

Fear," only if it were also "An Age of Love." In a word, the answer to fear is love. True love destroys base fear and creates genuine fear. Let us fear, but as those children to whom these tender words were addressed, "Come children, hearken to me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 33: 12).

—Walter McGuire, O.P.

¹ *Summa Theologica* I-II, q. 41, a. 4.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Bishop John J. Wright "Address to John Carroll Society," Washington, NC News Release.

⁸ *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 125, a. 1.

⁹ *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 19, a. 2.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Decree of the Council of Trent, Denzinger-Banwar, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, No. 898.

¹² *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 19, a. 2.

LAY PARTICIPATION IN THE MASS

THE RUMPUS ROOM for toddlers is the newest feature of our modern church building. By keeping the unmanageable tot quietly out of sight and sound, it aims at making possible for mother (and for the rest of the congregation) a devout, prayerful attendance at Holy Mass. Again, kneelers comfortably padded; public address systems, rich-toned and strategically placed; ceilings acoustically perfect; walls of glass, light-giving and inspiring; the altar "in the round," encircled by the faithful—each of these too has the same purpose: to provide an atmosphere in which attention is easily focused on the drama of the Mass; to furnish a retreat to which the faithful can retire to worship their God, leaving behind the cares and distractions of the world.

This retreat is a unique structure. Built of stone, steel or timber like all other buildings, it is vastly different from them. Compare it with the theater, for instance. Strangely enough, it is in one important aspect not

unlike the modern theater building. For the theater, too, grapples with the same problem of attention. Like the drama which is Holy Mass, the secular drama also means far less to those in attendance if they cannot see and hear what is taking place. There is, then, this common problem of attention.

There are glaring points of difference, of course. Here is the one I wish to emphasize: the theater-goer at the Broadway show or at the summer stock production is merely a *spectator*. The man attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is a *participant*. He is not a viewer of some kind of spectacle; he is an active participant in the offering of Holy Mass. His Baptism in Christ demands that he participate.

You see, the layman, through his Baptism, actually participates in the priesthood of Christ.¹ A member of the Mystical Body of Christ, he shares intimately in the life of Christ, the divine High Priest. The ordained priest, the representative of Christ, truly celebrates Mass and offers the divine Victim to the Father. This is the ministerial priesthood. Now the faithful truly *offer* the sacrifice also, as can be seen by a quick inspection of the very language of the Mass. Appointed by their baptism to give worship, they participate in the baptismal priesthood.

The late Pope Pius XII issued in 1947 his encyclical letter on the sacred liturgy, *Mediator Dei*. In this encyclical, the "Magna Carta" of the liturgy, he emphasized the nature of the offering made by the faithful: "the prayers by which the divine Victim is offered to God are generally expressed in the plural number; and in these it is indicated more than once that the people also participate in this august Sacrifice inasmuch as they offer the same."²

So the familiar phrase, "I went to *hear* Mass this morning," is not quite correct. For it suggests a mute attendance, a mere passive presence. Neither do the words, "I went to Mass," capture the true nature of what you did. Rather, you *prayed* the Mass, uniting your prayers with those of the priest; or better still, you *offered* the Mass.

This term "offer" must be correctly understood, of course. Pope Pius went on to clarify its meaning:

The unbloody immolation at the words of consecration, when Christ is made present upon the altar in the state of a victim, is performed by the priest and by him alone. . . . The faithful participate in the oblation . . . after their own fashion and in a twofold manner, namely because they not only offer the Sacrifice by the hands of

the priest, but also, to a certain extent, in union with him. . . . the conclusion that the people offer the Sacrifice with the priest himself is not based on the fact that . . . they perform a visible liturgical rite; . . . rather, it is based on the fact that the people unite their hearts in praise, impetration, expiation and thanksgiving with the prayers or intention of the priest.³

So the laity truly offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. But although each individual person offers the Mass, he can still never speak of "my" offering. It is always "our" offering. Mass is part of the divine liturgy; liturgy denotes social, public prayer. Fr. Chèry, O.P., in his fine little work on the Mass, puts it thus: "Nothing in Liturgy is the concern of the individual: neither the celebrant's part nor the part of the faithful. All of it is collective, the prayer or offering of the whole Body gathered together in the unity of the living Jesus, directed by him and in him to the praise of the divine Majesty and Fatherhood of God."⁴

We have seen, then, that the faithful truly participate in the Mass, and indeed, offer it; and also that this offering is that of the whole community and of the Church. Let us investigate some of the ways in which our ancestors in the faith participated in the Holy Sacrifice. This may provide a keener appreciation of the significance of the various parts of the Mass and help make them more meaningful.

