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by

REV. RICHARD GINDER

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THE MASS - YOUR LEGACY

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There's been a legacy left to you by the last will and testament of a famous man — a man who was fabulously rich, who knew your heart's desire and just what it is that can make you happy.

But you haven't been around to claim your share of that estate, perhaps because you haven't heard of it, but more likely because you don't understand; possibly, even, because you underestimate its value.

It isn't a matter of dollars and cents. Those are too common, too easily had. A clever invention, a shrewd investment, or just plain shameless hoarding can build up quite a respectable bank account.

No — this is something that no money

can buy. It's a spiritual legacy, invisible, but none the less real just the same — as real as joy and happiness, peace of mind, security, and all the other spiritual values of our experience.

His Last Will and Testament

Let's turn back the pages of history to a Thursday evening, long ago, when a man sat at a table with twelve of his most devoted friends.

This is Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, who by a host of miracles has demonstrated beyond rebuttal His contention that He is God. And yet He is a man with a human mother, as all can see.

Since He *is* God, His every word and action is important, so we must observe carefully.

It is the evening before His death. These are the most solemn moments of His life. He has His apostles gathered around Him as a man gathers his family about his deathbed.

“And having taken bread,” writes St. Luke, describing the scene, “he gave thanks and broke, and gave it to them

saying, 'This is my body, which is being given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In like manner he took also the cup after the supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant of my blood, which shall be shed for you' " (*Luke 22:19-20*).

As the apostles watched, they could see no outward change in either the bread or the wine. And yet the Master had said that they were, not now bread and wine, but His own body and blood. In other words, there had been an internal change in those substances, making them not mere symbols, mind you, but converting them into Himself.

And when He said "Do this in remembrance of me," He gave them the power to bring about that same change in bread and wine, for He would certainly not command them to do what would be impossible to them.

A Promise Fulfilled

His apostles thought immediately of another day, some months previous, when talking to the Jews He had promised them a mysterious "bread of life."

"Amen, amen, I say unto you," He

had said, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him" (*John* 6:54-57).

Since a joyful resurrection is the common hope of mankind, this flesh and blood must be destined for future generations as well as for those blessed Christians of that first century — just as Jesus came to save not only the believers of His own day, but His disciples of all time as well. But since He was to return to His Father in His visibly human Person, He had devised a way of perpetuating the supply of this divine bread.

A man with the necessary power would bend over the bread, just as He had, and utter these solemn words: "This is my body." In the same way, He would consecrate the wine: "This is the cup of my blood . . ." — a man in

the first, tenth, twentieth, or thirtieth century — and the wonder would transpire just as surely, provided only he were gifted with that heavenly power.

The Early Christian Interpretation

But now let's see how the first Christians acted on Our Lord's command — how they understood the events of that Thursday-night Supper.

St. Paul, in the first written words of the New Testament, describes the scene again for his converts at Corinth. Skipping the first part, which is essentially as reported by SS. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find him quoting the words said over the wine:

“ ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.’ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily,” he continues, “will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord” (*I Corinthians 11:25-27*).

From that one passage we can infer that

1) This commemorative ceremony involves the body and blood of Jesus Christ;

2) The apostles and their successors were empowered to perpetuate the act (as we saw it also in St. Luke's Gospel);

3) This commemorative ceremony is a sacrifice;

4) This sacrifice is one with the sacrifice of the Cross;

5) Communion in this sacrifice must be accompanied by a pure conscience.

A Sacrifice?

Now where, precisely, does the element of sacrifice enter in? — because a sacrifice is more than a communion service or a religious pageant. A sacrifice is the solemn offering of something to God, by a man and in a place designated by Him, and its consequent destruction in adoration, thanksgiving, reparation, and petition to Almighty God. The thing offered is a victim; the one offering is a priest; the place of the offering is an altar.

First of all, Our Lord's death on the Cross was a sacrificial offering to His Father for the sins of the world. "Behold the Lamb of God," St. John the Baptist had hailed Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (*John* 1:29).

Jesus did just that. The Cross was His altar, while He was Himself at the same time Priest and Victim. As Priest, He offered Himself, the Victim, to the Father for our sins and needs.

And now St. Paul quotes Him as saying: "For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes." This ritual, then, involves an altar, a priesthood, and a victim for sacrifice. It must be a re-enactment of Calvary, but in a mystical sense, for we know that Christ having died once, can never die again.

