

TO ALL GENERATIONS

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NOTHING makes man more thankful for the perfect day than does that day's closing. The day may rise in splendor, pass in brilliance, wane in shadow, yet win no human response. Yet when the glory of each hour is recaptured in the pageantry of sunset, man takes notice and gives thanks for the day.

The Church's annual cycle of feasts and seasons may be conceived after the fashion of a spiritual day. Thus considered, Advent becomes that day's purple dawn, Christmas and Epiphany its awakening sunrise. The Sundays following bring the promising warmth of Christ's early hidden life, then the radiance of his public ministry, a radiance increasingly lost in clouds of misbelief and human rejection. Finally, Holy Week and Easter mark the high noon of Divine generosity, a generosity that overcomes the overcast of human malice and ignorance. However, it was not until the last half of the last century that this spiritual day might be said to have its perfect closing: the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The role of the feast of the Sacred Heart is that of a summary, that of a fuller exposé of the grandeur of the Divine Mysteries, for it lays bare the cause of those mysteries: Divine Love. The Mass of the Sacred Heart shows this. The Mass begins with the words of the Introit:

"The thoughts of His heart are to all generations to deliver their souls from death and feed them in famine" Ps. 32.

Since our present Mass of the Sacred Heart is relatively new, dating from 1929, one might feel inclined to examine each part with a critical eye. For instance, the introit might well strike one as a remote scriptural reference to the Sacred Heart, an accommodation taken from the psalms. Actually however, the ini-

tial words of the mass are to be taken in a stricter, a more literal sense. What did the psalmist mean when he said: "the thoughts of His heart"? St. Thomas Aquinas says he meant the eternal intentions or decrees of the Will of God. So understood, the Mass opens with a vast panoramic description of a Divine plan—a plan of mercy—a plan "to deliver" the souls of men in every generation from the death of sin and damnation, and from want both of body and mind. There immediately follows a cry for praise—for praise befitting just men:

Rejoice in the Lord, O ye just, praise becometh the upright.

Then follows the praise: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son, etc." The cause of our praise contained in the opening words of the Mass is repeated: "The thoughts of His heart are to all generations, etc."

In the epistle of the Mass of the Sacred Heart, the initial theme of the Divine plan of mercy and love is developed. It is St. Paul who instructs us:

Brethren: to me, the very least of all saints, there was given this grace, to announce among the Gentiles the good tidings of the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to enlighten all men as to what is the dispensation of the mystery which has been hidden from eternity in God, Who created all things; in order that through the Church there be made known to the Principalities and the Powers in the heavens the manifold wisdom of God according to the eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him we have assurance and confident access through faith in Him. For this reason I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name, that He may grant you from His glorious riches to be strengthened with power through His Spirit unto the progress of the inner man; and to have Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts: so that, being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge, in order that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3).

In the epistle, St. Paul speaks of his share in the enormous plan of God's love towards man. He, Paul, is to be an apostle, one sent to reveal something of this Divine plan as it has come to pass.

It is a plan that is uniquely secret. God discloses the plan to no one beforehand, not even to His angels. This is because God Himself will work the work of love, and this by becoming Incarnate. If you wish to see the plan's unfolding you must behold it in the Church.

Those who discern what God works in His Church will be instructed in the wisdom of God, a wisdom described by St. Paul as manifold. St. Thomas explains that the wisdom of God is said to be manifold in as much as it is not all revealed at once, but part is revealed in one age, part in another; "because He embellishes diverse times with diverse effects."

In the remainder of the epistle, St. Paul describes the graces of faith, enlightenment and charity that are necessary to sound the unfathomable dimensions of God's designs and to know what exceeds "all knowledge," the charity of Christ. It is by the knowledge of the charity of Christ that men are filled with "all the fulness of God," that is, the fulness of virtue in this life and the vision of God Himself in the next.

Thus far, the Mass has echoed and re-echoed the eternal love of Almighty God and the infinite love with which the God-Man, Christ, came into this world "as a giant to run His course." Now, in the gradual and alleluia verse, the Mass recalls the manifestation of Christ's love in His public ministry. The gradual seems to have reference to the early phase of that ministry—to the sermon on the mount in which he sets down a new rule of life:

"The Lord is sweet and righteous, therefore he will give a law to sinners in the way. He will guide the mild in judgment, he will teach the meek his ways" (Ps. 24).

