

LITURGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASS—III

ALEXIUS SIMONES, O.P.



AFTER the Credo, the catechumens having been dismissed, the root of the service—the repetition of what Our Lord did at the Last Supper—begins. Our Lord took bread and wine. So bread and wine must first be brought to the celebrant and placed before him on the altar. St. Justin says that “bread and a cup of wine are brought to the president of the brethren.” Originally at this point the people brought up bread and wine which were received by the deacon and placed on the credence table. However, in the Eastern rites and in the Gallican rite a later practice of preparing the bread and wine before the beginning of the Mass grew up. Rome alone kept the original practice of offering them at this point, when they are about to be consecrated. In the Middle Ages, as the public presentation of the gifts by the people had disappeared, there seemed to be a void. This interval was filled up by our present offertory prayers. But even before the disappearance of this public presentation, the choir sang merely to fill up the time while the silent action of offering the gifts proceeded.

The offertory chant is of great antiquity. Like the Introit and Communion chants, this chant was always an entire psalm in the early ages. By the time of the first Roman Ordo, the psalm was reduced to an antiphon with one or two verses of the psalm. In the Gregorian Antiphonary it is still the same. From about the eleventh or twelfth centuries the shortening of the offertory act led to a further shortening of the psalm, so that the antiphon alone was sung. This has now become the rule. The antiphon alone is sung at the Offertory, except in Requiem Masses, where the antiphon is still followed by a verse, the second part of the antiphon being repeated. The chants in use today are generally taken from the psalms, frequently from some other book of the Bible, while sometimes they are of ecclesiastical composition.

In all rites the celebrant washes his hands before handling the offering—an obvious precaution and sign of respect. It was natural,

however, that the washing of the hands should be understood as a symbol of cleansing the soul. This ceremony takes place at different times in various liturgies. In the Apostolic Constitutions it is just before the dismissal of the catechumens; in the Jacobite and Coptic rites, after the Credo; in the Byzantine rite and those rites under Byzantine influence, the hands are washed in the beginning as part of the vesting. In the Roman rite this preparatory washing before vesting is also customary. The need for the second washing of the hands was no doubt necessary after receiving loaves of bread and flasks of wine from the people.

In the earlier documents there is no mention of any prayer being said while the hands are washed. In the Middle Ages various forms are found. It was but natural that the priest should say some private prayer, and eventually such prayers found their way into the missals. Many forms may be found, but the most common is that used in the Missal of today.

The old Roman rite had the offering by the people, and then, as an offertory prayer, what we call the Secret. The name *Secreta* means that it is said in a low voice, because the offertory psalm was being sung. Before the Canon began to be whispered the Secret was the only prayer not heard throughout the church. The Secrets follow the rules of the Collects and are built up on them. In the earliest sacramentaries each Collect had a corresponding Secret and Post-communion. The multiplication of Collects at one Mass brought about the like multiplication of these prayers too. The Secrets, like the Collects, allude to the feast or the occasion of the Mass. They form part of the changing *proprium* of the Mass.

The last Secret ends with the clause "*per omnia saecula saeculorum*" said aloud. This is merely a warning that the Preface is about to begin. The name *Preface* does not occur in any of the early manuscripts. It is early medieval, being found in the second Roman Ordo, the Gregorian Sacramentary and in all medieval commentators.

Originally the preface was very long, containing a list of all the benefits for which we thank God, going through much of the Old Testament to Isaías and his mention of the angels who introduce the *Sanctus*. In the East it is still quite long, retaining many of these allusions. But at Rome it was shortened, retaining only the mention of the angels because of the *Sanctus*.

Besides the shortness of the Roman preface, another characteristic of the preface is its variable character, changing according to the feast or the season. The number of proper prefaces has varied con-

siderably. The Leonine Sacramentary contains 267; the Gelasian, 53; the Gregorian only 10, but under Gallican influence it adds 100 in its appendix. In the Roman rite at present, ten of the prefaces are found in the Gregorian Sacramentary, one (of the Blessed Virgin) was added under Pope Urban II (1088-1099). In his encyclical letter of December 11, 1925, Pope Pius XI instituted the feast of Christ the King, authorizing a proper Mass and Preface. In March 1929, the same Pope appointed a new Mass with a proper Preface to take the place of the Mass formerly used for the feast of the Sacred Heart. Many prefaces were composed in the Middle Ages, of which some few remain in special rites.

Although the title *Canon of the Mass* now stands after the Sanctus, it must be remembered that the Preface is really a part of the Canon, originally being considered as such. However, by about the seventh century the Canon was considered as beginning with the secret prayers after the Sanctus. There is likewise some discussion as to the point at which the Canon ends. As late as the time of Pope Benedict XIV (1769-1774) there were those who thought that the *Pater Noster* made up a part of the Canon; but the first Roman Ordo implies that it ends before the *Pater Noster*. During the Middle Ages the distinction between the Canon of Consecration and the Canon of Communion occurred constantly, and the two views may thus be reconciled. The Canon of Communion would then begin with the *Pater Noster* and continue to the end of the people's communion. At the present day by the Canon we mean only the Canon of Consecration.

The Canon as we have it today represents the final stages of a development that had been going on ever since Christians first met together to obey Christ's command and to celebrate the Eucharist in memory of Him. Considerable discussion ranges about the prayers of the Canon themselves, and the order in which the prayers are said. There is a difference however, between the prayers and the order in which they are now found. The prayers, or at least some of them, can be traced back to a very early date from occasional references to them in the works of the early Fathers. From this it does not follow that they always stood in the same order as now. Since the time of Pope Gregory their arrangement in the Missal has been definitely decided. Their arrangement prior to that time presents certain difficulties and has long been a disputed point. There are so many theories and conjectures as to the position of the prayers of the Canon that a detailed account would be impossible here.

