

THE ESSENCE OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

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THROUGHOUT the ages there have been many sacrifices made to Almighty God, from the offering of Abel onwards. Noe, Melchisedech, and Abraham offered sacrifices. There were the Mosaic sacrifices in the wilderness, and the divinely ordained sacrifices in Solomon's Temple. These however were only types and shadows of a great sacrifice to come. Their Altar of Incense was only a symbol; their slaying of lambs merely foreshadowed the Divine Lamb that was to be slain for the sins of the world. Moreover, these were old sacrifices and have passed away. On the Altar, on the Table of our Eucharistic King we have a new sacrifice.¹

What is this new sacrifice? It is the Sacrifice of the Mass, greater than all the sacrifices of the Old Law. It is the unbloody renewal and perpetuation of the Sacrifice of Our Lord on Calvary. It is, Père Monsabré, O.P.,² declares very eloquently, "the sacrifice instituted by Our Blessed Saviour Himself. The words which He used to tell us 'I am in My Sacrament' are sacrificial words which offer Him up mystically. He gives Himself, but by immolation, by sacrifice, separating His Blood from His Body ('Hoc est Corpus meum; hic est Sanguis meus'), giving us His Body and His Blood as a victim, and in the condition of a victim, His Body yielded up to death ('quod pro vobis tradetur'), His Blood freely poured out for all ('qui pro vobis effundetur'). This is what must remain perpetually in the Church as the memorial of the holy oblation which was consumed on the Cross."

Where can we find this new sacrifice? Only on our Altars. "It was not the tragedy of Golgotha, but pre-eminently the Holy

¹ St. Thomas in the *Lauda Sion*, 7th stanza, sang of this in the following beautiful lines:

"In hac mensa novi Regis,
Novum Pascha novae legis
Phase vetus terminat."

² *Eucharistic Conferences*, (London, 1900), pp. 100, 101.

Eucharist, which the prophet Malachias contemplated when he repudiated the priests and the sacrificial victims of the Old Covenant: 'I have no pleasure in you,' said he in the name of the Lord. 'I will no longer receive the gifts of your hands, for, from the rising of the sun, until the going down thereof, My Name shall be great amongst the nations, and everywhere and in all places they shall sacrifice and offer in My Name a pure oblation.' *All places, everywhere amongst all nations.* Evidently that prophecy could not be limited in its interpretation to the little hill of Golgotha, nor to the little land of Judea, nor to the little nation of Israel. The Cross most certainly is there where God put it; but without forgetting it, I must seek elsewhere for the 'pure oblation' offered everywhere, and I can find it only in the sacrifice of the Mass," in the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

Now in what does this new sacrifice consist? Naturally before we can consider the sacrifice of the Mass in its essence, it is important and necessary that we start off with correct definitions of sacrifice and Mass. Sacrifice, considered nominally, or in its etymology, denotes some sacred work or fact. St. Thomas says sacrifice has its name from the fact that man makes a sacred something.³ This the very word implies, for sacrifice is from "sacrum facere vel fieri," to make or become a holy thing. A *real* definition of sacrifice taken in its wide sense informs us that it is any act of the virtue of religion offered for the honor and glory of God, for instance, "a sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit" (Ps. L, 19); and "he that doth mercy, offereth sacrifice" (Ecclus. xxxv, 4). Taken in its strict sense, sacrifice is an external public act of the virtue of religion, pertaining to the cult of *latria* rendered only to God. It is a sovereign act of religious worship due to God alone, inasmuch as it testifies by the oblation made to Him, that He is the sovereign Lord of all things, the Master of life and death, our first beginning and last end, Alpha and Omega. But sacrifice is commonly or generally defined as the offering of a sensible thing by its real or equivalent destruction made by a legitimate minister to God alone, in order to acknowledge His sovereign dominion and our subjection to Him (and in the present state of fallen nature), to repair the injury done to Him by sin. The author of the article on the sacrifice of the Mass in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. X, p. 7) gives us substantially the same definition when he states that sacrifice "is

³ *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, q. 85, a. 3, ad 3.

the external oblation to God by an authorized minister of a sense-perceptible object, either through its destruction or at least through its real transformation, in acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion and for the appeasing of His wrath."

