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## THE MASS AND SANCTITY

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IN RELIGION as in love delicate shades of attitude are important. The wrong attitude in love makes a crotchety bachelor. The wrong attitude in religion makes a spiritual pigmy. The command "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" excluded spiritual pigmys from the Divine Plan. Since the Mass is the very center of Christian life and worship, our attitude toward it is very important. It is a mistake to look upon the precept of hearing Mass as part of an inconvenient formula for avoiding mortal sin. And it is a mistake to look upon the command of the Lord "Do this in commemoration of Me" as a dying man's wish to be thought well of when he was gone. It would even be a mistake to look upon the Mass merely as something we give to God. The Mass is a gift, but it is also God's gift to us. The Sacrifice of Calvary is continued for our benefit, to increase our sanctity. In fact, all the external acts of religion are for our benefit, our utility. Bending the knees in a genuflection makes it noticeably easier to bend the will in adoration. Of course, this does not mean that reverence ceases to be the motive for offering sacrifice and making genuflections. These actions prove useful only when they are intended for God's glory. But what we intend and what they actually do are two different things. Here and now we are interested in what the Mass does for us. It is important to see the Mass from this point of view since our attitude toward it makes a great difference in what we do about it. But how the Mass is related to sanctity is a long story involving many distinctions. Though the story is long it has a very practical conclusion which should make the work of grasping these subtleties well worth the effort.

## SANCTITY

Ordinarily we associate sanctity with a spiritual hero. We lump together the ideas of sanctity and perfection into a vague notion that has something to do with getting into heaven. Now this is all quite true, but sanctity also has an exact meaning which is not quite so familiar. It is really just another name for the virtue of religion. The virtues are a bureaucracy. Each virtue handles a special section of our morally good actions. Religion is a part of justice, the moral virtue which handles debts. When debts are owed to God, justice is called the virtue of religion. Now, the first debt we owe to God is reverence. We pay it with acts of cult: devotion, prayer, adoration, sacrifice and vows. However, the virtue of religion is not quite so simple as all that. It also has special refinements. These refinements give it the name of sanctity. Sanctity digs deeper and offers God simply the will and uses ceremonies to apply the mind to God. It also sends out orders to other bureaus, to temperance and fortitude, and gets them to contribute their bit to rendering the will more efficient in applying itself to God. In a way sanctity makes religion more efficient and far-reaching. Its motto is "cleanness and firmness"—but always out of reverence for God's excellence. It insures that all our good actions will be in conformity to the attitude our will takes toward God's overlordship. It brings the will to seek God as its last end with the constancy that a compass displays in pointing north. It makes the will tag along after God with the steadiness a little boy displays in tagging along after his mother on whom he depends for all he has and all he needs.

Perfection also has a special meaning. It is the refinement of charity. Charity is at the very peak of the bureaucracy of virtue. Charity, however, is a theological virtue. It is an attitude towards God's goodness. It specializes in acts of love. From this point of view sanctity is different from perfection. However, it must be remembered that the moral virtues, including religion, not only get an impetus from the theological virtues but also dispose our little souls to operate more vigorously under the theological virtues. Thus sanctity is an approach to the perfection of man by charity. It is also important to remember that the theological virtue of charity is better than the moral virtue of religion or sanctity. Charity brings us closer to God. By charity we love God; by religion we pay our debts to Him. Even a grammar-school theologian can see that there is at least the difference here between God as the direct and indirect object of the verb. Charity unites us directly to God while sanctity unites us only mediately to God. None the less, at present we are

not directly concerned with charity or perfection. We are concerned with sanctity, the readiness to be a slave to the divine principle.

This good habit of sanctity is standard equipment for one reborn in Christ. God infuses this virtue at Baptism along with all the others. Like a baby, however, (we are all babes at Baptism), this virtue should grow and increase in stature as we grow older. Otherwise the child of God becomes a spiritual pigmy. Now, sanctity grows and increases by repeated acts of the virtue of religion, just as the ability to type increases with practice. Devotion, prayer and sacrifice are a few of the acts of the virtue of religion, but sacrifice is the most perfect. Since the Mass is a sacrifice it is properly an act of the virtue of religion. Hence the Mass can and does increase our sanctity. Before going on to see just how this comes about it will be necessary to recall a few ideas and distinctions about the Holy Sacrifice.

