

THE FEAST OF CORPUS CHRISTI—ITS PRAYER

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Y DELIGHTS are to be with the children of men.”¹ God meant that very seriously. At the dawn of time, no longer willing to contain His Goodness only for Himself, He created man to His own image and likeness. Man fell; He redeemed him. Could He do more? Yes, He could remain with man permanently and personally. This He did by means of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

The Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a sacrament. As a sacrifice it is the Mass, an adequate expression of love and homage even for God, because it is the work of God. As a sacrament the Eucharist is Holy Communion, the greatest of the sacraments, because it contains Him Who instituted all the sacraments. The relation between the Eucharist as a sacrifice and as a sacrament is very close, for “the eucharistic sacrifice gives us the sacrament.”² “He instituted this sacrament at the solemn celebration of the Mass.”³

Saint Thomas Aquinas, well named “the Eucharistic Doctor,” wrote the office for the feast of Corpus Christi. In the prayer for this office, probably better known as the prayer sung at the close of Benediction, he has beautifully epitomized the excellence of the Eucharist. “O, God, who in this wonderful sacrament has left us a memorial of Thy passion: grant us we beseech Thee, so to venerate the sacred mysteries of Thy Body and Blood, that we may ever feel within us the fruit of Thy redemption.” Saint Thomas sets forth three things in this prayer. He tells us, first, what the Holy Eucharist is; It is a memorial of the Passion. In the second part of the prayer we are taught how to use these sacred mysteries; we are to venerate them. Lastly, the effect of our veneration, the very purpose of the sacrament, is pointed out; ever to feel within us the fruit of our

¹ Prov. VIII, 31.

² Marmion, Dom Columba, O.S.B. *Christ in His Mysteries*. (St. Louis: 1934) p. 355.

³ Saint Thomas, *Opus*. 57. Cfr. also *Summa Theol.*, IIIa, q. 82, a. 10, ad lum.

redemption. To know what something is, to recognize its proper use, to realize the result of its use; these three points are necessary to profit from the gifts God has given us. It is for this reason that this prayer is an adequate summation of the Holy Eucharist.

The Holy Eucharist is a memorial of the Passion of Christ. The Passion is the price Christ paid to redeem fallen man. It is the source of all grace. Through it we receive the necessary help to begin and continue a life of virtue. The Passion enables us again to approach God, to live for Him, to die in His friendship, and so pass on to our eternal home. Because we can, and really need, always to share in the effects of the Passion, it is very necessary that we remember it. Christ "knew what was in man."⁴ Therefore He Himself left us a reminder of the redemption, a memorial of His Passion. It is a memorial and yet the original; it is representative of Christ and yet Christ; it is a reminder of Calvary and yet Calvary itself, because the Eucharist as a sacrifice is Calvary repeated. "For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord, until He come."⁵ Through the separate consecration of the bread into His Body and the wine into His Blood Christ is mystically slain, as He was actually slain when the last drop of His Blood had been separated from His Body and shed for us.⁶ The Mass is the unbloody sacrifice of Calvary. In the Mass an infinite offering is made to God. First He came through Mary and yet He came of Himself. On Calvary man crucified Him but He laid down His life of Himself. Now through priests He offers Himself. He is priest, He is victim, and hence the infinite value of Calvary is repeated.

In the sacrament He remains with us, the same Who came on earth to die for us. To remind us of that He leaves Himself, true God and true man, not less kind, not less powerful, not less ready to help than when, on Palestine's roads, He gave sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, bread to the hungry, and the gospel of good tidings to the poor. Only through His Passion and death are we brought to the glory of His resurrection. The graces of the Passion are given us through the sacraments which He left us. Of all the sacraments the Eucha-

⁴ John, II, 25.

⁵ I Cor., XI, 26.

⁶ Cfr. *Summa Theol.*, IIIa, q. 74, a. 1.

rist is the end and consummation,⁷ because it contains Christ Himself ever present to aid us. To help us fittingly honor God, to help us keep the narrow roadway towards the eternal city, Christ left us in this wonderful sacrament an abiding memorial of His Passion.