Sacrifice varies according to the manner of offering or the purpose of the offerer. It is bloody or unbloody, according as the object offered is or is not susceptible of bloody destruction, is or is not capable of physical slaying.

Its purpose may be to express the submission of a creature to God (latreutical sacrifice), or to thank God for His gifts (eucharistic sacrifice), or to implore His grace (impetratory sacrifice), or to appease God's justice angered by our sins (propitiatory sacrifice). And the same sacrifice may have all of these characteristics at one and the same time, as is the case in the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass.

Now for the Latin word "Missa." Taken etymologically, it is derived either from the dismissal (*dimissione*) of the Catechumens before the Offertory when the deacon was wont to exclaim: "Withdraw, O Catechumens . . ."; or from the dismissal of the faithful after the sacrifice is over by the words: "Go, the Mass is over"; or from the sending *missio* of the Host and our prayers to Almighty God, and this seems to be the opinion of the Angelic Doctor. In the *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 83, a.4, ad 9, he tells us that "the sacrifice is called "mass," because the priest sends (*mittit*) prayers to God, by an angel, just as the people send them by the priest, or because Christ is the Host sent to us by God. Hence at the end of Mass the deacon on feast days tells the people: "Go, the Mass is over," i.e., the Host is sent to God. . . ."

In regard to the Mass in its reality or in itself, if we consider it adequately, that is in its totality, it is a sacred ceremony consisting of many parts in which the unbloody sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ is offered under the species of bread and wine. Considered inadequately, or as the sacrifice of the Mass only, it is the sacrifice of the New Law in which Christ is offered and mystically slain under the species of bread and wine, to acknowledge the supreme dominion of God and to apply to us the satisfactions and merits of His Passion.

To prove that there is a sacrifice in the Mass we have the testimony of the Bible, both of the Old and New Testament (Ps. cix, 4; Mal. i, 10, 11; I Cor. xi, 24; Luke, xxii, 20) and that of tradition (Sts. Irenaeus, Cyril of Alexandria, Basil, Gregory of

Nyssa, Ambrose, *et al.*) and the teaching of the Council of Trent (Sess. XXII, Can. 1): "If any one saith that in the Mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God; or that to be offered is nothing else but that Christ is given to us to eat; let him be anathema." Theological reasons also, such as: every true religion must have a sacrifice, an exterior form of celebration and worship; all the conditions of a true sacrifice are verified in the sacrifice of the Mass, prove that we have a real and true sacrifice in the Mass.

We come now to the question of the essence of this sacrifice. In what part or in what action of the Mass, do we find the essence of this sacrifice? In what constituent parts of the liturgy of the Mass are we to look for the real sacrifice? The divers opinions of theologians center about the three chief parts of the Mass: the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion.

First, we have that of Scotus who said that besides the Consecration, the Offertory, which precedes it, is also required. This offering, we answer, is made simultaneously (*in actu exercito*) in the very Consecration. This opinion, consequently, we can reject without any difficulty or hesitation.

The second opinion, that of Johann Eck, states that, in addition to the Consecration, the offering "Unde et memores . . . offerimus" which follows, is required. We can reject this view for the same reason we have given above, and secondly because this offering is made in the name of the Church and not in that of Christ. Our Lord did not use these words; it was the Church that made it part of the liturgy of the Mass. Dr. Pohle, in the Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol X, p. 14, gives us another very good reason why the sacrifice is not comprised in the Offertory. He says: "From the wording of the prayer this much at least is clear, that bread and wine constitute the secondary sacrificial elements of the Mass, since the priest in the true language of sacrifice, offers to God bread as an 'unspotted host' (*Immaculatam hostiam*) and wine as the 'chalice of salvation' (*calicem salutaris*.) But the very significance of this language proves that attention is mainly directed to the prospective transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements. Since the Mass is not a mere offering of bread and wine, like the figurative food offering of Melchisedech, it is clear that only the Body and Blood of Christ can be the primary matter of the sacrifice, as was the case at the Last Supper (cf. Trent, Sess. XXII, Can. 2). Consequently, the sacrifice is not in the Offertory."