#### THE MASS

Even a little grammar-school Catholic can tell you that the Mass is the unbloody sacrifice of the cross. Faith makes little ones very smart. But a life time of meditation will hardly exhaust the meaning buried in this definition. A sacrifice is the offering of some external sensible object to God. It presupposes the internal offering of the heart. This external offering must be made by a priest who somehow changes or destroys the object. He does this to signify our complete subjection to the supreme dominion of God. On Calvary, Christ offered Himself to God as the external object. But Christ was both priest and victim. By undergoing death or destruction for our sins, Jesus acknowledged in the fullest measure possible the overlordship of God and the complete subjection of man. In the Mass this same sacrifice is continued, but without the spilling of blood and the killing of Christ. The same priest and the victim are really, though sacramentally present. Though Christ in heaven is not again killed, the destruction and oblation of the victim is accomplished by the separate consecration. The consecration really changes bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. But the separate consecration of the Body and Blood signifies the actual separation of Christ's Body and Blood, Soul and Body, on Calvary. Thus His sacrifice is re-enacted in the Mass in a real but unbloody manner. It is important to note that the sacrifice is not the destruction of the bread and wine. Nor does the destruction of the Body and Blood accomplished by Communion constitute the sacrifice. No, the sacrifice is accomplished by the twofold consecration and its sacramental

signification. Hence we say that the heart of the Mass is the Consecration. It is the very essence of the sacrifice. Many other rites and ceremonies surround the consecration, but at present we are not interested in them. We are here and now interested in the heart of the Mass and how it affects the heart of man.

As a sacrifice the Mass has many effects. The Mass has as its fruits honor and thanks given to God, petitions for favors and propitiation for sins which point to us. Yet, our thanks and honor add nothing to God. He is immutable. Their effect is to render us reverent and grateful in respect to Him. In a way these fruits of the Mass are like a child in relation to birth. They are the obvious result of the Mass. But they are not the effects we are here and now interested in. Though we seldom think of it, childbirth also affects the mother. There is a new tenderness and dignity about her. You can see it in her eyes when she looks at children. So too, the Mass, in as much as it flows from the virtue of religion, increases our sanctity. We seldom think of this effect of the Mass. Here and now, though, this very change in the heart of man is what we are concerned with—the effect of the Mass as an act of the virtue of religion. But to see more closely how this effect comes about, it is necessary to consider the different relationships the Mass has to Christ, to the priest and to the layman.

The strict definition of sacrifice calls for a priest. The priest offers up the victim to God by bringing about some change in or the destruction of what is offered. Now, Christ is a priest by essence. He is a divine Person having two natures, one divine and one human. He was Son of God and Son of Man from the moment of His conception. He is the perfect mediator between God and man by nature. For Him the grace of union was ordination. In the sacrifice of Calvary the soldiers seem to be the cause of His death. They provided sufficient punishment to destroy the union of Christ's soul and body. Yet, they could not tear asunder what God had joined together. Their cruelty had the effect of killing Christ only because Christ willed it. The soldiers were not the priests on Calvary. By willing to die Christ was the true and only priest. He saw God in all His excellence. He saw man in all the misery of his false independence which had resulted from the pride of Adam. Christ willed to die as a supreme act of worship to an outraged God for fallen man. This is the primary rôle of Christ whether on Calvary or in the Mass.

Unlike Christ, an ordained priest is not a priest by nature. He only participates in the priesthood of Christ. The priestly character conferred on him in the sacrament of Holy Orders is the source of

this participation. To see the intimate relationship between the Mass and the priest it is necessary to consider the separate functions of the character and the priest's will with regard to the Sacrifice.