Father Chèry says that the Mass can be looked upon as a drama in five acts:

- 1) *We pray*, so as to be in a fit condition to offer worthily: Beginning of Mass.
- 2) *We listen*, in order to increase our fervour in offering: the Readings.
- 3) *We give our offerings* to be the matter of the sacrifice: the Offertory.
- 4) *We offer the Victim* whose immolation is made present by the Consecration.
- 5) *We receive the sacrificed Victim*: the Communion.⁵

These different "acts" have had various forms throughout the years. There has been, in the worship and liturgy of the Church, a continual, vital evolution. The inner nature of the Mass has never changed, of course; it is unchangeable, because it was determined by God. But the ceremony which surrounds the central rite of the Mass can be altered and perfected. An eminent scholar of the liturgy has called the Mass a jewel which God

gave to the Church for her to put into as beautiful and as worthy a setting as she could.⁶

So we now look into the acts of this drama, the Mass, remembering that we do this only to increase our appreciation for this ancient rite which is our heritage, and always with our aim of active participation in mind.

Beginning of Mass (We Pray)

The Introit: The Introit as we know it is only a shadow of its former self. It was for many years a chant sung during the first of the processions of the Mass. The other processions were at the Gospel, the Offertory and the Communion. During these processions the faithful tellingly proclaimed in an enthusiastic fashion their lively interest in the drama unfolding before them, and their deep desire to participate in this drama.

This first procession of the ancient Mass, then, took place with the entry of the clergy into the church. The dominant themes of the Mass were solemnly chanted and became fixed in the hearts of the people. A sense of awe for the majesty of the ceremony about to begin arose in them. The Introit, then, is much like the overture played before a Broadway musical, "The Sound of Music," for instance. It highlights the main themes to follow, the dominant ideas which will claim our attention time and again.

Kyrie: The Kyrie was originally the refrain chanted to litanies which were sung as the faithful processed to the church where the Holy Sacrifice was to be offered. Later the processions were discontinued, and the litanies were shortened. Eventually, only the refrain itself was kept, and the number of parts set at nine: Lord, have mercy on us; Christ, have mercy on us. The Kyrie is a cry by the whole congregation for God's mercy. It is a plaintive plea for salvation and grace to be made available through the offering of the Holy Sacrifice.

Gloria: The joyous response of the people praising the glory of God; first, of God the Father, then of the Son, finally of the Holy Spirit and the entire Trinity. In the Gloria we breathe with the intense fervor of the early Church, so exultant at redemption by our Lord, so desirous that His name be held in glory.

Prayer: Together with the Secret and the Postcommunion, the Prayer or Collect stresses a request or petition of the assembled people. The Collect, Secret and Postcommunion have their particular, unique roles in the un-

folding of the Sacrifice, of course, but each is suffused with the overall spirit and tone of the Mass being offered.

The Readings (We Listen)

Epistle: After the prayer there is read the Epistle, on most Sundays an excerpt from one of St. Paul's letters or a selection from the Acts of the Apostles. This Epistle, always a masterpiece of doctrine, advances the general theme of the Mass being offered, and by its instruction helps us to offer it more fruitfully.

Gradual and Tract: The Gradual and Tract re-echo the thoughts of the Epistle and solemnly address the prayer of the community to God.

Gospel: Christ himself speaks to his people in the Gospel. This is the high point of the early part of the Mass. The faithful are refreshed by the word of God Himself; then they are instructed on that word in the sermon or homily which follows. And filled with a lively faith in the teaching they have received, they chant the eloquent profession of belief found in the Creed.

The Offertory (We Give Our Offerings)

The ceremonies and prayers up to now have been a *preparation* for a fruitful offering of the Mass. Now the offering itself takes place. In the ancient Church another procession of the people occurred here. They carried forward the matter for the sacrifice and presented it to the priest. How easy it was for the congregation to realize that this was *their* sacrifice; they offered it to God through the priest, both for themselves and for their neighbor. This offering was for the most part bread and wine. What was needed for the Holy Sacrifice was taken and put on the altar. That which was left over was gathered together after Mass and distributed to the clergy and to the poor for their sustenance. During this entire offertory procession a devout chant was sung; this stressed for the people the true meaning of what they were doing. A joyous, yet solemn spirit welled up in the people, now so near to the wondrous sacrifice.

Gradually the offering by the people of the matter for sacrifice became impractical and it disappeared. And with it went the awareness by the people that they were truly offering the Mass, and were not mere spectators. They still made an offering, of course, but now this came chiefly in the form of money. The notion arose, and it has remained a prevalent one,

that a person, when he put his offering into the collection basket, was merely helping with the support of the parish, rather than actually taking part in the sacrifice.

It would be a mistake to confine our discussion of the offering only to the material offering made. For from the beginning of the Mass we offer our whole being to God. Father Chèry speaks movingly of this:

[At the Offertory] I bring myself to be lifted up on the paten and in the chalice as an offering in sacrifice. All that I have I give: all my past and its affections, my work and its difficulties, my life and its hopes, my worries, my poor efforts at goodness, the qualities given me by God, my strength and my weakness, my virtues and my longings after virtue, my body, my blood; it is all there, the matter of the sacrifice that is now made ready.⁷

And still, the material offering and the offering of ourselves are nothing compared to the real offering being made. For this is Christ's own sacrifice, that unbloody renewal of Calvary which has been made on altars through the centuries. What an unspeakable honor and privilege to be allowed to participate in this offering, not once or twice during life, but every Sunday, and if we wish, every day of our lives!

