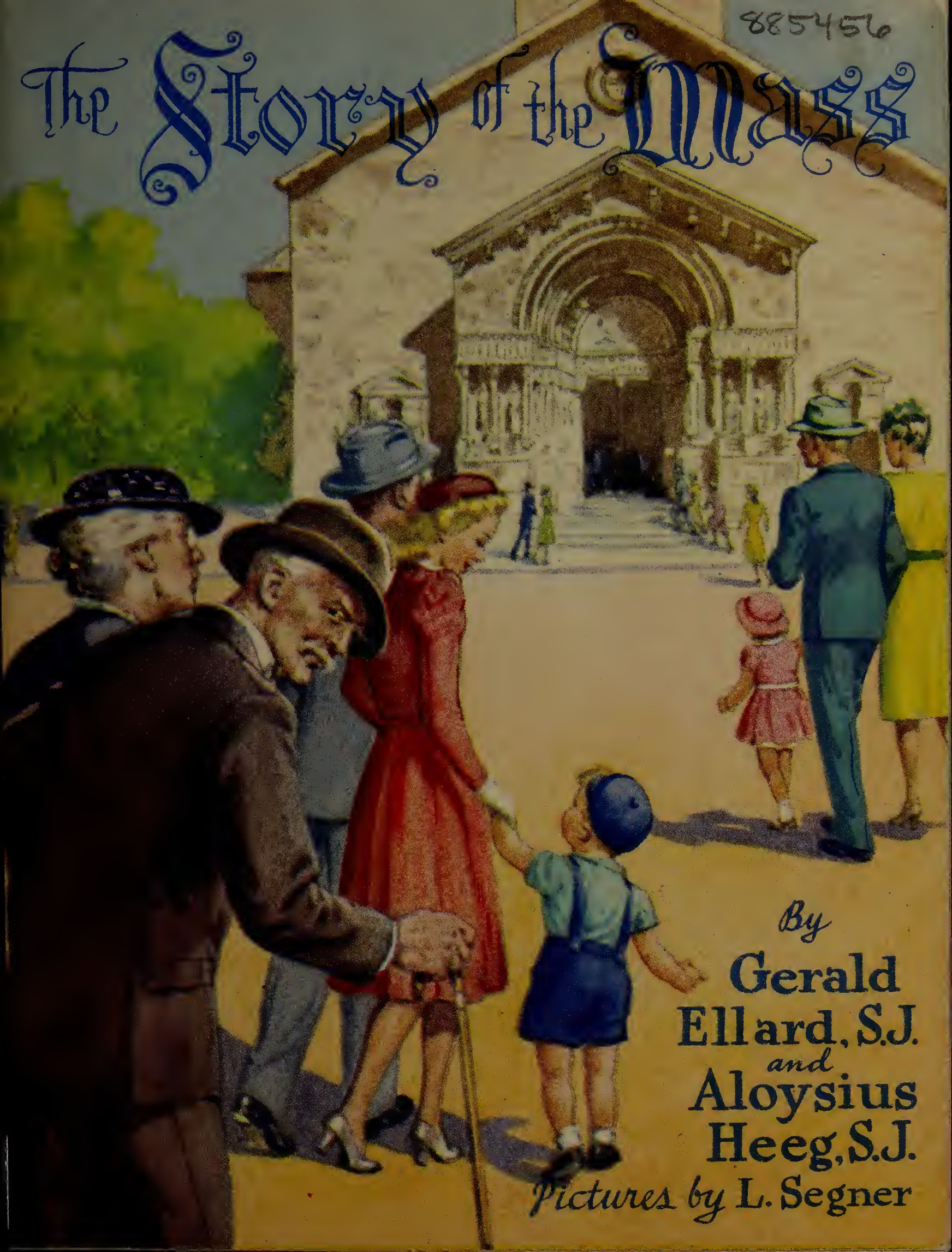


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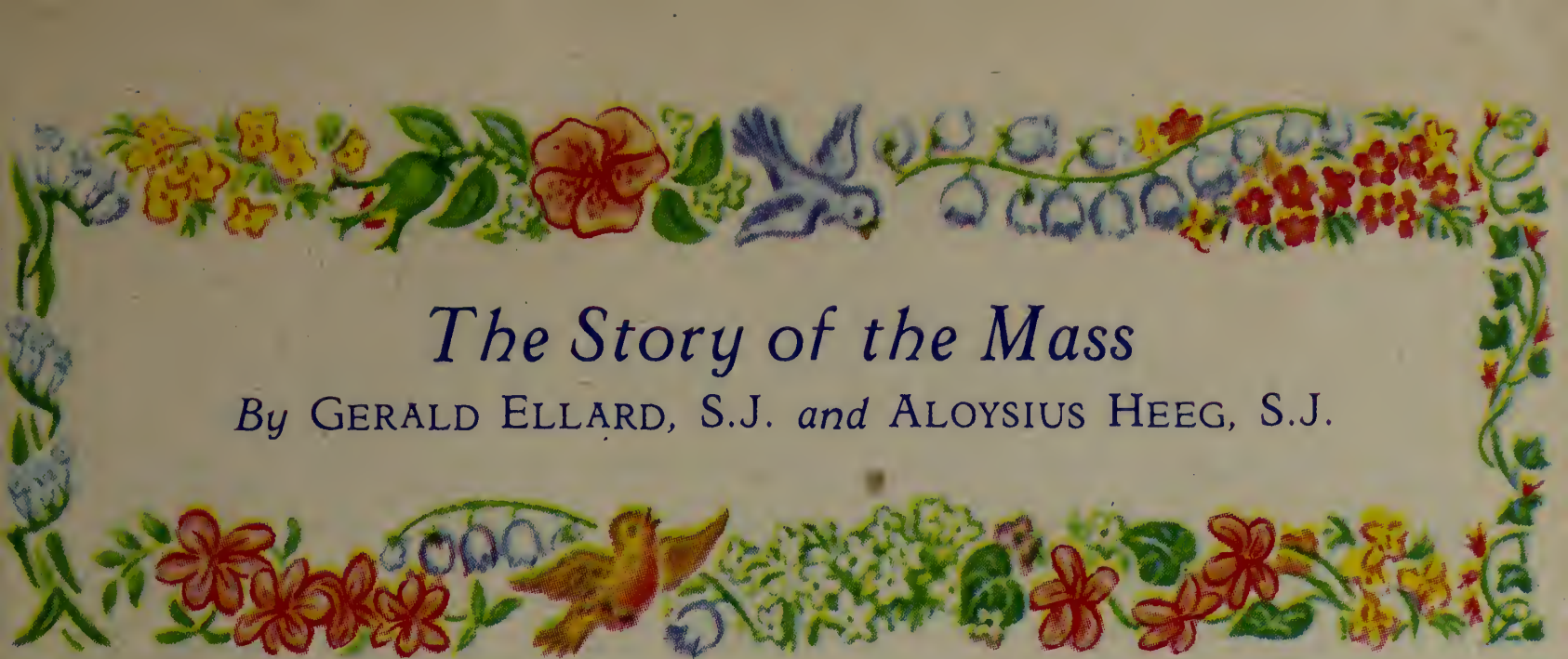
The Story of the Mass



By
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Pictures by L. Segner





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By GERALD ELLARD, S.J. and ALOYSIUS HEEG, S.J.

DO YOU like to get out of a cozy bed when everywhere else it is very cold? Do you like to walk far away from home when it is raining very hard? Of course, you don't. But on Sunday mornings what happens? No matter what the weather is, all good Catholics get up and go to church. Do you know why?

It is a beautiful story and just as true as it can be. It is the story of the Mass, the sweetest story ever told. Do you want to hear it? All right, we shall tell it to you.

But where shall we begin? Let's see - - . The story of the Mass is a love story. It seems that we can never start it without first thinking of the way children love their fathers and mothers.

You know, every good child loves his father and mother, and every good child tries to show his love for them. He tries to show his love for them even before he can talk. Just watch a little child and his mother. See how he puts his arms around his mother's neck. See how he presses his little face against her cheek. That is the way he shows that he loves his mother when he is just a tiny baby.