The priestly character is what we call a potency. For example, we say the digestive potency is an ability to change food into ourselves. The priestly character is somewhat like that; only it is an ability to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Since this change is the very essence of the sacrifice of the Mass, this ability is what properly makes a man a priest. Hence, in the rite of ordination the Bishop does not say "receive the power to consecrate," but "receive the power to offer sacrifice." This potency in the priest is an instrument in the hands of Christ Who is a priest by nature, just as a pencil is an instrument in the hands of a writer. However, since transubstantiation cannot be accomplished by the natural human powers of Christ, we say further that the human nature of Christ is again an instrument of His divine nature, just as the hand is the instrument of the body. This potency of consecrating thus gives the priest a physical union with Christ, just as physical as a hand united to a pencil. It is physical and instrumental. Hence the priest does not say "This is His Body" but "This is My Body." Christ is still the principal offerer of the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is important to remember that the priestly character is the proper reason why a priest is a priest; it gives the priest a physical participation in sacrificing the Body and Blood of Christ.

Over and above the physical union a priest has with Christ by his character, he should also have a moral union with the will of Christ by willing what Christ willed. Though the priest's will does not cause the sacrifice to be accomplished as a principal cause, still his will makes it possible for his priestly character to go into operation. Thus, by physically sharing the priesthood of Christ, and by morally sharing in the intentions of Christ, the priest takes bread and wine into his hands and truly offers the one acceptable sacrifice to the All High God.

The layman also has a rôle to play in the sacrifice. However, unlike the priest, he in no wise is a cause of the sacrifice. The layman does not physically offer the external sacrifice, but his willing what Christ wills and intending what the priest intends do, however, give him a moral union with Christ and the priest. Though we say we hear with the ears and see with the eyes, we really *hear* Mass with the will. It is an act of the virtue of religion, an act of worship. True, charity and faith and humility are necessary and play a part. Though acts of worship flow directly from the virtue of religion, they

should ultimately be sponsored by our love for God. The Mass also calls upon us for an act of faith in most of the mysteries of God, of Christ and of the sacramental system. Then too, acknowledgment of our subjection to the overlordship of God presupposes an act of humility. All these virtues contribute and each is strengthened by its contribution. Yet, properly speaking, we *hear* Mass with the virtue of religion. Thus the faithful, unlike the priest, have only a moral union with the sacrifice. They have not the priestly character in their souls. Their union is based on grace and the virtues. The sacramental characters of Baptism and Confirmation in no way enter into the offering of the sacrifice. These characters are ordained to totally different activities. We can no more offer sacrifice with them than we can think with our digestive system.

#### THE LAYMAN'S PART

To avoid confusion on this participation of the laity in the Sacrifice of the Mass, it is necessary to indicate what is not meant before going on to develop more definitely just how *hearing* Mass increases our sanctity. Strictly speaking, in the New Law only a priest can offer sacrifice. Having a physical union with the priesthood of Christ, a priest can properly elicit the act of religion called sacrifice. Now a layman does not have this kind of participation in the Mass. However, we frequently read in devotional literature of the practice of offering up all the little acts of the other virtues which make up the warp and woof of daily life in the Mass, as matter for the sacrifice. Certainly this should be done. But strictly speaking, this offering is not properly a sacrifice. There is no destruction of a physical external object. And even if there were, it would still not be a sacrifice since the layman is not a priest. So to arrive at the basic and fundamental and proper participation of the laity in the Mass it is necessary to exclude the sense in which they are mystically identified with Christ, the priest and victim. The Mystical Body is more the effect of the Sacrifice than its cause and matter.

But if the layman is neither priest offering nor victim offered, how can the Mass be for him an act of the virtue of religion? First, recall that a sacrifice strictly speaking is that offering of an external object by a priest. The external object is destroyed to signify man's inner subjection to God. Note well that what takes place externally is a sign of what should take place within the heart of man. In former times food was used for the external sign. Since food nurtures life it is an apt sign for life itself. A man cannot actually kill himself to show his complete subjection to God. So a lamb or some

such thing was substituted as a sign of man's life, a very simple procedure. In the Mass, as on Calvary, Christ Himself is the external sign which is destroyed, the real, physical Christ. The thing signified is an inner spiritual reality. It is the actual subjection of our hearts to God our Father.

