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# DOMINICANA

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## SACERDOS ET PRESBYTER

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HE WORD was made flesh, and a new order was born, "for God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."<sup>1</sup> Because of the disobedience of our first parents the human race had incurred the divine displeasure, and for long centuries man had waited for his Deliverer. An abyss which none but One could bridge separated the offended Father from His prodigal children. The whole human race sinned in Adam, and no ordinary man could render the condign satisfaction which Infinite Majesty demanded. But Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed human nature and offered Himself as Mediator. By reason of His Humanity He held a middle place between Almighty God and helpless man. He could petition God for mercy and forgiveness, while as the Only-begotten of the Father He embodied in Himself the fullness of grace which made Him pleasing to His Father. During His life upon earth He gave to mankind the rule of life whereby friendship with God could be retained. At His death He offered the Sacrifice which satisfied divine Justice; He raised His work as Mediator to the heights of perfection when as Priest and Victim He consummated the Sacrifice of Calvary.

When the Lamb of God was led, voluntarily, to the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross, He ended forever the spiritual efficacy of the bloody sacrifice of the paschal lamb. The Levitical priesthood was terminated, and the eternal priesthood of Christ according to the order of Melchisedech began to function. The

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<sup>1</sup>2 Corinthians v, 19.

Sacrifice of the Cross was a true sacrifice, but Christ having died once, "dieth now no more."<sup>2</sup> The night before His Crucifixion Our Divine Lord provided for the continuance of that bloody Sacrifice in an unbloody manner. In the midst of the celebration of the Jewish Passover He instituted the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. "Who the day before He suffered took bread into His holy and adorable hands; and with eyes lifted to Thee, O God, His Almighty Father, giving thanks to Thee, did bless, break, and give to His disciples, saying: TAKE AND EAT YE ALL OF THIS: FOR THIS IS MY BODY. In like manner after He had supped, taking also this precious chalice into His holy and adorable hands, and giving thanks to Thee, He blessed and gave to His disciples, saying: TAKE AND DRINK YE ALL OF THIS: FOR THIS IS THE CHALICE OF MY BLOOD OF THE NEW AND ETERNAL TESTAMENT, THE MYSTERY OF FAITH: WHICH SHALL BE SHED FOR YOU AND FOR MANY UNTO THE REMISSION OF SINS. As often as ye shall do these things ye shall do them in remembrance of Me."<sup>3</sup>

And so in the New Testament the true Sacrifice of Christ is renewed daily upon the altars of the Catholic Church under the appearance of bread and wine, a clean oblation from the consecrated hands of the ministers of Christ. When the ordaining bishop holds the anointed hands of the newly ordained priest upon the paten and chalice containing the bread and wine of sacrifice, he confers upon him the power to celebrate Mass. Near the close of the Mass of ordination, in a special ceremony, the Bishop gives the priest the power to forgive sins. To him, as to the first disciples, Jesus says, "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you."<sup>4</sup> In his life he must be, in every sense of the words, *sacerdos* (*sacra dans*)—one who gives sacred things, and *presbyter* (*præbens iter*)—one who shows the way.<sup>5</sup> "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins."<sup>6</sup> Each morning the priest gives to God the Sacred Body and Blood of His divine Son in the Sacrifice of the Mass. By It he adores the infinite Majesty of God; he thanks

<sup>2</sup> Romans vi, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Canon of the Mass.

<sup>4</sup> John xx, 21.

<sup>5</sup> St. Alphonsus de Ligouri, *Dignity and Duties of the Priest*, (translated from the Italian), (New York, 1888), pp. 234-5.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews v, 1.

Him for the graces He has bestowed upon the human race; he asks pardon for the sins of mankind; and he begs that greater graces may come through the merits of Jesus Christ. Just as he has given the Sacred Body and Blood of God to God in sacrifice, he returns to men and gives them this same Body and Blood in Holy Communion. This Food of eternal life will keep them in the friendship of God by preserving them in the state of grace. It is a pledge of the future reward which God has prepared for those who exchange their union of grace in this life for a union of glory in the next.

The Holy Eucharist is the first and greatest of many sources of grace which Christ has placed at the disposal of His ministers. Shortly after a child is born the priest pours upon his head the sacred water of Baptism and initiates him into the life of supernatural grace. As the infant grows in physical stature, one with the plenitude of the holy priesthood anoints him with holy chrism in order that he may be spiritually fortified to profess his faith. If, after reaching the age of reason, he should ever fall from grace, the priest is at hand, ready to give him holy absolution and restore his soul to its former beauty. When he chooses a life partner, the priest is there to bless the union. Should he decide to follow more closely the Master, a priest who has been exalted to the bishopric consecrates his hands that they may be worthy to handle the Body and Blood of Christ. Finally, at the hour of death, the priest prepares the soul by a last holy anointing to enter into eternal glory. The priest is the salt of the earth which permeates the life of every Christian. From the cradle to the grave the priest is present, *sacra dans*, "giving sacred things." "By whom He hath given us most great and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature."<sup>7</sup>

If we may say that the priest is the salt of the earth as *sacerdos*, then he is the light of the world as *presbyter*. By his preaching, by his example, and by his prayers, he shows the way along which men must pass through this life to the next. "Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God."<sup>8</sup> When Jesus sent His disciples on their world-wide mission, it was in order that they might teach His rule of life. During His stay on earth He

<sup>7</sup> 2 Peter i, 4.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians iv, 1.

preached His gospel of charity, love of God and love of neighbor. This is the theme of every priest's preaching. Every sermon has for its object the love of God, which is shown by the degree of charity which a person exercises in regard to his neighbor. But if the preaching of a priest is to be effective, he must show the way by his own example. The greatest conversions that were made in the early ages of the Church resulted from the good example given to the pagans, and through the centuries that have followed this has not ceased to be an effective means of bringing sinners to God. Finally, the priest lights the way for his flock by his prayers. Besides the infinitely valuable prayer of the Mass, the Church places in the hands of her priests the Divine Office. Throughout the day he offers with the Church her song of praise to the Heavenly Bridegroom, seven diamonds studded about the great jewel, the Mass.

"The first and most natural place where the flowers of the sanctuary should almost spontaneously grow and bloom, remains always the truly and deeply Christian family."<sup>9</sup> The truth of this wise assertion is proved every year as the ranks of Christ's priesthood increase. Such products are the candidates who kneel each year after seven years of religious training in the Dominican Order to receive their consecration as *sacerdos et presbyter*. With the apostolic zeal for preaching of Saint Dominic, with the life of prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas, with the life of good example in the care of the flock of Saint John of Gorcum as models, they are prepared to give the sacred things of God to men and to show to men the way back to God. So may it always be.

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Pius XI, *Encyclical on Catholic Priesthood*.