As soon as a little child is able to talk, he tells his father and mother he loves them. Sometimes he says, "Look, mother, see how much I love you." When mother looks, he stretches out his arms as wide as he can.



A Present Is a Sign of Love

WHEN a child gets a little older he gives his mother a present. He tries to give her the best present he can. He knows that a present is a sign of his love. When a child gives his mother a beautiful bouquet of flowers, he does not have to tell her he loves her. The bouquet is a sign that shows that he loves her. He gathers that bouquet and gives it to her just because he loves her.

But what do you think is the best present that a child can give his mother to show that he loves her? Maybe you would never guess. It is the child himself. Can the child let himself be a present? And can he give himself to his mother? Yes, he can, and many a child does. How? By acting as if he really belonged to her. That means by doing everything he can for her and just the way she wants it. A child who gives himself to his mother in this way is really giving her the best present he can. It shows best how much he loves her.

Did your mother ever show you the ring your father gave her before they were married? It is very pretty; isn't it? But do you know why your father gave her that ring? It was because he loved her, and he wanted to give her a sign of his love. He loved her so much that he wanted to give himself to her and to belong to her always. So he gave her that beautiful ring to wear on her finger. That ring is a sign of his love. When your mother looks at that ring she remembers that your father loves her.



What Shall We Give Our Father in Heaven?

IT IS easy to remember our father on earth, but sometimes we forget our Father in heaven. You see, besides the different fathers for the different families on earth, there is one Father for all in heaven. No matter how young or how old we are, no matter when or where we live, God is the Father of us all. He was the Father of the first man on earth. He will be the Father of every boy and girl, and man and woman, until the end of the world.

God is a very good Father. He loves us more and takes better care of us than the best father on earth. So we should all love our Father in heaven more than anyone else.

From the very beginning good people have tried to show their love for God. They gave Him many gifts. They knew that no gift could be too good for God. So they tried and tried to find the best present there was to give to God. They wanted a present that would be the very best sign to show that they really loved Him. Would you like to know what some of these presents were that people gave to God long, long ago? All right, there's just time enough to tell you three fine stories.



The Gift That a King Gave

THE FIRST story is about the present that was given to God by a king. This king had a long, hard name. He was called Melchisedech. Melchisedech was a good king. He really loved his people, and he really loved God. He was so good that he loved God more than anything else. Because he loved God more than anything else, he wanted to give God the best present he could. He wanted to give God a present that would be the very best sign of his love.

What do you think his present was? You will be surprised when you hear. It was just bread and wine! That seems a strange present for the king to give; doesn't it? But the king was very smart. You see he lived in a land where people did not have many things to eat and drink. They lived on bread and wine. So maybe what the king thought was this: "It is bread and wine that keep me alive. If I give God my bread and wine, it will show that I love God more than my life. It will be a sign that I love God so much that I would even give Him my life." So the king did choose a very good gift; didn't he? You see it was such a fine sign of his love for God.





The Gift That a Shepherd Gave

BUT LONG before Melchisedech, there lived a man named Abel. You heard of him before; didn't you? He had a bad brother named Cain. Well, Abel was a shepherd and had many sheep. He was very good. He really liked his sheep and took very good care of them, but he loved God more than his sheep or anything else. He also wanted to show God how much he loved Him. So what did he do? He tried to think of the very best present he could give to God. And then what do you think he chose? His very best lamb!

Abel loved that little lamb. It was so white, so clean and spotless. "If I give this little lamb to God," thought Abel, "it will show that I love Him more than anything. It will also show that I wish God to make my soul clean and spotless like the little lamb. I will put the little lamb on the altar and kill it there. That will show that I really give it to God and will never take it back. It will be a sign that just as I take the life of my little lamb, so God may take my life if He wants it. I give myself entirely to God." So you see Abel's lamb did make a fine present for God; didn't it? After that many people gave lambs as presents to God.





A Gift That God Asked For

THE THIRD story is about the present that was given to God by a man named Abraham. This man was very rich, and he had all that money could buy. But Abraham had only one little child, a fine boy named Isaac. Of course, he loved Isaac more than his money, or his flocks, or anything he had. He loved Isaac so much that he wouldn't take the whole world for him. But how much did Abraham love God? Did he love God as much as he loved Isaac?

