosom of the Trinity, makes of Him the first to whom all honor and adoration must be shown.

There is no truth upon which our Lord has more insisted. We could justly say of Him that He came to bring the Religion of the Father out of the darkness of the Old Law, into the brightness of the New. It is to the Father that the homage of the Mass is addressed. "It is truly meet and just, right and salutary that we should always give thanks to Thee, Father Almighty...through Christ our Lord."

On the other hand, it seems evident that Transsubstantiation, making, as it does, Jesus Christ really present under purely alien species, is not an adequate means to offer to Him our adoration. Christ did not make Himself Bread that we might adore Him, but that He might give Himself to us, to transform us into Himself, and to provide us with simple yet efficacious means of worthily adoring the Father by uniting our adoration with His own.

Do not let us, therefore, reverse the order of things. Christ is present, really and substantially present in the Eucharist. Let us adore Him, then, with all our faith, give Him this special worship which is His due; but let us remember that this last is not the worship of the Church, less still the Sacrifice which He has confided to His Church that by it we may fulfil our essential obligation of adoration and submission before the Majesty of God. We have not paid our full debt to the Eucharist when we have adored it. Christ chose to come in this sacramental form that He might work in us and with us; and this work is our sanctification and the glorification of the Father. This is the real purpose for which the Eucharist was instituted.

And even in the Sacrifice let us respect the scale of values. We should not say, for instance, that the Elevation is the culminating point, the most august moment of the Mass. This short instant of adoration, however solemn we may make it, is none the less only a secondary ceremony. It was only introduced into the Mass in the eleventh century, and does not figure at all in the Eastern liturgies. The end of the Consecration is not to give us the Real Presence that we may raise It on high; but we elevate It, and we adore the Host because we long to adore Jesus Christ in the first moment of His coming amongst us. However closely allied the Elevation may be to the Consecration, it is the latter which is the culminating point of the Mass.

In the same way, it is right and just to surround the Blessed Sacrament exposed with every sign of honor and devotion. Nevertheless, this presence of our Lord does not in itself differ from that of the Tabernacle. It should attract our devotion far less than the

Real Presence on the Altar during Mass, where in the person of His ministers our Lord is fulfilling His great priestly office. To give to this secondary devotion the primary importance, to make it the apogee of our worship is a failure of proportion, which in the end turns to the disadvantage of true and solid piety in many souls. We will never make real progress if we base the whole work of our Christian life on these "Eucharistic Devotions"; if for them we neglect the Way pointed out by Christ; that is, those acts which nourish our spiritual life, and enable us to fulfil our duty to the Father: a real participation in the Eucharist, Mass and Communion.

2. DIVERS MANIFESTATIONS

This worship has assumed three principal forms:

(a) *The Tabernacle and Exposition.*

In spite of recent attempts to prove the contrary,¹ the cult of the Tabernacle does not date from the earliest times. Nor is it likely that it should be a Christian adaptation of the Jewish *Shekinah*. After the Exile, the Jews had adopted, as the center of their devotion, the presence of God among them. This they had localized, not only in the Temple but in every Synagogue, and gave to this the name of *Shekinah*, Inhabitation. Many Rabbis made it more or less the equivalent of the universal presence of God.

The primitive Christians, who had no fixed place of worship, knew that however real the *Shekinah* might have been, it had ceased with the abrogation of the Ancient Covenant, and they never showed any tendency to adopt the beliefs and practices of the Jewish teachers. The Reservation of the Eucharist after Mass had for them the same meaning, at once loving and familiarly utilitarian, which marked all their devotion to the great pledge of their Master's love. It was made solely with a view to the Communion of those who could not assist at the divine Sacrifice and especially of the sick and prisoners. When they began to build churches, in which the Sacred Host was specially but not exclusively reserved, there were no more Jewish converts to revive the idea of the *Shekinah*.

But adoration was due to the Blessed Sacrament thus reserved, whether in some annex or coffer in the church, in the houses of the priests, or even of the laity. In spite of the familiarity with which our ancestors treated the Eucharist (of which we have already spoken), a certain exterior worship grew up from the very nature of things.

¹ Canon Freeland in *Catholic Faith in the Holy Eucharist*, 1928, Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

It took shape with the tendency to a more sensible devotion; a wish to gaze upon the Host, which led later to the introduction of the Elevation at Mass. They had a longing to remain near it, under its protection, which brought about the custom of carrying it on their persons. Prayers and ceremonies began to surround the place where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. A door of open work was made through which the sacred vessels could be seen, and soon they began to enclose the Host itself in a vessel with a glass covered opening so that It also might be seen. To look upon the Blessed Sacrament was the great devotion of the Middle Ages; it led in fact to certain exaggerations, not untinged with superstition, which the Church was obliged to condemn.

