

THE BLESSED SACRAMENT AND THE SACRED HEART (Treatises of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure)

Translated by

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WE KNOW THAT MANY TODAY are turning with greater zest to a study which delights and nourishes Christian piety. This, it would seem, is chiefly because a revived interest in the sacred liturgy, the more widely spread custom of receiving Holy Communion and the more fervent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus practiced today have brought many souls to a deeper consideration of the unsearchable riches of Christ which are preserved in the Church."¹

Our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, addressed these words to us in his encyclical letter on the Mystical Body of Christ. Since two of the three reasons mentioned why many souls have been led to consider Catholic truth more deeply are directly concerned with the Blessed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart, it would be beneficial to look into these causes more closely.

Who will guide us in our endeavor to have a greater appreciation for these two sublime mysteries of our Faith? To increase our knowledge and love of the Blessed Sacrament, we turn to St. Thomas Aquinas, who sang so well the praises of the Holy Eucharist. And we go to St. Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor, to intensify our devotion to the Sacred Heart. Our Holy Mother the Church has given added approval to the words translated below by incorporating them into her official prayer, the Divine Office.²

Now let us drink the fountain of our instruction at its very source. Let us proceed directly to the Angelic Doctor and the Seraphic Doctor, whose words will clearly show how greatly

¹ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, from the official English translation used in Bluett, Joseph, *The Mystical Body of Christ* (America Press, New York) sec. 10, p. 7.

² St. Thomas, three lessons of 2nd nocturn of Corpus Christi, and 3rd lesson of the nocturn for 1st day of the Octave. St. Bonaventure, three lessons of 3rd nocturn of Sacred Heart feast (Dominican Breviary).

Christ loves us in His Blessed Sacrament and in His Sacred Heart.

TREATISE OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT³

The innumerable benefits bestowed upon Christian people through God's generosity have conferred on them an immeasurable dignity. There does not now exist, nor did there ever exist a people so elevated as to have their gods near them as our God is present with us. Since the only begotten Son of God wanted us to share in His divinity, He took upon Himself our nature. He became man in order that men might become gods.

For our salvation He gave back to us completely that which He took from us, namely our human nature. On the altar of the cross He offered His body as a victim of sacrifice to God the Father, in order that we might be reconciled. He shed His blood which was the price of our redemption and at the same time the cause of our cleansing. And He did these things to redeem us from our miserable bondage, thereby cleansing us from all our sins.

In order that we may always remember such a great benefit as this He left His body as food and blood as drink. He left them to be consumed by the faithful under the appearance of bread and wine. O precious banquet that commands our admiration, that brings us health of soul, and that abounds with all peace! What could be more precious than this banquet? In it we do not eat the flesh of goats and calves as was done in the Old Law. We receive for our food, Christ, Who is truly God. What could be more admirable than this Sacrament? In It the substance of bread and wine are changed into the Substance of the Body and Blood of Christ. Therefore Christ, Who has the fullness of divinity and humanity, is contained under the appearance of a little bread and wine.

Christ is consumed by the faithful, but is in no way mangled. In fact it happens that when the Sacrament is divided, the whole Christ continues to exist in each part that has been separated. The accidents subsist in this Sacrament without a subject. Thus, faith is required since we receive without seeing Him the visible Christ Who is hidden under appearances not His own. The senses are not deceived because they are perceiving accidents which are the only things they know. No other sacrament is

³ Taken from his *Opusculum LVII*.

more healthful than this Sacrament. In It sins are removed, virtues are increased, and the mind is made to abound with all spiritual gifts. This Sacrament is offered on behalf of the living and dead by the Church, so that this great Gift which was instituted for the salvation of all might be of assistance to all.

Consequently, the devotion of the faithful will profit by recalling the institution of this Sacrament which is so healthful to the soul and so admirable. This recollection will help us to adore the inexplicable manner of God's presence in His visible Sacrament; it will aid us in our praise of the divine power which has performed so many wonderful works in this Sacrament; and, finally we shall be assisted in giving to God the thanks that are His due for giving us this benefit, which brings us so much spiritual strength and peace.

The Roman Pontiff, Urban IV, being so disposed by his devotion to this Sacrament, affectionately decreed that the institution of this Sacrament should be commemorated by all the faithful on the first Thursday after the Octave of Pentecost.

TREATISE OF ST. BONAVENTURE ON THE SACRED HEART⁴

The providence of God permitted one of the soldiers to pierce the sacred side of Christ with a lance in order that the Church might come forth from that side while He was hanging dead on the cross. The Divine Ruler allowed this to happen that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which says: "They shall look on Him Whom they pierced" (*Zacharias XII, 10*). God's purposes were furthered when that sacred side, opened up by the thrust of the spear, poured forth blood and water, the price of our redemption. This saving liquid which sprang from the fountain that was Christ's Heart would empower the Sacrament of the Church to give grace. For those who live in Christ, it would be a drink of the living fountain that springs up to eternal life. Arise, then, O soul friendly to Christ! Be on your guard continuously! Put your lips to the place where you may drink the waters of the Savior's well.

Since once we come to the Heart of the Lord, our dearest Jesus, and realize that it is good for us to be here,⁵ we are not easily torn away from It. O how good and how pleasant it is to dwell in this Heart!⁶ The good treasure is Thy Heart. The pearl

⁴ *Book on the Tree of Life*, num. 30, *On the Mystical Vine*, chapter 3.

⁵ cf. *Matt. XVII, 4*.

⁶ cf. *Psalm CXXXII, 1*.

of great price is Thy Heart.⁷ O all good Jesus, we found this Pearl after the field which was Thy body had been dug open. Who would reject this Pearl? As for me, I shall surrender all other pearls, I shall give in exchange all my thoughts and actions, and I will unite this Pearl to myself. For by casting all my thoughts and desires into the Heart of the good Jesus, I will not be deceived, but rather will be supported by that same Heart. Since I have found this Heart, which is both Thine and mine, O dearest Jesus, I shall now beseech Thee Who art my God: "Allow my prayers to enter Thy sanctuary where Thou shalt answer them. Rather, do more than this. Draw me entirely into Thy Heart."

Thy side was opened to make an entrance for us. Thy Heart was wounded to be our dwelling place free from the disturbances outside. For no less a reason, this Heart was pierced that by seeing a visible wound we might behold the invisible wound of His love. How could He have shown His love more convincingly than by permitting not only His body, but even His very Heart to be wounded by a spear? The wound of the flesh therefore, shows forth the wound of the spirit. Who would not love that Heart so wounded? Who would not return the love of a Heart so loving? Who would not embrace a Heart so pure?

And so, while we are still with our bodies, let us, as much as we are able, love in return One Who so loves us; let us embrace our wounded One, Whose hands and feet, side and Heart were pierced by ungodly barbarians; and let us pray that, although our hearts are yet obstinate and impenitent, He may deem them worthy to become the prisoners and targets of His love.

⁷ cf. Matt. XIII, 44; Matt. XIII, 46.