A question comes up at this point. Does the external sign come before or after the thing signified? Does the external sacrifice signify an interior subjection already existing or does it cause this interior subjection? Strangely enough both are true. The external sacrifice should be both an effect and a cause of the inner subjection of our wills. As an effect, the sacrifice of the Mass should be a sign of our subjection, an already existing reality. Our intention to offer the Mass with Christ and the priest by sharing their intentions should spring from our virtue of religion. This is the virtue with which we *hear* Mass. This is the virtue of reverent subjection. However, recall that the exterior acts of religion are supposed to bring about an increase of interior devotion in the heart. A genuflection, for example, not only proceeds from devotion, a spirit of adoration, but it also proves useful in stirring up further devotion. So it is with the Mass. The exterior sign is meant to cause instrumentally a further deeper subjection of the heart. The Mass should cause an increase of devotion, that willingness to serve God promptly which might be called the interior spiritual sacrifice. This is the very point at which the heart of the Mass affects the heart of man. That moment of every Mass when the priest says "This is My Body . . . This is My Blood" should be a most efficacious means of increasing our sanctity, our slavery to the divine principle. All the words and music and ceremonies of the Mass focus on this point. All our lives and all our pious exercises at Mass should be aimed at eliciting this act of devotion. It requires "putting on the mind of Christ" at that point in His life which was the very climax of all history. The death of Christ is a sacrifice so far surpassing the signification of the sacrifices of bread and oil and oxen and lambs of the Old Law that our inner response to it can never fulfill the tremendous meaning of this sign.

All the distinctions necessary for a full understanding of the relationship between the Mass and sanctity have now been introduced. The process of bringing all the loose ends together starts with one more question. There seems to be a contradiction in saying that the outward sacrifice not only flows from the inner sacrifice of the heart but also causes it. The Mass seems to be an effect and a cause at the same time. Now, there are two different kinds of causality in-

volved here. In the first case we say the Mass should flow from our inner devotion. Certainly this is not a matter of physical efficient causality as far as the layman is concerned. In order to express their devotion the faithful use the priest as a spokesman. The priest acting in conjunction with Christ offers the external sacrifice. The faithful will what Christ and the priest will, they intend what Christ intends. They will it, however, as a manifestation of their inner devotion, as a sign of the sacrifice of their hearts. This union with the priest in offering the Mass is an act of the virtue of religion and hence it serves to increase our sanctity. Virtues increase by repeated acts. But this is only one side of the picture.

On the other hand we say that the external sacrifice causes an increase in devotion. It stimulates the heart to profounder subjection. How does the Mass bring this about? Now, the very definition of a sign says that it is a means for increasing knowledge. God knows about our devotion before we express it. We express it for our own utility. God gave us this means of expressing devotion to teach us important truths. The Mass should bring home to us a realization of God's excellence. If Christ undertook to worship His Father at so great a price, certainly the Father must be most worthy of worship. Furthermore, the Mass should bring home to us a realization of God's goodness and love for us. "Greater love than this no man hath, than that he lay down his life for a friend." Finally, in as much as the Mass is a commemoration of the death of Christ it should bring home to us a fuller realization of the malice of sin. It should teach us our utter dependence upon God's mercy. These truths in turn move the heart to a fuller measure of devotion. They stimulate a willingness to serve God promptly and completely. Thus it is that the Mass as an external sign of devotion also serves to increase devotion. Devotion is the basic operation of the habit of sanctity. By devotion the heart actually gives itself in reverence to God. Devotion is the source and term of all the external acts of religion. Sanctity merely uses these external actions to apply the heart more fully to God. Thus the Mass is a means of increasing sanctity. And this is the way to use the Mass as God intended us to use it.

There is a very practical conclusion to all these fine distinctions about the Mass and sanctity. Some say it would be wonderful if the laity could read Latin. Some say that more missals in English will make the Mass more fruitful for the laity, especially if they are taught how to find all the prayers so they can keep up with the priest. Now all this is true, but there is a need for something still more practical

and important. At the beginning we said that the externals of religion prove useful only when they are intended for God's glory. The attitude of the heart which tends to give glory to God is dependent upon two factors. First, our devotion depends upon God as an extrinsic and principal cause. Unless God moves the heart, the heart does not move. Therefore it depends upon God. Second, our devotion depends upon meditation or contemplation. The mental outlook which moves the soul to worship God comes from daily consideration of two truths: the supreme excellence of God our Father and Creator, His goodness and mercy; and a knowledge of our defects, our sins, our needs, our total dependence upon Him, the beginning and end of our existence. Meditation upon these truths is the first step in the life of devotion, the life which leads to sanctity.