Melchior Canus held a different opinion, stating that besides the Consecration there must be the ceremony of the breaking of the Host and its commingling with the Blood. We reject this view also, because this action is merely a ceremony instituted by the Church, and secondly because we would still have the sacrifice even though the entire Host after the Consecration were to fall into the chalice by accident, thus preventing it being broken later on; and for the third reason that this action affects the consecrated species only and not the Victim. (Tanquerey, *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, III, 482).

The Consecration and the Communion are still to be considered. Does the sacrifice consist in the Communion? The late Bishop Bellord proposed a view, the so-called "banquet-theory," according to which the essence of the sacrifice was not to be looked for in the offering of a gift to God, but solely in the Communion. Without communion, he said, there was no sacrifice. According to recent historical research and investigation, he contended that the concept of sacrifice required as essential a communion with divinity by some sacrificial banquet. Of course we cannot accept such a view because it is contrary to the facts observed among various peoples and hardly in harmony with what is taught us by the Council of Trent. Among the Jews, only a few Levitical sacrifices, such as the peace offering, had feasting connected with them; most and especially the burnt offerings (*holocausta*) were accomplished without feasting, without any sacrificial banquet. (cf. Levit. vi, 9 sq.). And among the pagans, with the complete shedding of blood their sacrifice ended, so that the supper which sometimes followed it, was expressive merely of the satisfaction felt at the reconciliation with the gods. It was merely supplementary, a sign of their reconciliation with divinity effected through the sacrifice. Certainly we will not say that the essence of sacrifice consists in an element which may sometimes be absent, and which, when it does in fact exist, is merely something supplementary. Besides, Bishop Bellord was logically bound to allow that the Crucifixion itself had the character of a sacrifice only in conjunction with the Last Supper at which alone food was taken; for the Crucifixion excluded any ritual food offering. The death of Christ on the Cross is not, then, a sacrifice *ex se*, but only when taken together with the Last Supper. But according to the Catholic doctrine exposed by the Fathers of the Tridentine Council (Sess. XXII, chap. 2) the death of Christ is a true sacrifice, so that the Eucharistic Supper derives its sacrificial signification from the

Sacrifice of the Cross. It can also be stated here that sacrifice must tend directly to God's glory and honor, whereas communion tends directly to the advantage and utility of the one communicating. Important, too, is the fact that the "private Mass" at which the priest alone communicates is allowed (cf. Trent, Sess. XXII, Can. 8). And when the Jansenist Synod of Pistoia (1786) proclaiming the false principle that "participation in the sacrifice is essential to the sacrifice," demanded at least the making of a "spiritual communion" on the part of the faithful as a condition of allowing private Masses, it was denied by Pius VI in his Bull *Auctorem Fidei* (1796).

Bellarmino, de Lugo, and St. Alphonsus also hold for a communion being essential to this sacrifice, but it is that of the priest. They said that the essence of the sacrifice consists in the priest consuming the Host and the contents of the Chalice, this being a kind of destruction and thus fitting in with the conception of sacrifice given above. But this is not true, for the sacrificial transformation of the victim takes place in the body of the priest whereas it should occur on the altar in public, externally. At the most the partaking of the two species can represent the burial and not the sacrificial death of Christ. It does not imply any mutation in the body of Christ except the change from one place to another, from the mouth to the stomach. And furthermore, it is not the body of Christ which is consumed but the sacramental species, and Christ ceases to exist under these species when they are substantially changed, when corruption has set in. Moreover, the Last Supper would have been a true sacrifice only on condition that Christ had given the Communion to Himself also. There is, however, no evidence that such a Communion took place, although it is the teaching of our Catholic faith that Christ offered a true sacrifice at the Last Supper. And again, Communion presupposes the sacrifice completed, and is merely a participation of it for the good of the celebrant. All readily admit that this Communion belongs to the integrity of the sacrifice, but will not grant that it is essential to, that it belongs to the essence of, the sacrifice.