(b) *Benediction.*

The practice of giving a blessing with the sacred vessels containing the Eucharist was only introduced much later, in the fourteenth or the fifteenth century. It originated in certain confraternities, when it closed their devotional exercises, as it now closes our "Benediction" service.

(c) *Processions.*

Still greater honor was paid to the Eucharist, and that already in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, when It began to be carried processionally through the streets. We see here the same idea, the same wish to associate the Eucharist with the ordinary daily life of the people. They loved to see It surrounded by the crowd, to enjoy the illusion of seeing our Lord pass through their towns and villages, as when He walked through Palestine laying His hands on the little children and scattering graces and miracles upon all.

3. BENEFIT OF THESE DEVOTIONS

And it is not all illusion. Doubtless it would be an illusion to think that our Lord suffers and feels in the Tabernacle or during a procession. He cannot stretch out His hand to us, nor even, strictly speaking, look out on us from the monastrance. These oratorical expressions are only metaphors, and we should be careful not to take them for realities. Let us cling firmly to what our Catholic Faith teaches us. The Christ of the Eucharist is not the same as the Christ who dwelt among men for more than thirty years in Palestine. There is the same Person with the same two natures, but the state is different. He can only be the glorious and impassible Christ. Therefore those expressions signifying emotion, suffering, weakness, or any state or action which belongs only to His human nature

as it was on earth, are unsuitable. They can be used at the most as images, but are usually erroneous and often dangerous. More than this, our Lord's state under the veil of the sacramental species is not the state in which He now reigns in heaven. We cannot say that in the Eucharist He performs the exterior actions which He might have performed in His Humanity, moving, feeling, etc. Christ in the Tabernacle is not solitary and humiliated; He is not powerless, not wounded by our ingratitude; He does not suffer His passion anew upon the altar, nor come to seek rest in our hearts.

He is there under new conditions, in a completely different state, whose mystery we cannot fathom. We have had to find a new word to express it, and we call it His "sacramental" state or presence. This does not explain how Christ is present, nor how He acts. How could it? But it enables us to speak of Him intelligibly. We know from this word that He does not act as an ordinary man, nor even as the glorified Christ would act in His own person. The expression marks the difference very clearly—our Lord is present as Sacrament—but it does not attempt to describe the condition in which, in His infinite mercy towards us, He has placed Himself. He is among us, not to be our companion, but to be the Sacrament; that is, the visible sign of the invisible graces which He wishes to shower upon us. And at the same time He is surrounded by adoring angels. He enjoys unalterable happiness; He adores His Father and offers for us His merits, all in the serene calm of His infinite love.

Why do we not meditate more on this truth? Cannot our love, our gratitude, our adoration go out to the Risen Christ, to that glorious life which has been given to us as our model by the inspired word? Is not the reality more wonderful than all our imaginings? Why must our piety always seek the extraordinary, the unreal? Is there in the Eucharist, as we dramatise it, anything to be compared to the Sacramental Grace which really unites us to Christ and divinises us with Him?

If we must absolutely "console" our Lord, it can only be in retrospect. The Liturgy prays in this manner for the Faithful Departed, asking God to save them from hell. Strictly speaking, it is too late. In the same way we cannot console Christ who suffers now no more; but we can experience sorrow and remorse for our own sins and for those of the world which caused His very real sufferings in the past; and, by analogy, we give to these acts of love the name of Consolation. This is what the Church does. In the Liturgy of Good Friday, in mourning and in sorrow, she commemorates the anni-

versary of the sufferings and death of her Spouse; but even then she cannot refrain from mingling with her grief accents of joy and triumph at the thought of the immutable state of blessedness which He acquired by His death.¹

What is certain, however, is that good must follow from the contact or association with the sacred humanity of our Savior, even when hidden under the species of the Eucharist. It is still the instrument of the graces bestowed by the Divinity. But it would be hard to say in what exactly this influence consists. We must leave that to the free dispensation of Divine Providence.

There are other effects of encouragement and stimulus to our piety which we can more easily understand, of which I would like to add a word. If our Lord has allowed this growth of devotion to the Sacrament, it is surely with a view to the good of souls.