The alleluia verse on the other hand calls upon us to witness Christ in his labors and hardships:

"Alleluia, alleluia, Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew, 11).

For Christ did not only preach, but He began first to do. He is in fact the rule, the living law by which man is to live and receive his reward.

Then follows the Gospel:

"At that time, the Jews therefore, since it was the Preparation Day, in order that the bodies might not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a solemn day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other, who had been crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs; but one of the soldiers opened His side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water. And he who saw it has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he tells the truth, that you also may

believe. For these things come to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of Him shall you break.' And again another Scripture says, 'They shall look upon Him Whom they have pierced' " (John, 19).

The gospel is taken from the passion according to St. John, the passion sung on Good Friday. Our Lord has given up his spirit, yet when the cantor on Good Friday breaks the silence commemorating Our Lord's death, he does not take up the tone of a lamentation—he sustains rather the tone of dramatic re-enactment. For there remains one more climactic action. It is an action telling in itself the entire story of Our Lord's incarnation, life and passion, and so is retold in the gospel for the Feast of the Sacred Heart. That action is the opening of the side of the dead body of Jesus, the piercing of His heart and—what is most meaningful for all to see—the immediate gushing forth of blood and water. For in the opening of Christ's side there is symbolized the unleashing of a flood of grace and forgiveness for mankind. This is, in fact, the central moment of the Divine Plan of God's love and mercy. There remains now only the need to accept the graces won for mankind by it. Man has only to conform his affections with those of Christ and become conformed to him in His passion in order to receive the fruits of that passion.

But herein lies the tragedy of modern times. Men today refuse to take to themselves any of Christ's sufferings or obedience to God's commandments. It is not strange then, that the Offertory verse for the Mass of the Sacred Heart is quite clearly a complaint, a complaint descending as it were from the cross whereon hangs the dead body of Christ:

"My heart hath expected reproach and misery, and I looked for one that would grieve together with me and there was none; and I sought one that would console me and I found none" (Ps. 68).

Upon this note the instruction of the Mass, teaching the meaning of the feast, comes to an end and the Offertory, the first major part of the Eucharistic sacrifice itself begins. The foregoing instruction for the feast of the Sacred Heart has taught two things: the greatness of Christ in his love for mankind, and the proof of that love in His redemption of mankind on the cross. St. Thomas states that these two things comprise the whole gospel message. The instruction has ended with a heart-wrenching complaint demanding response.

The offertory itself is that response. With the offering of the bread and wine the Christian people symbolically offers itself to

God asking to be accepted as the instrument of His will and the object of His good pleasure.

In the canon of the Mass God does accept this offering and by the power of Christ acting through his priest, the loving sacrifice of that first Good Friday is re-enacted. For at the consecration, the bread offered to God then becomes the Body of Christ, and the wine, His Blood. Thus indeed does the opened Heart, spoken of in the preface for the feast, "flood us with torrents of compassion and grace." For it is this Body and Blood which the faithful will receive in Holy Communion, the sacrament of love and of grace.

After the receiving of Holy Communion, the Church with reason joyfully repeats in the Communion verse the testimony of St. John:

"One of the soldiers opened His side with a lance and immediately there came out blood and water" (John 19).

This then is the Mass of the Sacred Heart, a review of love and the mysteries of love, a reminder, a sunset, as it were, of God's goodness towards mankind. But why? Why this review? Why this reminder?

In the year 1928 Pius XI made very clear his purpose in issuing a new Mass of the Sacred Heart. It was to win from men's hearts a response to Divine Love, to win amends for human heedlessness. He began this Mass with a Divine promise, a Divine reassurance of God's continuing benevolence. Thirty years, a whole generation, has passed since then. That generation, terribly chastised, is now opening into another even more in need of an assurance of God's mercy and love. It will be worthy of that assurance if it makes its own the prayer of the Church in the Mass of the Sacred Heart:

"O God, Who in the Heart of Thy Son, wounded by our sins, hast deigned mercifully to bestow infinite treasures of love upon us; grant, we beseech Thee, that as we offer Him the faithful service of our devotion, we may also make worthy reparation. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, who with Thee liveth and reigneth in unity with the Holy Spirit, God world without end. Amen.



"Let them seriously consider that We speak of a devotion . . . which has long been in the Church and is firmly based on the Gospel and which tradition and sacred liturgy openly encourage.