*And as He hath done and planned it—
'Do this'—hear His love command it,
'For a memory of me.'*⁸

We are to use these sacred mysteries, not in a vague, uncertain way, but in a definite and clear manner. *Grant us to venerate these sacred mysteries.* We venerate the Eucharist as a sacrifice by assisting at Mass. The Mass is the greatest action that can take place on earth. It is the Incarnation made permanent, for in the Mass the Word is again made flesh to dwell among us. Every act at Nazareth was infinite because it was an act of God; every second on the Cross was infinite because God was there; every Mass is infinite because it is the action of God. "All our good works put together can never equal the Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the work of God. Martyrdom is nothing in comparison with it; for martyrdom is the sacrifice which man makes to God of his life, while the Mass is the sacrifice which God offers for man of His Body and Blood."⁹ It is not strange that the Mass is the center, the unifying principle, the vital source of the religion which will last all days even to the consummation of the world.

We venerate the Eucharist as a sacrament by receiving it. Food is the source of growth and conservation for the body. To grow in Christ, to live for Christ, it is necessary to have a source of spiritual growth and conservation.¹⁰ It was to convince us of this necessity that Christ left Himself under the species of the food most common to all men.¹¹

*O thou memorial of our Lord's own dying;
O living Bread, to mortals life supplying.*¹²

⁷ Cfr. Dionysius, *Eccl. Hierarch.*, cap. 3, in prin.

⁸ Saint Thomas, *Lauda Sion*, Sequence for the Mass of Corpus Christi.

⁹ Cure d'Ars, *Sermons*. Cfr. Monnin, *Life of the Cure d'Ars*, (New York: 1862) p. 119.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Summa Theol.*, IIIa, q. 65, a. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, q. 74, a. 1.

¹² Saint Thomas, *Adoro Te*.

He desires to come to us, to unite Himself to us, to transform¹³ us into Himself. "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you."¹⁴ He will not force Himself. He stands at the door of our heart and knocks. He has been there so long a time and have we not known Him? The lock to our heart is on the inside; we alone can open it. He enters, infinitely powerful, desiring to help, but the efficacy of His visit depends on us. He is able to transform us into Himself, if we are ready and willing to make the sacrifices entailed by such a transformation; if we stand prepared to judge our lives by His standards and not by the standards of the world;¹⁵ if we are willing to judge our work, as He judges it, not by its effect but by its motive.¹⁶ A drop of water is put into the chalice of the Mass before its consecration. It becomes wine. As that water becomes wine so are we to be transformed into Christ.¹⁷ The source of this transformation is the sacraments, and especially the Holy Eucharist. If we but knew the gift of God!

The Eucharist is a permanent sacrament. Time is often a mark of friendship, the time friends spend with each other or for each other. Our Lord remains upon our altars to spend all His time with us; while on earth He spent His entire life for us. Why then do we stand all the day idle? There is no friendship unless the love, which is its source, be mutual.¹⁸ He loves us. Through love He created us; through love He redeemed us; His love remains with us upon the altar. "It was in order that the boundless goodness of His great love might be driven home into the hearts of His faithful one . . . that He instituted this sacrament . . . the greatest miracle which He ever wrought, and the one mighty joy of them that now have sorrow, till He shall come again, and their hearts shall rejoice, and their joy no man shall take from them."¹⁹ He is with us because He loves us; we must go to Him if we want to love Him. Love expresses itself in action. God could do no more for man than what He has already done. How is man to show his love for God? Many wait for an occasion to do something big for God

¹³ Cfr. IV *Sent.*, dist. 12, q. 2, a. 1.

¹⁴ Luke, xxii, 15.

¹⁵ Cfr. Tanqueray A., S.S. *The Spiritual Life*, (Tournai: 1932) p. 145, 149.

¹⁶ Cfr. Leen E., C.S.Sp. *In the Likeness of Christ*, (New York: 1936) p.

335 sqq.