Consecration and Communion (The Victim Is Made Present, Then Received)

The greatest Gift the world has received is made ours. The climax of the drama which is the Mass has been reached. Here is the center of the Mass; here is the center of our thoughts and prayers; here is the center of our lives.

He who drew His first priests around Him at the Last Supper, the birthplace of the Mass, is now here again, drawing us around Him. The most meaningful, the most perfect way to participate in the Mass is to join with one's fellows as they receive their Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

For the Mass is a *meal* for the faithful of Christ. Did not Our Lord Himself place the accent on *eating* and *drinking*? "Take and eat . . . take and drink ye all of this." Indeed, in early times, the Eucharist was celebrated in the midst of a ritual meal. But then, with the Middle Ages, the meal aspect of the Mass disappeared. It was not unusual to find that the only one receiving was the celebrant himself. And the faithful, now no

longer really taking part, found it very easy to consider the Holy Sacrifice as just another exercise of piety.

But St. Pius X and Pius XII, the Popes of the Eucharist, insisted on the necessity of frequent Communion for the faithful. Just as regular meals are needed for the health of the body, so is the Eucharistic meal needed for the health of the soul. Happily, most of our people today seem to be conscious of this. They realize that there can be no better way of participating in the Holy Sacrifice than by receiving Communion during its celebration.

Communion and Postcommunion Prayers: These prayers, read after the chalice has been purified and covered with the veil, stress the mind of the Church on the nature of the sacrifice. They seem to take it for granted that all who participated in the Mass received Holy Communion. They make petitions to God that the effects of this unutterable sacrifice may be realized in His faithful people.

Shortly after the Postcommunion the congregation is sent away, "Ite, missa est." "Go, it is the dismissal." They answer, "Deo Gratias," "Thanks be to God." Thanks be to God for the graces and blessings which have been ours because of this Holy Mass. May these graces strengthen us in trial, support us in our fight for eternal happiness. This too is the prayer of Holy Mother Church. It is as if she said, "You have received the graces of the Holy Sacrifice. Now you must go and make use of them, proving in your labours and sufferings, in your patience and charity, that you belong to Christ."⁸

With the Last Blessing and the Last Gospel we are finally sent back to the world from which we came, fortified against its assaults, filled with the sweet peace of Christ. We have indeed *participated* in the drama of the Mass.

Here are some suggestions for one who wants to participate more perfectly in Holy Mass. These few suggestions are undoubtedly already the habit of many; all of them will not appeal to everyone; perhaps they will help a few to approach the Sacred Mysteries with a more prayerful, more intelligent outlook.

1) Read over the Mass before going to church, to familiarize yourself with the main theme and the various threads which go to make up the fabric of the whole.

2) If the Epistle and Gospel are unfamiliar to you, look up the sec-

tion in the New Testament from which they have been taken. Seeing the full text may make the extract much more meaningful.

3) Remember that the Mass is a community action, a vital, pulsing rite of the whole gathering. "We cannot be content with having the church full of people, with having an amorphous crowd of individuals, a meaningless mass which assists at the sacred rite spiritually distracted or without inner unity. We must strive to give a composition to those present, an order, an awareness, so as to establish the sacred atmosphere in which the religious rite takes place."⁹ (These are the words of the Archbishop of Milan to his priests.)

4) Keep a spirit of recollection on your way to Mass and for a time after Mass. This does not mean that you cannot buy the morning paper or the rolls at the bakery, or that you cannot prepare breakfast. It *does* mean that you should guard against the sundry little needless distractions which so easily become a part of life. The Mass is the most important event in your life; you should look upon it as such.

5) Let the Mass produce some effect in your life and in your dealings with others. "The true meaning of personal integrity, the true higher aim of human activity, of loving and of suffering, the true overcoming of death in the certainty of the resurrection—are not these taught by the liturgy, precisely as fruitful principles to be introduced into the current of the secular world?"¹⁰

The Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass can take its rightful place in our lives; it can prepare us for the unending joy awaiting us in heaven.

—Joseph Payne, O.P.

¹ *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 63, a. 3, c.

² Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (1947), No. 87.

³ *ibid.*, No. 92, 93.

⁴ A. Chéry, O.P., *What is the Mass?*, translated by Lancelot Sheppard, Newman, 1952. pp. 22, 23.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 47, 48.

⁶ Pius Parsch, *The Liturgy of the Mass*, translated by Rev. H. E. Winstone, B. Herder, London, 1957. p. 36.

⁷ Chéry, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁸ Parsch, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

⁹ Cardinal Montini, "Pastoral Letter to the Archdiocese of Milan," Lent, 1958; translated by Leonard Doyle: *Worship*, Vol. 33, No. 3, Feb. 1959. pp. 147, 148.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 162, 163.