

## LIVE WITH CHRIST IN THE MASS

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HE Catholic Church was instituted by Christ to dispense salvation to all men for all time. She was given the sublime mission of continuing the work of redemption by the conversion and salvation of all nations. Before His ascension into Heaven Christ said: "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."<sup>1</sup> It is through her that the God-Man continues His mediatorship on earth. He carries out the work of salvation chiefly by the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass, the mystical renewal of the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross, from which all graces and blessings proceed. In the Mass the inexhaustible source of grace and salvation is transferred from the past to the present.

From a twofold aspect, the Mass represents the entire work of redemption. From one aspect, Christ continues to exercise His office of Teacher, Priest and King over all men. In the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ is the Highpriest Who establishes peace between Heaven and earth and regains for us the gifts of grace. While on earth He taught the divine truths by word and deed. Now His teachings, so full of the light and wisdom of faith, are brought to our attention repeatedly, especially through the Epistles and Gospels of the Mass. By means of the Cross Christ established His supernatural kingdom; through Holy Communion the meek and humble King takes possession of our souls and extends His kingdom of grace and love over us.

Likewise from the historical aspect, the work of salvation is represented in the Mass, for it is a living memorial of all the wonders and mysteries which the measureless love of the Blessed Trinity brought about for the salvation of men. In the Holy Sacrifice Christ's ignominious death on the Cross is mystically renewed. As all the other mysteries of redemption partly end and partly have their root in the Sacrifice of the Cross, so they are also contained in the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass. In each Mass the Altar becomes

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<sup>1</sup> *Matt.*, xxviii, 20.

another Bethlehem. Jesus lies under the species of bread and wine. His silent, humble and obedient life of thirty years is prolonged under these species. Moreover, He is in our midst in His hidden glory and with His painless wounds. From the Tabernacle He salutes us as He did the people of Palestine with the words: "Peace be to you."

The principal purpose of the liturgical ceremonies of the Church is to render to God the highest adoration and glory and to obtain for men sanctification and remission of sins. In the Sacrifice of the Altar praise and thanksgiving ascend to Heaven and blessings descend upon earth; man is elevated to God and God descends to man. The Mass daily procures and maintains the supernatural communion of life and love between God and man. It nourishes the members of the mystical body of the Church and unites them firmly to their Head—Jesus Christ.

The Eucharistic Sacrifice not only forms the crown of the Church's liturgy, but also is its vivifying root. It is the sum of divine worship, for it is our highest adoration and greatest thanksgiving, our most efficacious propitiation and most powerful petition. Christ, our Priest and Victim, offers Himself daily in the Eucharistic Sacrifice through the cooperation of the priest and the faithful. It is the Sacrifice of the people, as well as of the priest. For the Church says: "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be pleasing in the sight of the Lord." Therefore, we should unite ourselves to His Sacrifice as intimately as the branches are united to the trunk of the vine. Without the Mass our worship of God is like the ivy-vine without a tree upon which to make its ascent; it creeps on the ground and decays bit by bit. But when our worship is coupled with the Sacrifice of the Altar, it ascends with haste and power to Heaven.

The Mass is the center of the Church's liturgy throughout the ecclesiastical year in which it finds its fullest illustration. The chief idea behind the liturgy is a review of the life of Christ in the course of a year. Naturally, the more closely one follows this review, the greater good will one derive, because the spirit of the liturgy, the spirit of Christ Himself as portrayed during the various seasons, will penetrate the soul and give it new life, life that is Christlike. In this regard the missal is of very great assistance, since the Mass is the center of all worship and the principal source of our union with God. Pope Pius X said that "active participation in the *most holy Mysteries* and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church is the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit." The use of

the missal will give us a better view of the splendor and the shadows which the feast-days and holy seasons cast upon the Altar.

Beginning with Advent, we see the Church longingly preparing herself for the coming of the Promised Redeemer. At Christmas and Epiphany the liturgy radiates with heavenly brilliance, with peace and happiness, for the King of Kings dwells in our midst. But the liturgical sky darkens with the approach of Septuagesima Sunday when the Church begins her penitential preparations for Lent. And with the arrival of Quadragesima Sunday, her ceremonies become sadder and sadder until they are climaxed by the death of Jesus on Good Friday. The Church suffers and dies with her Spouse, but only to rise more gloriously on Easter Morn. She sings Alleluia after Alleluia and rejoices with her Risen Lord for forty days, after which He returns to His heavenly Father. Ten days later the Church commemorates His sending of the Holy Spirit, Who continues to teach and to sanctify souls through the successors of the Apostles.

In the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity the liturgy summarizes this first part of the ecclesiastical year by unveiling to us what we can learn of the intimate life of the Three Divine Persons. In the second part, from the Feast of the Blessed Trinity to Advent, the liturgy, by reviewing the teachings of Christ, recommends for our consideration truths which ought to be the guiding principles of our lives. Finally, in her celebration of the feasts of the Saints the Church honors them, because while on earth they reflected the life of their Master.