¹⁷ Cfr. *Summa Theol.*, IIIa, q. 74, a. 6; q. 74, a. 8, ad 2.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, IIa, IIae, q. 23, a. 1.

¹⁹ Saint Thomas, *Opusc.* 57.

allowing countless opportunities to do small things for Him to slip by. They forget the thirty years of His hidden life. It is no small thing to spend a lifetime made up of little things and do them all well for God. "Little things—why do we call them little at all? We must not measure spirituality in cubic feet, nor should we judge holiness by the acreage of our activities."²⁰ Saint Paul was not just writing to fill up space when he penned, "Whatsoever . . . you do, do all to the glory of God."²¹ Most of life is made up of little things. Should God require greater things of us, we may the better hope to do them if we have been faithful in that which is least.

The most assured means of spending our life for God, be it made up of big or little things, is to keep in close contact with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. After visiting our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament we return to our everyday life and find it is the same. Rarely is there a difference. The visits do not change our surroundings, but they do change us.²² They do not make our life easier, but they explain it; they do not take away all sorrow and trial, but they bring strength and courage; they do not change our daily tasks, but they change us so that we can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth us. Visits to our Lord do not take away the Cross; they show us how to carry it. Is He not there as a reminder of His own crucifixion? The way of the cross is not something merely historical; it is a living reality. It must be our way if we shall have any part with Him. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me."²³ He remains with us to help us on our way.

*Hail angelic Bread of heaven,
Now the pilgrim's hoping-leaven.*²⁴

If we properly venerate the memorial of Christ's Passion we shall ever feel within us the fruit of our redemption. If we remember the price Christ paid for our sins we shall keep from sin; if we retain the vision of Calvary, certainly we shall not wane in good works. To enable us to do good and avoid evil for God, that is why He suffered and died. He gazed on through the centuries to the consummation of the world. Would men

²⁰ O'Rahilly, Alfred. *Fr. William Doyle, S.J.*, (New York: 1925) p. 365.

²¹ I Cor., x, 31.

²² Cfr. Le Buffe, F., S.J., *As It is Written*. (New York: 1931) p. 86.

²³ Luke, ix, 23.

²⁴ Saint Thomas, *Lauda Sion*.

remember the Passion or would the passing years slowly cloud its memory? He looked back to Adam's fall; He recalled how the Father promised to send a redeemer. Years intervened, and when in the fulness of time the redeemer came, men had forgotten that promise. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not."²⁵ The redeemer came; the price was paid. Could men forget that? No, for He Himself would stay to see that they would not. He would leave Himself in a wonderful sacrament to remind men of His Passion. Men would venerate Him therein and thus would they ever feel within them the fruit of the redemption. Calvary took away our sins; Calvary repeated in the Mass and our Lord present in the Holy Eucharist would keep us from sin and urge us on to do good. This memorial would be the product of His love. Love is returned by love. Surely men, drawn by His love, would return it and live for Him.

*O Good Shepherd, still confessing
Love, in spite of our transgressing,
Here Thy Blessed Food possessing,
Make us share Thine every blessing
In the land of light and love.²⁶*

"We have not here a lasting city but we seek one that is to come."²⁷ To help us toward the abiding city He left us a memorial of His Passion, that Passion which is the price of our entrance. To help ourselves arrive there we should venerate the Holy Eucharist by assisting at Mass, by receiving the Sacrament, by visiting Christ truly present beneath the species. He left us Himself because He loved us. Love begets a union; in union there is strength. May God's love for us and our love for God be our strength as we "journey to the abiding city."²⁸

*By birth, our fellow man was He;
Our meat, while sitting at the board;
He died, our ransom to be;
He ever reigns, our great reward.²⁹*

²⁵ John, I, 11.

²⁶ Saint Thomas, *Lauda Sion*.

²⁷ Hebr., XIII, 14.

²⁸ Jarrett, Bede, O.P., *No Abiding City*. (London: 1933).

²⁹ Saint Thomas, *Verbum Supernum*. Hymn of Lauds for the Office of Corpus Christi.