In the first place, we must notice the great difference between the development of Christian piety and the passage from the Old Law to the New. Our Savior abrogated the old worship and established another, purer, higher, and more true. We needed a form of worship more in keeping with the Divinity, whose true nature Christ had revealed to us: the Holy Trinity whose origin was the Father, source of all things; and one which would also be more in keeping with the needs of man, redeemed and raised to the divine Sonship. After the institution of the Eucharist and the organization by the Church of essential lines of Eucharistic devotion, nothing need be added. No more modern devotion should or indeed could replace that which was founded by Jesus Christ; nothing else can bring about the salvation or renovation of the world. Christian piety, under the watchful eye of the Church, has developed certain practices: corollaries, corresponding to local needs. These may be either passing waves or movements, or a more general current of ideas and feelings, arising often from the very nature of the Eucharist. Their only effect can be to rekindle our fervor in respect to the essential thing. If they were to turn us from that, they would be a danger instead of a help to our spiritual life.

When the laity began to leave off assisting at Mass and to neglect Communion; when the multiplicity and exaggeration in the invocation of the saints threatened to challenge the sovereignty of the worship of God, devotion towards the Tabernacle grew more ardent to affirm the truth that the Eucharist was always the sovereign good of souls.

¹ See the Hymns *Vexilla Regis* and *Pange Lingua gloriosi* of Passiontide.

When heresy began to deny, in whole or in part, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, processions and exposition of the Blessed Sacrament were multiplied. When the modern world showed itself pleasure-loving and indifferent, our Lord revealed His love for us under the image of His Sacred Heart.

But all this should serve only to bring us back to the one thing necessary. Whatever may be the justification for these practices of piety, the essential thing cannot be changed. It is always through the Eucharistic sacrifice that our Lord infuses into us His love and His life.

In defense of what we may call these side-tracks, it has been said that people take pleasure in them, and find profit in them. But pleasure is not the purpose of piety, still less of religion. And I doubt if souls really profit. A child who works only for a reward, whose efforts are thus subordinated to pleasure, will never develop into a strong character. He may learn the rules of grammar and arithmetic, but he will not be really educated. To forget the essential and cling to the accidental, the more human, checks the forward progress of souls. They are thus perhaps saved from certain dangers, but they have not in them enough good—real good.

The devotion of ordinary people, unless carefully formed and guided, tends naturally towards the accessory. Human instinct does not of itself attain the heights; divine things alarm us a little; we cling to what appeals to the senses, to the marvelous, and at first find only dryness in "adoration in spirit." Hence come exaggerations in illumination and decoration, sentimental hymns, and exuberant expressions; hence the popularity of such practices as "speak to the heart" or to the imagination: Holy Hours, night watchings, consecrations, etc.

On the other hand, simple upright souls, souls of faith and desire, such as are the majority when they have been taught to understand what it is that God gives us to lead us to Himself, are usually quickly won over by the greatness of the truth. They see its importance, its wonderful adaptation to the needs of man; they realise, easily and joyfully, how much better it is to go to God by associating themselves with the mysteries of Christ, than along the by-paths and circuitous routes of mere "practices."

I do not mean to condemn Benedictions and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, Eucharistic Congresses and midnight vigils. All these are good things; but there are others which should not be forgotten.¹

¹ *Haec oportuit facere et illa non omittere.* Mt. 23, 23.

All I desire is to bring back our piety to the royal, but somewhat neglected, road of Catholic doctrine, and to draw from these secondary and supererogatory exercises the best advantage possible, in view of the necessary and primordial good.

But they have one benefit which must not be overlooked. They are for the most part more within the reach of the majority of the faithful. We cannot receive Holy Communion at all hours; there are necessary conditions of fasting, parish services, and even of purity of conscience which we may have temporarily lost; whereas the Tabernacle is always accessible, and that with no restricting conditions. Expositions and Benedictions of the Blessed Sacrament take place at more frequent and variable hours than the Mass; and, above all, they are often held in the evening, at hours when the greater number of working people are free. So long as the Mass continues to be celebrated only before midday, the majority of people, at work all day, are practically incapable of regular assistance. These will gladly avail themselves of the opportunity offered by these evening services, in which their devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament can find expression.

Let us then see how these Eucharistic devotions can foster our piety.

1. They stimulate and support our Faith. It is because we know and believe Him to be present that we love to draw near as often as possible to our Lord. These exercises help to keep up in us the dispositions which will best enable sacramental grace to influence our activity.

