

"ORATE FRATRES"

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"Pray brethren, that this, my sacrifice and yours, may be equally acceptable in the sight of the Lord." (Dominican Mass.)



URING this present month every Catholic turns his heart toward the city where the Eucharistic Congress is held. We consider it an honor that the United States has been chosen for that celebration of homage and adoration, and those in attendance at the Congress feel it a privilege to join with the Catholics of every land in worshipping their Eucharistic God. They realize that worship due to God from every creature must include adoration because God is perfection itself and His majesty and authority are infinite. In divine worship thanksgiving is an essential element since all we have is from God, the Giver of all good things. But man in his weakness has fallen away from God his benefactor. He has offended the divine majesty and it is his duty to propitiate the wrath caused by this defection. Finally, realizing that God is the source of every good and perfect gift and that we can hope for nothing that does not proceed from Him, it is obligatory that we supplicate Him for those things of which we stand in need.

Not until Jesus Christ became our High Priest, not until He ordained successors to serve Him in His eternal priesthood and consecrate His own sacrifice, His precious Body and Blood, was there a worthy offering to God. In the Mass, our Eucharistic God is offered, our adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and supplication. The priest is the commissioned representative of Jesus Christ the great High Priest and if there were no priest there could be no Mass. But it is not the priest alone who offers the sacrifice, the whole Church offers it by the hands of the priest. The faithful as a body unite in offering the divine oblation through the instrumentality of the ordained successor, the truly commissioned envoy or representative of Christ Who is the chief sacrificer.

This privilege, the participation of the members of the Church in the offering of the sacrifice to God, is a prerogative of the new dispensation. In the old law we read that the Lord smote Ozias with leprosy for daring to offer incense upon the

altar. In the new law we are told by St. Peter, "We are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (I Pet. ii; 9). This is the privilege of the Christian in contradistinction to the Jew. In the early part of the same epistle the Apostle says, "Be you as living stones built up, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." But when the faithful offer the Mass by the hands of the priest they do more than offer a spiritual sacrifice, they offer the self-same victim Whom the priest holds in his hands.

It is because of this fact that throughout the whole Mass the priest prays for and with the people. Even as he ascends the altar steps he bows low before God and begs Him "Take away from us, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our iniquities, that we may be worthy to enter with pure minds into the holy of holies, through Christ our Lord. Amen." This prayer is not for the priest alone, it is said for the whole congregation. He prays that they all may be pleasing in the sight of God to offer with him the homage which he is about to perform. All the collects and kindred prayers of the Mass are said in the plural. In them the priest prays in the name of the universal Church, he prays in the name of those who participate in the Mass, that their offering and his may be beneficial. Again in the prayer said after the washing of the hands, "In our spirit of humility, and with contrite heart may we be received by Thee, O Lord, and so make our sacrifice this day that it may be acceptable and pleasing to Thee." Before the secret prayers, which are said in the plural and in which all are to take part, the priest turns to the people and says, "Pray, brethren, that this, my sacrifice and yours, may be well pleasing to God the Father almighty." Here all are invited to join with the priest as he reads the prayers of the Mass. He calls the people brethren because all are one in Christ. By their membership in the Church they form one holy family and they are brothers who call upon one Father Who is in heaven. By this family alliance in the Church of Christ, since all are brethren, members of the same body, they should have but one heart and soul, praying for and with one another. In response to the priest the server answers in the name of the faithful, "May the Lord receive the sacrifice from thy hands to the praise and glory of His name, to our benefit and to that of all His holy Church." Here the people acknowledge their brotherhood with the priest, they admit their membership in the Church of

which Christ is the head. They pray not merely for their own individual needs but that the sacrifice may be beneficial to the whole Church. They, in this response, recognize the right of the priest to offer the sacrifice for them, they see in him the alter Christus whose hands are annointed to perform the sacrificial act. In this answer they mention that an acceptable sacrifice means honor, praise and glory to God, propitiation and supplication for ourselves.

Proceeding with the faithful joined to him in intention, the priest recites the secret prayers of the Mass. He makes the plea that the sacrifice may be beneficial, and asks God to be merciful and generous. To quote from the various Sunday secrets. "Be appeased, we beseech Thee, O Lord, by the prayers and offerings of our humility," "Look upon the sacrifices here before Thee," "Receive them, we beg Thee, O Lord and sanctify them"; "Accept our offerings and prayers, and favorably regard these gifts." "We entreat Thee, be pleased and propitiated with the oblation of Thy suppliant Church," and "graciously behold these offerings which out of Thine own bounty we bring unto Thee," that "they may be pleasing to Thee," "That by them, our heavenly remedy, we may be purged from evil and rid of our guilt." "By this sacrifice and its expiation may we be made worthy of Thy grace," "Through it may we enjoy the fruit of the Redemption," "may we be withdrawn from all human excesses and loosed from the bonds of sin." "Direct our wavering hearts, turn them towards Thee," "compel our wills even if they resist." "By this sacrament sanctify our minds and bodies," "deliver us from our earthly appetites," "defend us from all danger," "protect us from all our enemies both of soul and body." "Being cleansed, renewed, protected, and sweetly governed by Thee through this holy sacrifice," "lead us to Thy everlasting glory," "bestow upon us Thy gifts in a blessed eternity" and "direct us by Thy grace to the unending joys of heaven." Such are the sentiments contained in the secrets of the Mass. All things, spiritual and temporal of which we stand in need are sought of God, and true propitiation is offered to His offended majesty, not in the name of the priest alone, but in the name of the people as well.