From the time of the Apostolic Constitutions on, all liturgies had the elevation of the Blessed Sacrament. The idea of the elevation is to show the sacred species to the people. In all rites the elevation took place just before the Communion, and it was thus an act of reverence to the Blessed Sacrament before Communion. But the elevation at the words of institution (as is the custom today) is another matter. It is a late medieval ceremony and until the twelfth century there is no trace of it. The Canon was said through without a break. The elevation at the words of institution began in France, being adopted at Rome later. By the fourteenth century it was an established ceremony in the Roman rite.

Like the Canon, there is a difficulty about the place of the Pater Noster. Although the prayer occurs in every liturgy, it is not said at the same place in all. The place of the Pater Noster in Eastern rites is always just before the elevation and breaking of the Host. In the Gallican, Ambrosian and Mozarabic rites it follows the breaking of the Host. As regards its position in the Roman rite, we know that Africa and Rome were closely united in matters liturgical. St. Augustine clearly points out that the Pater Noster was said immediately before the Pax—where it is now said. On the other hand Gregory I seems to say just as plainly that it came after the Communion and that he moved it to where it is now said. Since the time of Gregory, however, there has been no change.

In the early ages the rite of Communion was a very long and complicated ceremony. While it was going on, the people sang. The reason for singing here is the same as that of the Introit and the Offertory. A silent action was taking place, and the interval was filled by the singing of a psalm. A chant of some kind is found in every rite at this point.

The first mention that we have of the Communion chant in the West is found in St. Augustine. In his time both the Offertory and Communion chants were new in Africa, and Augustine wrote a treatise to defend their use. In the beginning the Communion chant was an entire psalm, sung with the *Gloria Patri* and an antiphon before and after the psalm. Down to the twelfth century all allusions to the chant bear this out. During this century the chant was gradually shortened, due to the lessening of the number of communicants. Now we have only the antiphon, which is generally, but not always, scriptural.

The Communion of the priest completes the integral Eucharistic service. It was fitting, however, that the people should not be dis-

missed without a final prayer of thanksgiving and petition. Every rite has a short prayer or two and a blessing before the dismissal.

In the Roman rite these prayers are arranged and said exactly like the Collects and Secrets. Thus the Collects, Secrets and Postcommunion prayers correspond, the Postcommunion having, however, the distinctive note of thanksgiving. These prayers may be found in the Leonine Sacramentary, corresponding to the liturgy of the Apostolic Constitutions. In the Leonine Sacramentary the prayers have no titles, but in the Gelasian the names given to the two prayers are *Postcommunio* and *Ad Populum*. But even at the time of the Gelasian Sacramentary, the second prayer became less frequent. In the Gregorian Sacramentary the Postcommunion is called *Ad Complendum*, the second *Super Populum*. Since that time the prayer for the people has been almost exclusively confined to the time from Septuagesima to Easter. The restriction of the second prayer to Lent is just one more case of shortening the Mass, whereas the Lenten prayers as a rule remain longer. The Postcommunion has lost much of its original character as a prayer of thanksgiving, having absorbed the idea of the old prayer for the people. It is now almost always a prayer of petition, although the note of thanksgiving is sometimes included.

The end of the liturgy is a formal dismissal of the people by the deacon. The form in the Apostolic Constitutions is "Go in peace"; the Byzantine rite has "Let us go in peace. R. In the name of the Lord"; the Gallican rite has a form similar to the Byzantine. As far back as can be traced the Roman dismissal has been "*Ite missa est. R. Deo Gratias.*" This form has caused much needless embarrassment. It is simply the archaic use of *missa* meaning *missio* or *dismissio*. The correct translation is "Go, it is the dismissal." But since the eleventh century, on days that have a penitential character, in place of the dismissal, "*Benedicamus Domino*" is said. The reason for this is that on such days the people of the Middle Ages did not go away immediately but stayed in church for further prayers.

It may seem strange that after the people have been dismissed they remain and the service continues. The explanation is that the *Placeat* prayer, the blessing and the Last Gospel are all late additions, having been originally mere private devotions, but later being incorporated into the Mass. In the first Roman Ordines after the *Ite missa est* nothing more happens but the forming of the procession and the return to the sacristy.

The Last Gospel is one of the latest additions to the Mass. During the Middle Ages the first part of St. John's Gospel was used by many priests as a part of their thanksgiving after Mass, usually being said on the way back to the sacristy. Later it began to be said at the altar, though still a part of the priest's thanksgiving. Pius V in his reformed missal admits it for the first time as a part of the Mass.

The liturgy of the Mass presents an inestimable source of study to the Catholic. Every detail of prayer and ceremony contains beauty and depth of meaning. It is only fitting that we study and penetrate more and more into the meaning of these prayers and ceremonies. Nor can it be considered a waste of time to do so. Every Catholic assists at Mass at least once a week—some almost daily. How much better we appreciate the value of that Sacrifice when we know and understand to some degree the reasons why the prayers and ceremonies have been incorporated into the service. It is not necessary to turn to long and exhaustive treatises on the development of the Mass. Under the impetus of the liturgical movement many readable accounts of the Mass have been published. The sole purpose of this paper has been to awaken an interest in the liturgy—an interest that will lead the reader to study for himself and by this study to gain a greater appreciation of the highest act of adoration that man can give to God, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

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