Well, to let Abraham show how much he loved God, God asked him for a certain present. What do you think that present was? It surprised Abraham very much, and made him very sad. God asked Abraham to give Him his only son Isaac. He told Abraham to place Isaac on an altar and to kill him like a little lamb.

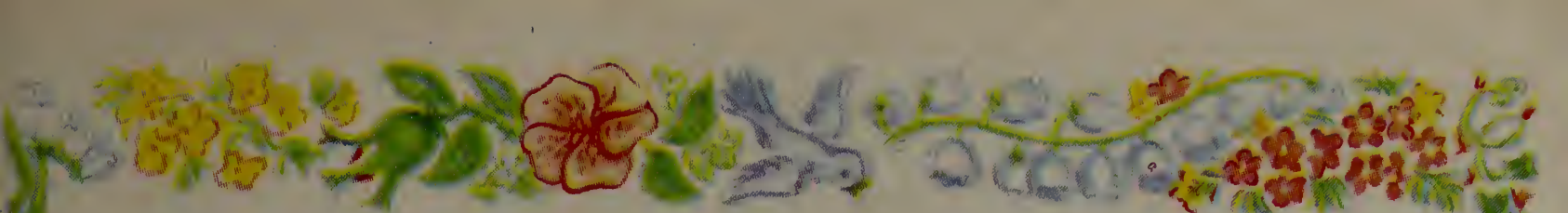
What did Abraham do? Did he tell God that he loved Isaac more than anything in this world? Did he beg God to take everything else instead? No. Abraham loved God even more than he did Isaac. It would be awfully hard to give up his only son Isaac, but because God asked him to he surely would. So Abraham tied his dear boy and put him on the altar. He would do just what God told him to. But then, at the very last minute, God sent an angel to tell Abraham to stop and not to hurt the good boy.



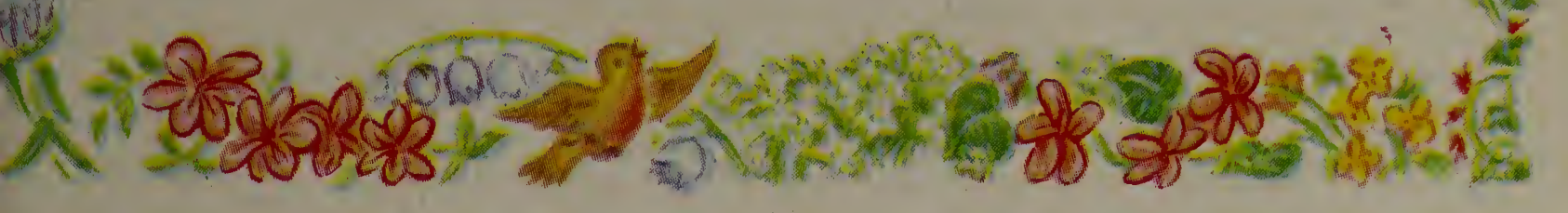
You see God did not really want Abraham to kill Isaac. He just wanted to let Abraham show how much he loved Him. When Abraham showed that he was willing to give up his son Isaac, that was surely a fine sign that Abraham loved God more than anything else. God was so pleased with this sign of Abraham's love that He let him keep Isaac. After this God blessed Abraham and Isaac even more than before.

Now what do you think of these three presents? Which one do you think pleased God most? Abraham's? Yes, Abraham's present to God was a better one than the bread and wine given by King Melchisedech. It was even better than the lamb given by Abel. Abraham's present was the best. It showed best how much he loved God.





Why No Gift Was Perfect



SURELY God was pleased to see all these men try to give Him the best gift they could. But, do you know, not one of them gave a gift that was good enough for God. You see, God is so good and so wonderful that He should be given a *perfect* gift. Do you know what a *perfect* gift is? A perfect gift is one that has nothing the matter with it, and is given in just the right way.