Having finished the secrets prayers of the Mass the priest again exhorts the people to join with him, this time in the preface, in rendering thanks to the Lord. "Gratias agamus Domino Deo

nostro." "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God." To this invitation the voice of the Church responds, "It is meet and just." Then in union with the congregation the priest reads the preface, a sublime hymn of thanksgiving. It is but proper that all in all places should give thanks to the Lord, the eternal God through Jesus Christ, through Whom the angels and heavenly powers, the seraphim and the cherubim celebrate His majesty. The last words of the preface are "And we beseech Thee allow us to join our voices in suppliant confession saying"—"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He Who cometh in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest." In this unparalleled canticle of praise we join our voices with the priest's and together with the angels, as St. Thomas tells us, all praise the divinity by chanting "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus," and we give honor to the humanity of Christ in the words, "Blessed is He Who cometh in the name of the Lord."

In these parts of the Mass we find plainly revealed the value of the sacrifice. It is propitiatory as shown by the thoughts contained in the secrets, where we beg God to be appeased by our offering. The impetratory value is expressed in the petitions which are presented in these same prayers, supplication for every good we need. The preface is a thanksgiving and an acknowledgment that we should thank almighty God, and from this hymn we pass into the heavenly canticle of the angels, Holy, Holy, Holy. This is the manner in which the celestial choirs praise God and we unite with them in adoration of His majesty and perfection. Here we also find the participation of the faithful in the sacrifice. The Church, through the instrumentality of the priest offers to the Supreme Ruler of the universe her fourfold worship. The priest invites all to join with him in rendering this homage, he calls upon all, his brethren, to offer with him this sublime sacrifice.

Throughout the canon of the Mass this participation of all the faithful in the Mass is expressed. In the prayer, the *memento* of the living, the priest says; "Be mindful also, O Lord of all here present, whose faith and devotion are known to Thee, for whom we offer this sacrifice of praise, or who offer it up for themselves, for their families and friends." After the *communiantes* the priest prays; "We therefore beseech Thee, O Lord, graciously to accept this oblation of our service as also of Thy

whole family, dispose our days in Thy peace, command us to be delivered from eternal damnation and to be numbered in the flock of Thy elect." Again in the commemoration of the dead, all the souls of the faithful departed are remembered and the priest proceeding with the Mass pleads; "And to us also, sinners, Thy servants, hoping in the multitude of Thy mercies—freely pardoning our offences." And in the "Agnus Dei" it is not "Have mercy upon me," but it is "Have mercy upon us, grant us peace." It is thus in the whole Mass, the plural is used, and the priest prays in the name of Christ, he prays in the name of all Christendom whose envoy he is. He is the ambassador of the faithful, through him and with him in this sacrifice they offer their homage to God.

The extent to which the faithful enjoy this participation in offering the sacrifice of the Mass will depend upon the degree to which they are united in intention with the priest. Christ the great High Priest offers every Mass to His Father in heaven even as He offered Himself upon Calvary, for all mankind. The officiating priest, offering in the name of the Church, since he offers in person as the mediator between God and man, has the greater part, and the choicest fruits of the Mass are his. But it is the teaching of the Church that out of the abundant fruits of the sacrifice a special participation is enjoyed by all those who offer the stipend for the Mass or in some way supply the necessities for the celebration. They who give may confidently hope that their share will be in proportion to the spirit and generosity of their gift. The Mass was instituted by our Divine Lord as the public act of worship of the Church. Its purpose is to draw men around the altar in homage to God, to unite them in the exercise of His eternal priesthood, and accordingly they who attend in person, if they join their intention to the intention of the priest, will share in no small way the merits of the oblation. The full value of hearing Mass does not consist in merely being present in person when it is celebrated, but in offering it to God conjointly with the priest. They who fail to do this, though they satisfy their obligation, do not gain half the graces that others who unite with the priest receive. Finally, since the priest at the altar acts in the name of the universal Church, since he is the ambassador of Christ, the envoy of Christendom before the throne of God, his action is the action of the Church, through him the Church offers worshipful homage and adoration

to almighty God. The whole body of Christ, the Church, benefits, and each individual member of the Church will participate in as much as he unites himself in spirit with the priests who are offering the holy Sacrifice.

Thus it is that in the celebration of the Mass there is a clean oblation, as spoken of by the prophet, offered continually from the rising to the setting of the sun. In the offering of this oblation all the members of the Church are privileged to join. In this union of all the faithful with the priest at the altar as he offers to God the worship of the Church, there is a continual Eucharistic Congress. Also as St. Chrysostom tells us, “When the priest at the altar offers the stupendous and sublime sacrifice, the angels stand beside him, and all around the altar are ranged the choirs of heavenly spirits, who raise their voices in honor of the Victim Who is immolated.” There before us the drama of Calvary is being reenacted, that consummation of love which Christ left us as ours to offer to His Father in fulfillment of our obligations to Him. The members of the hierarchy are not present from all parts of the world, but in spirit the whole Catholic Church is united in divine worship. No papal legate is there but the legate of Jesus Christ is present, the priest, the alter Christus. In the Mass offered daily, every child of the Church is privileged to unite in rendering homage to the most High and adoration to God. This is why St. Peter calls us a “Chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation.” This is why the priest calls upon us to pray with him that our sacrifice may be worthy. So through the privilege that is ours as members of Christ’s mystical body, the Church, we are given the signal honor of attending an unending Eucharistic Congress through the holy sacrifice of the Mass.