

OUR EUCHARISTIC FRIEND

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OCCASIONALLY our attention is arrested by an article in the daily news describing the demise of some famous recluse whose personal life was so colorless and uneventful that it would have passed unnoticed save for the enormous wealth and eccentricities of the deceased. The busy world pauses for a moment, quickly glances through the article and says to itself: "The good Lord deliver me from such a life as that!" There is something very unnatural about a person whose closest approach to human friendship is an exaggerated fondness for a Persian cat or an expensive poodle. Deep-seated in each of us is the realization that friendship is one of the most satisfying and consoling things in this life. To overlook it is tragic; deliberately to avoid it is inhuman. Aristotle describes friendship as: "... a thing most necessary for life, since no one would choose to live without friends though he should have all the other good things in the world."¹ The great philosopher made that observation over two thousand years ago, but it is equally true today. Broad acres, marble palaces and a host of servants are no compensation for a cold, friendless existence. Better a neighborly pauper than a rich solitary. Young and old, rich and poor, peddler and president, all need friendship.

St. Thomas, the Angelic Doctor, points out repeatedly that the spiritual life bears a close resemblance to the natural life. Spiritually, as well as physically, a man must be born, receive nourishment and grow, if he is to survive. His soul, as well as his body, must be kept in a healthy condition. Diet and exercise must be employed when the occasion demands. Our Divine Saviour has placed at our disposal means of accomplishing these things for our spiritual well-being. He has given us the seven Sacraments, of which the Eucharist is the greatest. St. Thomas gives the reason: "The Sacrament of the Altar contains Christ Himself. All the other sacraments seem to be ordained to the Eucharist as to their end."² We are baptized that we may be eligible to receive the Holy Eucharist. Penance and Extreme Unction prepare us to receive Communion worthily. Confirmation

¹ Ethics VIII.

² *Summa Theol.* IIIa Q. 64, a 2.

encourages us to receive Christ sacramentally. Priests are ordained in order to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ from bread and wine.

This may all seem far afield from friendship, but in reality it is not. Man needs friends in his natural life. In addition, man desires the continual presence of his friends and grieves when he is forced to be separated from them. Friends aid and console one another. This is equally true in the spiritual life. Man needs, and can infinitely benefit by the friendship of God, our true and lasting Friend. This intimate friendship with God is brought about by the Eucharist. God chose this sacrament as a medium through which our endless friendship with Him is acquired. On the eve of His passion and death, He gave His Apostles and their followers a means of being intimately associated and personally united with Him forever. He instituted the Eucharist, the sacrament of love and friendship. During our exile here in this world, He does not deny us the comfort of His bodily presence. The most intimate and choice friendship which man can enjoy on this earth is attained by the reception of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

"Forget not thy friend in thy mind, and be not unmindful of him in thy riches."³ God does not forget his friends. On the contrary, He pours upon them His special favors and blessings in a never-ending stream by means of the Blessed Sacrament. In so far as it is within their power, friends seek to prolong each others' lives. Similarly, Christ's purpose in instituting this sacrament was to offer us a means of nourishing our souls and of sustaining our spiritual life. We receive the Holy Eucharist under the species of food and drink so it is only fitting that it should accomplish in our souls what food and drink effect in our bodies, that is, an increase of life. Jesus Christ, our eternal Friend, will not allow us to die of spiritual starvation unless we firmly will to do so.

The worthy reception of the Sacrament of the Altar wipes away our venial sins. Just as we take nourishment to relieve the strain which has been made upon our system by sickness, so too we receive through Holy Communion the grace and strength to remedy the weakness caused in our souls through venial sin. Vigorous spiritual health is recovered by the frequent reception of this sacrament and strength to ward off the assaults of Satan is freely given to us. Our Friend gives us a weapon from His heavenly armory that renders us unconquerable until we decide to exchange His friendship for the

³ Ecclesiasticus, 37:6.

transient, momentary pleasures which are held out to us as snares by the devil himself.

When God is one of the parties to a friendship with us, it is obvious that He does not expect an equal return from us for what He gives. God knows we cannot return measure for measure, and consequently He does not look for it from us. There is one thing, however, which He does expect. He awaits some manifestation of gratitude on our part for His gifts. We do not think much of ingrates, nor does God. The best manner of showing Our Saviour the value we place upon His friendship is our frequent, worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist. Some deliberately, others thoughtlessly, ignore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Still others pay Him the minimum courtesy of receiving Him once a year. They do merely what is demanded of them and nothing more. The custodian of the sacraments, Holy Mother Church, has pointed out the secure path for us to pursue. The Council of Trent urges: ". . . that at every Mass the faithful who are present should communicate not only spiritually, by way of internal affection, but sacramentally, by actual reception of the Eucharist."⁴

Assuredly, if we seal our friendship with God and offer Him our sincere thanks by fervent and frequent reception of His Body and Blood, He will reward us with His infinite generosity. The very words of our Eucharistic Friend suffice: "He that eateth this bread, shall live forever."⁵

⁴ Session 22, Chapter 6.

⁵ John, 6:59.