

THE LITURGICAL APOSTOLATE

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CTIVE 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." With these words, the great Pope Pius X, in an encyclical letter *Motu proprio*, issued on November 22, 1903, gave a great impetus to the awakening of interest in the liturgy and in things liturgical. This saintly Pontiff, whose motto was "to restore all things in Christ," accomplished much for Holy Mother Church, and not the least of his efforts were those which pertained to the liturgy. Hence, under his direction, the breviary, the missal, and the calendar were revised, Gregorian chant was restored, and early Communion for children and daily Communion for all, was ardently advocated, the object of all of which was to revive in the faithful a practical belief in the mystical life of the Church.

The "liturgical movement," or "liturgical apostolate" as it has come to be called, thus animated has been taken up enthusiastically by all who have the interests of the Church at heart. In many countries of Europe—notably in France, Belgium, and Germany—many individual churches and religious houses are doing all in their power to further the work, by public conferences on the liturgy, by the organization of societies for its study, and by the publication of several periodicals. In our own country the movement has been more or less personal and sporadic until the establishment of the Liturgical Press at St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. The review *Orate Fratres*, which is issued by this association and which has just celebrated its first birthday, and the *Popular Liturgical Library*, both have as their sole aim the consolidation and promotion of the apostolate.

Let it be understood that the aim of the liturgical apostolate is not simply to impart to the people a knowledge of "rubrics" and their development and signification; neither is it to build up an aesthetic appreciation of the beauties of the liturgical ceremonies. The movement is essentially theological in its nature, and bases its appeal upon doctrinal foundations rather than upon historical or aesthetical considerations, in order to lead the faithful to *active participation* in the

liturgy. It is true that these other phases of the movement are not being neglected, as they are undoubtedly instructive and will be very fruitful when kept in their proper sphere and duly proportionated, but they are regarded as merely accompanying the true aim and quite secondary to it.

Of the need of the apostolate in the life of the Church today, there can be no doubt. Many thoughtful Catholics have begun to realize that their knowledge of their own religious devotions and the public services of the Church was really very limited, and how many, many more there are who have never given the matter a moment's thought! And yet, surrounded on all sides as we are by those who are questioning even the fundamentals of our faith, it is necessary for our very safety that we be more firmly grounded in the truth of our religion, that we know more thoroughly what we do in our religious life and why we do it.

Many writers of the present day, including Abbot Herwegen of the Abbey of Maria Laach, a great German center of the liturgical movement, are of the opinion that the objective, sacramental, and social worship of the early Church has undergone a complete revolution into the highly subjective, personal, and individualistic effort of modern times. Dom Justin McCann in *Blackfriars*, September, 1927, comments on this opinion and this tendency in somewhat the following manner, considering each of these charges in turn.

The worship of the early Christians was objective, concerned entirely with God, and not intermixed with subjectivism and emotionalism. The Mass, for instance, was not for them a casual and mechanical affair, but an objective, sacred action into which they entered with their whole soul. But, under the influence of the subjective temperament, interested in itself and its own emotional experience, what has happened to the Mass at the present time? People who would not think of missing Mass in the literal sense of not being present at it, do, however, miss it in the practical sense of missing its meaning and ignoring its character. Instead of joining in the sacred action and offering it *with* the priest as he offers it *for* them, they have tended to practice during the Mass other devotions which have a more personal and subjective appeal. Because of the exterior splendor and the more direct appeal to the emotions, some have even gone so far as to attach more importance to Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament than to the Mass itself.

In the second place we have the change from a sacramental to a personal worship. The early Church placed absolute trust in grace and in the sacraments; its outlook was sacral and sacramental. It

was profoundly convinced of the divine power that came to it in the performance of the solemn acts of the liturgy, and believed more in the power of God than in human effort. But nowadays, much greater stress is laid on the human contribution. The religious life of many becomes a systematic exercise or series of exercises, the exact performance of which is rigidly adhered to, indicating the tendency to exalt their puny personal effort to a predominant place in religious duty.

Thirdly, the change from a social worship to individualism. Formerly all Masses were sung; in the early times, certain parts were sung by the people and the rest sung or said by the priest. The people, therefore, took an active part in the very words of the Mass. When the part of the Mass preparatory to the action of offering was ended, the priest turned to the people, who then came up to him in procession and delivered their offerings of bread, wine, oil, or whatever it might be, into his hands. Part of the bread and wine was set aside for the sacrifice of the Mass itself; the remainder was used for the support of the Church and of the poor. In this way the sacrificial oblations were the gifts of the people attending the Mass. It was, then, into these very gifts that Christ entered, identifying Himself with that which was offered by the people as representing themselves. With the introduction of money, this custom died out, and the practice of giving a money donation at the offertory was substituted, which is really not so different from the old offertory procession as it may at first seem to be. It is simply this same procession translated into modern conditions of life.¹ The point is that under present conditions many people do not realize that the Mass is really theirs in a very true sense, and the bread and wine offered by the priest and changed into the Body and Blood of Christ are their own personal offerings. Too many members of the Church regard her in some external fashion as a sort of institution and establishment for the regulation of ecclesiastical and moral life, and look upon her prayers and rites as something apart from themselves in which they have only an indeterminate share.

It is obvious now what the work of the liturgical apostolate is. Its first aim is to put the liturgy into our lives, and since the Mass is the very heart of the liturgy, to place the Holy Sacrifice in the very center of our lives. It teaches constantly that there is one perfect way of attending Mass, namely *cooperation* and *conjunction* with the

¹ Louis Tranfler, O. S. B., Virgil Michel, O. S. B. "The Mass as the People's Sacrifice," *Orate Fratres*, I, No. 7, 208ff.

priest in the sacred mysteries—in the words of Pope Pius X, to “pray the Mass.” It is trying in every way that it can to emphasize the point that the congregation are offerers with the priest. The people are not there to watch a sacred minister go through some ritual in which they have no share; they are there to join at every step with him and with Our Lord, Jesus Christ, in the adoration of the Father. The apostolate would withdraw the faithful from their isolation and individualism, and attach them fundamentally to the sacramental life of the Church. It would lead Catholics away from a too subjective and individualistic religion to an objective and social worship, and have them realize that they are members of Christ and of one another. It would discourage trivial and secondary devotions, and form the soul not to the formality of a human religiosity, but to the direct worship of God.

To conclude this short review of the liturgical apostolate we cannot do better than quote from the encyclical letter *Quas Primas*, establishing the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, the entire context of which shows how great a value is placed on the liturgy by its author, the reigning Vicar of Christ, Pius XI: “For imbuing the people with the faith and leading them by faith to the interior joys of life, the annual celebrations of the sacred mysteries are far more efficacious than even the most weighty documents of ecclesiastical teaching. As a rule these latter reach only the few and the more learned, whereas the former impress and teach all the faithful. One means, we may say, speaks but once; the other speaks every year and forever. The document appeals only to the mind, while the celebration of the sacred mysteries appeals not only to the mind but also to the heart, that is to the whole man. Since man consists of soul and body, he should be so moved and interested as to drink in divine doctrines more abundantly through the variety and beauty of the sacred liturgy, and, converting it into vigor and blood, make it serve him for progress in the spiritual life.”