This ties in with St. Paul's reproach of the Hebrews, when he says it is impossible for fallen-away Christians to be renewed again to repentance, "since they crucify again to themselves the Son of God and make him a mock-

ery" (*Hebrews* 6:6); and, in the same document, his words — "A man making void the Law of Moses dies without any mercy on the word of two or three witnesses; how much worse punishment do you think he deserves who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant through which he was sanctified . . .?" (10:29).

Our Christian Heritage

Surely if only we Catholics could realize these facts about our Holy Mass, no one of us would ever absent himself from that Sacrifice.

Our Lord descended from heaven just to give us the Mass. His whole life was a preparation for that first Mass — the only Mass He offered, as far as we know. And it has come down to us, protected by the blood and bravery of our apostolic forefathers, not a few of them martyrs, for our spiritual consolation and relief.

It should be easier now to see the parallel between Calvary and the Mass: then it was Jesus, humanly visible —

now it is Jesus working through one of His priests. The Victim is the same — Jesus Christ, offered to the Father for the same sublime purposes as on Calvary. So that when we assist at Mass, it is as though we were standing in company with our Blessed Mother and St. John at the foot of the Cross on that first Good Friday.

In the first of the great Commandments given by the Almighty God to Moses on Mt. Sinai, we are told that we must give God the worship that is His due.

And God has never been content with mere lip-service. Prayer, meditation, hymns, and sermons have always been mere supplements to the central act of worship: the sacrifice. Men have in all times, very literally, offered sacrifice to God, and He has always indicated His satisfaction with that means of adoration.

Adam and Eve were hardly out of Paradise when Cain and Abel, their sons, began the offering of sacrifice. This was continued by Noah, by Abraham, by Moses, when the Lord codified

the ritual of His people, dictating a detailed routine of sacrifice to be offered to Him in His holy Temple when it should be built. There were to be offerings of ewes and rams, of heifers and turtle-doves, of firstfruits — all on carefully specified occasions, all in His holy place, all under the hand of His priestly designates.

Under the Old Law, then, the First Commandment was to be fulfilled principally through the offering of sacrifice.

The Perfect Sacrifice

When Jesus came, He abolished the sacrifice of animals and substituted for it the perfect sacrifice — the sacrifice of His own body and blood. He did not however do away with the Ten Commandments. We are still to worship God by sacrifice — by the only sacrifice left to us, the sacrifice of the Mass, involving as it does a Victim, an altar, and His own Priesthood. It is God's own command, then, that we assist at Mass.

But when? — His Church has defined that for us. We are to hear Mass on all Sundays and holydays of obligation.

Because such tremendous values are involved — the Divine Sacrifice, the First Commandment, and the Third (“Remember thou keep holy the Lord’s Day”), the Church declares it a mortal sin wilfully to omit hearing Mass on any of the days prescribed. This means that by missing Mass we not only lose the rich treasures of grace associated with the Mass, but we bring on ourselves the danger of everlasting damnation through our violation of two Commandments of God and a Precept of His Church.

But we have so much to thank God for, so many favors to ask, so many sins to repent, that there should be no need to write of Commandments and Precepts. There is no greater act of adoration, of thanksgiving, of reparation, or petition. One Holy Mass, devoutly heard, can wipe out the vengeance due to a lifetime of sin. One Holy Mass, devoutly heard, can procure our everlasting salvation. It is a rite in which the very Blood of Jesus cries out on our behalf. With the Cross of Christ towering over us, we approach the eter-

nal Father saying, "Look, can You refuse me now?"

Go To Mass!

As one writer puts it — "The Holy Sacrifice is renewed every morning in your parish. Can't you find a way of being there? You want to adore God, you want to thank Him for the good things He has done to you. You want to pray for peace — not only for yourself but for the world as well. You want to do penance for your sins and the sins of your loved ones. Go to Mass! Take your place on this new Calvary! Draw close to Our Lord so that, when His blood is poured out at the Communion, it may wash over your soul and intercede with the Father for your intentions!

"Surely you won't have any trouble getting up a little earlier when you know that Our Lord is waiting for you and that it is an engagement you have with Him. No morning can be too cold or too dark to keep you at home.

"It isn't that you *must* come, that you *have* to be at daily Mass — but now you

can see how dearly God regards the sacrifice and what it means to your soul: Jesus, the Priest, offering Jesus, the Victim, to the everlasting Father in token of His love not just for God, but for us as well. It's too good to miss!"

This is the legacy left to us, His brothers, by Jesus Christ at His last supper: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. His infinite love, all-wise and almighty as it is, could invent no greater gift. It's yours to claim. For His sake, don't underestimate it. This legacy cost Him His life — and He is God.



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