God was glad to see Melchisedech, Abel, Abraham, and other men *try* to give Him a perfect gift, but He knew they never could. Do you know why? It was because after the first man disobeyed God no man could be perfectly pleasing to God. You see, Adam was the father of all men, and what he did he did for all of us. When he sinned he spoiled things, not only for himself but for all of us. By his sin he separated all of us from God. When he disobeyed God, it was like putting up a big wall between God and man. As long as that wall was there, no one could do anything that was perfectly pleasing to God.

Before men could please God perfectly, someone had to break down that wall. But that was something that no one who was just a man could do. No one but God could break down that wall. Would He do it for us? Yes, He would and He really did. Do you know how He did it? It is another beautiful story.



How God Came to Help Us

IT IS easy to remember when this story happened. Just look at the calendar and see what year it is. If it says "1943", it means that it is just 1943 years ago that this story happened. So what did the good God do about 1943 years ago? Because no one who was just a man could break down that wall, God sent his only Son into the world to break it down for us.

God's Son is really God. He always was God, and He always will be God. But when God the Father sent Him into this world to break down that wall for us, His Son became also a man. He was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Christmas Day in the cave of Bethlehem. His name is very holy. His name is Jesus Christ. He is really God. He is really man.







Jesus Will Be Our Perfect Gift

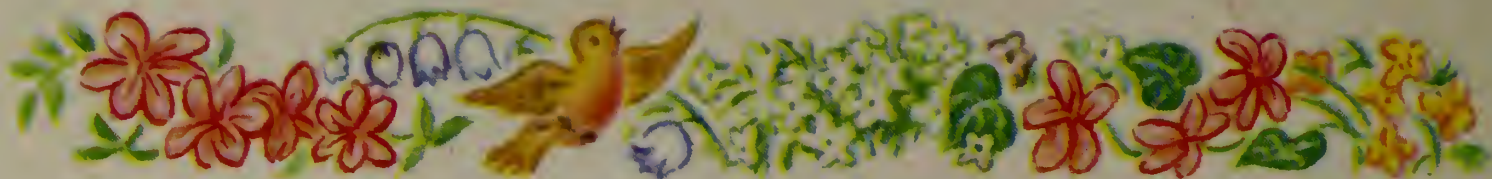
AS SOON as Jesus came into the world, we had a present that was really good enough for God. He could be Our Perfect Gift to God. He could break down the wall, and we could go to God and be with Him forever.

Jesus Christ will be a very wonderful Perfect Gift. In It will be all the nice things we saw in the gifts of Melchisedech, Abel, and Abraham. Melchisedech's gift, you remember, was bread and wine, the food that kept him alive. That gift had in it that fine sign of love. God liked that sign in Melchisedech's gift, and so you will find it in Our Perfect Gift. You will see how Jesus Christ is given back to God under the signs of bread and wine.

Do you remember what was so nice about Abel's gift? It was that he gave God a little lamb that was so white, so clean, so spotless. God liked that spotless lamb in Abel's gift. It showed how Abel wanted his sins taken away. Will there be a lamb in Our Perfect Gift? Yes, when Jesus Christ will be given back to God, He will be given back as the true Lamb that takes away the sins of the world.

Abraham was willing to give God his only son Isaac. This pleased God very, very much. Will there be an only son in Our Perfect Gift? Yes, Jesus Christ is the only Son of God the Father. His Father loves Him ever so much more dearly than Abraham loved Isaac. Yet He will let Him be cruelly put to death on the cross. By dying for us Jesus will take away all sin, break down the wall between God and man, and become Our Perfect Gift to God.





What Jesus Did at the Last Supper

YOU SEE now how God planned to have His only Son, Jesus Christ, become Our Perfect Gift. But when was this Perfect Gift really offered to God for the first time? It was when Jesus was about thirty-three years old. It began when Jesus took that Last Supper with His Apostles the night before He died. On the table were some bread and wine, the very things which Melchisedech gave as his gift to God. Jesus took some of that bread into His hands, and as He did so the Apostles watched Him. They saw Him bless that bread and say, "This is My Body." Then He took a cup of wine and said, "This is My Blood." When Jesus spoke these words, He changed the bread and wine into His Body and Blood. After that He said to the Apostles, "Do this."