Having eliminated the Offertory and the Communion, there remains only the Consecration as the part in which we must seek the true sacrifice. And it is the common doctrine of theologians that the sacrifice consists in the Consecration alone, for it is in this part of the Mass that we have the necessary conditions of a true sacrifice. It is offered in the person of Christ, by an equivalent immolation when in virtue of the words of con-

secration there is a separation of the Body from the Blood, and it represents the Sacrifice of the Cross. Indeed that part alone is to be regarded as the proper sacrificial act which is such by Our Lord's institution. But Christ's words are: "This is My Body; this is My Blood." The sacrifice must also be at the point where Christ personally appears as High Priest and the human celebrant acts only as His representative, and this occurs only when the celebrant pronounces the words: "This is My Body; this is My Blood," in which there is no possible reference to the body and blood of the celebrant. We have also the words of the Angelic Doctor to confirm this teaching. He states that this "sacrament is perfected in the Consecration of the Eucharist, in which (action or part) the sacrifice is offered to God." (IIIa, q. 82, a. 10, ad 1).

The Consecration, then is the act of sacrifice. But is the one or the twofold consecration required for this sacrifice? Many theologians (especially the older ones, Frassen, Gotti), have supported the untenable theory that when one of the consecrated elements is invalid (such as barley bread or cider), the consecration of the valid element not only produces the Sacrament, but also the sacrifice (mutilated). Their argument is that the sacrament in the Eucharist is inseparable from the sacrifice. But they entirely overlooked the fact that Our Lord positively prescribed for His Apostles and their successors the twofold consecration for the sacrifice of the Mass (not for the sacrament), and especially the fact that in the consecration of one element only, the intrinsically essential relation of the Mass to the sacrifice of the Cross is not symbolically represented. Since it was no mere death from suffocation that Christ suffered, but a bloody death, in which His veins were emptied of their Blood, this condition of separation must receive visible representation on the altar, as in a sublime drama. This condition is fulfilled only by the double consecration which brings before our eyes the Body and the Blood in the stage of separation, and thus presents the mystical shedding of blood. Consequently, the double consecration is absolutely essential for the Eucharistic Sacrifice. This is also confirmed by the policy of the Church which never dispenses from the consecration of both species, even though extreme necessity may demand it. And Canon Law (Can. 817) states explicitly: "It is unlawful (*nefas*—contrary to divine command also) even in extreme necessity to consecrate one matter without the other, or even both, outside of Mass."

Bishop Challoner summarizes the true teaching of the Church on this question very clearly and simply when he writes (*Meditations*, p. 400): "This great sacrifice of the Eucharist essentially consists in the consecration of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and in the offering up of the same body and blood to God, by the ministry of the priest, as a perpetual memorial of the sacrifice of the Cross, and a continuation of the same to the end of the world. For, by the separate consecration of the bread into the body of Christ, and of the wine into His blood, performed by the priest, in the name and person of Christ, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ, presents Himself to His Father upon our altars, as slain for us, and His blood as shed for us, and under this figure of death offers up His own body and blood, to answer all the ends and intentions for which we ought to offer sacrifice to God."

In the double consecration, then, of the bread and wine is accomplished that never-to-be-forgotten prophecy of Malachias (i, 10, 11) announcing that in place of all the sacrifices of Mosaism, which were to be abrogated from then on and forever, a Sacrifice without blemish, a pure oblation, would be immolated in every place and offered in Jehovah's honor, while His Name was to be glorified as never before to the very ends of the world. Herein, too, is recalled the oblation of Melchisedech who, according to St. Paul (Heb. v, 6) interpreting a passage in the Psalms (cix, 4), was a figure of Our Lord. And finally, it is the long-awaited substitute for the immolation of the Paschal Lamb, the new Paschal Sacrifice of the "new and eternal Testament." Imitating the example of St. Thomas Aquinas who daily exercised his strong and firm faith before this "Mystery of Faith" on our altar, let us also pray every day to our Eucharistic Lord, both the Priest and Victim:—

"Make me believe Thee more and more
In Thee my hope, in Thee my love to store." (*Adoro Te*, 4th stanza.)

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