2. They help our prayer. Not to speak of the influence spoken of above, which the sacred Humanity of our Lord must exercise when we approach Him in Faith, it is only natural that the thought of His near presence must aid our devotion, which so often needs just such a sensible support.

3. They help us to think of the Eucharist, to long for it, and so they help prepare us to receive it. Beside this, they are an efficacious means of keeping up our fervor and stimulating our co-operation with the sacramental grace of our Communion.¹

4. On the other hand, they make certain demands upon us. We have to take trouble. We have to go and seek our Lord, and by

¹ In the book by Dom Vonier already referred to, *Sketches and Studies*, etc., there are excellent passages on prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. Another article on the relations between Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the Mass is, to my thinking, a vain attempt at incorporating, so to speak, Benediction in the Mass.

making the effort necessary to go to church, we recognize God's sovereignty, and the importance of spiritual things in our life. We acquire the habit of giving something of ourselves, and even this small sacrifice does not go unrewarded.

CONCLUSION

There is one fruit of the Eucharist to which I have scarcely alluded, and on which Saint Thomas dwells with special predilection. It is the pledge and the seed of eternal life.

Futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.

What would our life be, what would be the most spiritual of joys, if they did not help us on our way to the boundless happiness which will know no end? What are the gleams of light which our Faith shows us? What even is the revelation of the immeasurable love of Christ in the Eucharist, if there is to be no tomorrow; if we are never to see that light unveiled; if the sign is not one day to pass away, leaving us the full and unfading enjoyment of infinite love?

But, God be thanked, our life is one. What with the help of grace we build up so laboriously on earth will not be destroyed nor forgotten; it will be completed and perfected. The Eucharist is the pledge of this life of glory.

The Gospel speaks of the Kingdom of God, sometimes as being the Church here below, sometimes as the City of the Blessed in heaven. It is both the one and the other; but only because these two are one. From the possession of God, in life eternal will flow, as from a never-failing spring, the happiness of the Christian brotherhood, which is but begun on earth. The Eucharist begins the work; day by day through it is developed the life of the Mystical Body of Christ, as the bonds uniting us to our brethren are strengthened.

How often, when we recall those who are dear to us and who have gone before us to God, we think of the happiness of those families which will be reunited, of the friends who will meet again. The Church, too, thinks of her family which is being formed again in heaven; she feeds us on the Bread of Life which prepares the endless Banquet of Eternity; she does not want her children to leave this world unprovided with this *Viaticum* which will be, as it were, the sign by which they are known in heaven. What will be the joy of those meetings, when we enter the circle of the Blessed on whose lips shines the sign of the Eucharist—not our merits, not even ourselves, but the Christ, the same in all, the bond of union. All indi-

vidualism will be incomprehensible in that kingdom where all live the same life, into which one enters only because one Bread has made of us one Body.

Let us never ask ourselves anxiously: "What will become of me after death?" Let the heathen worry about the uncertainty of the other world. They have no faith to guide them, they do not know the love of God. We know what that blessed life will be—the life we have already begun here below. By grace we have received the adoption of God; by grace we enjoy Him, though imperfectly as yet in this state of trial. When the trial is ended, grace, henceforth unimpeded in us, will break forth into vision, and without fear of loss, we will possess in unchangeable love that which we have longed for, which already we seem to see, which indeed we hold.

The Eucharist is the link between these two phases of our life. By sacramental grace we are so united to God that our souls are transformed; we do but await the liberation of death in order to live by God alone.

What more is there to say? The little I have said is enough, I think, to show that we must approach the Eucharist with our eyes fixed on eternity. There must be nothing of this earth in our hearts, nothing which keeps us shut up within ourselves with our own desires and interests, nothing which seems to exclude our brethren. Naturally we shall think of the needs of our soul, and of other needs, too; but our chief desire must be to free ourselves from what is passing, faulty and imperfect, from the errors and limitations of egoism, that we may be transformed, that we all meet in the unity of Faith so as to be but one in the sight of God,¹ and that we may love as we are loved.

That is a first step in immortality. The Eucharist will develop this seed, by sanctifying even our bodies, in making God our life, in giving us "divine manners," so that, made ready in body and soul, we may stand before God in the likeness of His Son, one with Him, and never to be separated from Him.

*"Quid mihi est in caelo, et a te quid volui super terram? Deus cordis mei, et pars mea Deus in aeternum—*What is there for me in Heaven and what have I asked of Thee on earth? Thou art the God of my heart and my portion for ever."²

¹ *Donec occurramus omnes in unitatem fidei.* Eph. 4, 3.

² Ps. 72.