Christ instituted the daily Sacrifice, "into which He poured forth, as it were, the riches of His divine love for men, leaving (to men) a memorial of His wonderful works."<sup>2</sup> But all the faithful do not gain the same measure of graces while assisting at Mass. Those who personally cooperate in its celebration, who actually assist at the Sacrifice, are more likely to be better disposed for the reception of a greater share of heavenly blessings. Those who follow the prayers with the celebrant, as far as possible, enter into the closest and most intimate connection with the Sacrifice, because they pray and offer with the priest and with the Church. The celebrant asks for this cooperation just before the Preface when he turns to the faithful and says: "Pray, brethren, that my Sacrifice and yours may be pleasing in the sight of the Lord." Pope Pius X said: "The most suitable manner of attending Mass is to offer it together with the priest reflecting on the Sacrifice of the Cross, and to receive Com-

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<sup>2</sup> Council of Trent.

munion." Justly, therefore, is the following of the Mass with a missal regarded as one of the most efficacious means of drawing upon ourselves and others the fulness of spiritual and temporal blessings.

Moreover, the Mass is for us an inexhaustible source of pious emotions and holy thoughts drawn from Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which refresh and quicken our hearts with each reading. Its prayers are virile, expressive and adapted to the various moods of the liturgy; they harmonize with the deepest sorrow yet do not exclude hope; they promise everlasting joy yet remind us of the present vale of tears. In the Mass we find doctrines concerning God, His nature and attributes; the precepts and counsels summarized in the love of God and our neighbor; the teachings of the Prophets, who ever proclaimed the goodness, the justice and the love of God for His people; the counsels taken from the Sapiential Books, which are storehouses of wisdom. The prayers taken from the Book of Psalms make very nourishing spiritual food. Through the Mass we come in contact with examples that have incited many to practise virtue. From the Old Testament we have the Patriarchs, the Prophets and other outstanding personages, whose virtues merited the praise of St. Paul. We learn of the great piety of Abel and Henoch, the steadfastness of Noah in the midst of a corrupt generation, the faith of Abraham, the courage and wisdom of Moses, the zeal and wisdom of David.

Teachings and models from the New Law are likewise held up for our imitation. The Church proposes for our instruction and sanctification the teachings of Christ. In the Sermon on the Mount is contained a summary of Christian perfection. The spiritual theology of St. Paul's Epistles is rich in doctrinal ideas and in practical application. On feasts of Our Lord, the Mass prayers concern the life of Christ, Who is the perfect type of sanctity. Then we read of Mary and Joseph, His faithful imitators. Next we have the Apostles, who were imperfect at first, but later could say with St. Paul: "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

In the Mass we see the unique model of perfection, Jesus Christ. And we see a reflection of this perfection in His many followers. We become acquainted with the various steps in the way of perfection and with the persistent efforts of the Saints who triumphed over difficulties and advanced towards their desired goal. Our experience tells us that knowledge fires and stimulates our de-

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<sup>3</sup> I *Cor.* iv, 16.

sires. Hence, our acquaintance with the life of Christ and His imitators through the use of the missal will greatly assist us in fulfilling our desire to be Christlike; the spark will be fanned into a glowing flame. Our courage will be stirred up, our enthusiasm will be sustained in the midst of struggles, and these will prevent us from becoming lukewarm towards God. The Eucharistic Altar is the holy hearth where faith, hope and charity are enkindled, where devotion is fired and the spirit of prayer is enflamed.

The sanctuary is Heaven's stage whereon is daily enacted the greatest and the most sublime of dramas, the tragedy of tragedies. Again and again we see the renewal of the Hero's bitter agony and death for that which is good and holy, and particularly His triumph over the forces of evil. The entire congregation witnesses this sublime action, but ordinarily it is only those following it very closely who can expect to derive the greatest benefit, to appreciate the perfection and the loftiness of the Divine Drama.

But how many of us, so unlike the zealous Christians of the first days of the Church who sang in unison the Common of the Mass, come to church with an apparent indifference or lukewarmness as to what is going on at the Altar! Where is our faith, our love? Without a missal at Mass, we are like those who enter a theatre to see one of Shakespeare's plays without having first read it, or at least something about it. If people find it worth their while not only to read, but to study a play before they see it acted, certainly it should be worth our while to learn more about the greatest Religious Drama and to assist at it in the best way possible. For the time spent in assisting at Mass is very precious both for our well-being on this earth and for eternity. St. Augustine says: "Since you sin daily, partake daily of the antidote (the Mass) for sin." "To me," says Cardinal Newman, "nothing is so consoling, so piercing, so thrilling, so overcoming, as the Mass, said as it is among us. I could attend Masses forever, and not be tired. It is not a mere form of words—it is a great action, the greatest action that can be on earth."

"The Mass is a spiritual mine of gold, where we may dig and enrich ourselves with little labor; it is a treasure-house inexhaustible in its riches, that is ever open to us and to which we can always gain admittance," says Father Gehr. Those of the faithful who follow the Eucharistic Sacrifice with a missal store up spiritual treasures in many ways. To mention some: by endeavoring to restore all things in Christ, which is the urgent prayer of Our Holy Father; by joining

more fully in the official prayers of the Church; by uttering words that have been consecrated by centuries of usage; by following the thought and spirit of the Church, the very life of Christ as expressed in the liturgy, which instills in them new vigor; by reliving the Life, the Passion, the Death and the glorious Resurrection of Our Saviour; by fixing their attention on the greatest Action ever performed; by getting a more intimate appreciation of the Holy Sacrifice, the price of their salvation; and by uniting themselves more intimately to Christ. They become other Christs, and say with St. Paul: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Gal.* ii, 20.