Do you know what Jesus meant when He said to the Apostles, "Do this"? Jesus meant that He gave the Apostles the power to do what He just did. He wants them to take bread and wine and say, "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood." And as soon as they say that, the bread and wine will be changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus, just as they were at the Last Supper.

The Apostles were the first priests. The power which Jesus gave to them He will give to every priest even to the end of the world. When Jesus said, "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood," He was saying the first Mass. In that Mass He offered Himself as the Perfect Gift to God. When He said to the Apostles, "Do this," He gave us the Mass to be Our Perfect Gift to God to the end of the world.



What Jesus Did On the Cross

AT THE Last Supper when Jesus said the first Mass, He offered up for us His death on the cross. He died that very cruel death the next day. We now call that day Good Friday. It was the day when Jesus was so very, very good to us that He even died for us. Surely there was nothing dearer to God than the life of His only Son, Jesus. When Jesus gave His life for us, He gave to Our Heavenly Father the best gift there could ever be. It was the real Perfect Gift. Our Heavenly Father was so pleased with It that that wall, which the sin of Adam put between God and us, was broken down right away. It did in a second what the gifts of Melchisedech, Abel, and Abraham could not have done in a million years.



What Jesus Does in the Mass

THE GIFT which Jesus gave to His Heavenly Father when He died on the cross is so wonderful that there is nothing like It in the whole world. Yet this same wonderful Gift is offered to God in every Mass. Jesus died only once, but His death was so precious a gift that we can keep on offering It to God to the end of the world. Ever since the Last Supper priests have the power to offer this Perfect Gift every time they say Mass. And every time this Perfect Gift is offered in the Mass, God in heaven is just as pleased as when Jesus gave it while dying on the cross.





Our Perfect Gift On the Altar

THIS, then, is what happens during Mass. The priest uses the power that Jesus gave at the Last Supper. By changing bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus, the priest really brings Jesus down upon the altar. There on the altar, Jesus is the true Lamb of God who died on the cross to take away our sins. He is Our Perfect Gift. God in heaven loves Jesus ever so much more than anyone can say. During Mass Jesus offers Himself to God, the priest offers Jesus to God, and we offer Jesus to God. Nothing could be more pleasing to God. It is the Perfect Gift. It is a perfect sign of perfect love of God.

But God loves us more than we love Him. He will not keep Jesus all to Himself. In every Mass God also makes Jesus His Gift to us. The priest receives Jesus in every Mass he says. We receive Jesus as often as we go to Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we see how much God really loves us. In Holy Communion we are more closely united to God than even Adam was before he sinned. God loves us so much that He comes right into our heart.

During Mass we can offer many gifts to God and God gives many gifts to us. But the best gift that we give to God is Jesus dying for us on the cross, and the best gift God gives to us is Jesus in Holy Communion.



We Give Our Perfect Gift to God

THEN we have the Perfect Gift all ready to be given. God looks down lovingly from heaven. All the people pay strict attention. They see the priest, who acts for them all, take up the Perfect Gift and give It to God. Then all the people join in their hearts in singing their song of love for God. With the priest they all together give God the Perfect Gift of His only Son.



God Gives His Perfect Gift to Us

DURING Mass God is pleased to see how we love Him. He is glad to see how we give Him the Perfect Gift. And now God wishes to show His great love for us. He also wants to give us something very fine. So what does the good God do? He lets us receive in Holy Communion the Perfect Gift that we have just given to Him.

We go to the Communion rail. The priest lifts high the Perfect Gift and says, "Behold the Lamb of God: behold Him who takes away the sins of the world." Then the priest brings the Perfect Gift to the people at the Communion rail. The Perfect Gift still looks and tastes like bread. But It is not bread; It is Jesus.

Jesus is the only Son of God. Jesus is the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus comes under the form of bread. He comes as the food of our soul. He comes as the guest of our heart. He comes as our all-good God. He comes to unite Himself with us His children.

When we leave the church, we are like little churches ourselves. Our hearts are tabernacles into which has come the good God Himself. He comes that we might live united with Him.

O, how good God is! That is the story of the Mass.



