

THE MASS STIPEND

From the histories of the religions of the world, with all their variances and errors, the most striking and universally admitted fact is that all religious institutions had a sacrifice and as a necessary consequence a priesthood. All who profess belief in any religion, recognize the need for a sacerdotal cast: for it appertains to the priestly office to render due thanks for the blessings and prosperity which the people enjoy and to appease the Bestower of all goods lest maledictions befall the people in just punishment for the sins of society. That the priest might give whole-hearted service to the performance of his sacred duties, he was supported by the tithes and free will offerings of his co-religionists.

Especially is this true with regard to the Jewish priests, the descendants of the Patriarch Levi. For Moses at the command of Jehova divided the promised land among the Jews according to their tribes but "to the tribe of Levi he gave no possession, because the Lord God of Israel Himself is their possession" (Josue Ch. XIII, Verv. 33). For the sons of Levi on entering the service of the Lord, were bound by their ordination to enforce the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law, and especially those enumerated in the book of Leviticus; in partial recompense for their ministrations, the Levites received certain portions of the sacrificial victims.

The Old Law commanded numerous and various sacrifices to be offered in atonement for sins and legal uncleanness, and recognized no sacrifice except it be offered in the temple at Jerusalem by a duly ordained priest. It is for this reason that since the year 70 A. D. when Titus rased Jerusalem to the ground and demolished the temple that the Jews have not offered a public sacrifice. And besides there is no further need for the Old Sacrifices which merely prefigured in some way the perfect sacrifice instituted by the Son of God on the night before His death. It was not, however, until the Christ yielded up His Ghost on Calvary's Mount and paid in full with His blood the price for the world's redemption, that the Mosaic legislation ceased to prevail before the Almighty, except in so far as it was incorporated in the new and perfect dispensation of the Christians.

Membership in the sacerdotal cast is no longer limited by the Christian Law to the descendants of one tribe. Christ, the first priest of the New Law was a descendant of Juda, and the Apostles whom He ordained priests for the Christians, came from the various tribes. Like the Levites, the Apostles were to give their entire services to the Lord, for they were ordained to preach the Gospel of glad tidings throughout the whole world. To their care was also entrusted the administrations of the sacraments and the offering of the perfect sacrifice of the law of grace.

Although the Gospel contains no positive legislation regarding the means whereby the Apostles and their successors in the priesthood are to obtain their support, St. Paul emphatically teaches "the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel, should live by the gospel" (I Cor. Ch. IX, ver. 14), yet he does not say how this is to be accomplished. The Levites of the Jews were given a portion of the sacrificial meats for their sustenance but with the abrogation of animal sacrifices this source of revenue is denied the Christian priest. St. Paul supported himself by working as a tent-maker wheresoever he went, but he tells us that he had the right like the rest of the Apostles of being supported by the faithful. From tradition we learn of the custom of Apostolic times where "all the faithful brought their offerings of bread and wine with other eatables: they likewise offered all that was necessary for the exercise of worship and for the subsistence of its ministers as well as for the relief of the poor" (S. Alphonsus, "The Holy Mass"). These donations were presented to the deacon, whose duty it was to prepare the bread and wine needed for the Holy Sacrifice and for the communion of the faithful. At the offertory of the Mass the deacon placed the matter for consecration before the celebrant, making known to him at the same time the names of the donors that their wants might be especially recommended to God.

The Mass, besides rendering the most perfect adoration to God, is an efficacious means for obtaining new benefits, pardon for sins, and the punishment due to sin. These last three named effects of the Perfect Sacrifice are commonly termed the fruits of the Mass. All the faithful, whether living or dead, participate in the fruits of all Masses in a general way. The person for whose intention the Mass is said receives these fruits in a more special manner than the faithful in common, while the priest in

a most special way enjoys the fruits of the Mass which he personally celebrates. The charity of the first Christian benefactors was thus rewarded, for such benefactors had a special share in the fruits of all the Masses offered in their Church.

With the growth of the Church this ancient custom of common offerings by all the faithful gradually gave place to new and more convenient methods for supporting the Church. In certain regions the needs of the Church were unable to be supplied from local resources, and such necessities were procured elsewhere by the priest from funds obtained from the faithful, and these donors of money also partook of the special fruits of the Holy Sacrifice. Even though the Ven. Bede (d. 735) speaks of those who gave money to the priest outside of Mass, in order that he offer the August Mysteries and obtain for them temporal and spiritual favors, this custom was by no means universal in his day. It is not until the eighth century that the saying of Manual Masses, that is where the priest agrees to apply all the special fruits of his Mass according to the intention of any person from whom he received a remuneration of money, became frequent. The custom of all the faithful making an offering was gradually supplanted by the saying of Manual Masses, and since the twelfth century the common offering in its ancient signification has ceased entirely.

It is customary today when in need of some spiritual or temporal blessing and especially at times when those whom we dearly loved have entered the kingdom without end to receive a just reward for their earthly stewardship, that the faithful of this country offer their priest a stipend requesting him to say a Mass for their intention. Ignorance regarding the nature of a stipend gives rise to the accusation from those outside the true fold that we Catholics buy Masses. The priest is the successor of the Apostles in the ministry of the Word, and like the Apostles has the right of being supported by the faithful. An opportunity is afforded Catholics to fulfill their obligations in this regard towards their pastors, at times when they seek spiritual ministrations. Catholics well know that spiritual things cannot be bought at any price, and any attempt at such a transaction is sinful. We give the stipend to help support the priest and not as a fixed price in exchange for his Mass.

The Catholic Church to safeguard her children and particularly her priest from all abuses regarding the stipend, has in-

corporated in her New Code of Canon Law, clear and precise legislation to regulate such matters. The Church has expressed her mind on this subject in the twenty-one consecutive Canons beginning with number 824. Herein will be found the Church positively approving the practise of each priest accepting a money stipend for the special application of his Mass. On such days when the priest must needs say more than one Mass, he can lawfully accept but one stipend, an exception to this general law is made regarding the three Masses said on Christmas day, for on that day the Church permits a separate stipend to be accepted for each Mass.

The amount of the stipend differs in the various countries, sometimes a difference will be found in the dioceses of the same country. The reason for this comes from the fact that the Church leaves to each of her bishops to determine the amount through a decree, which ought to come from the diocesan Synod, for his territory. In the absence of such a decree all priests are to accept the amount which has been established by custom. In this country custom has determined that the amount for all dioceses shall be one dollar. Ordinarily a priest may not demand more, yet he is justified in asking for a larger stipend when by complying with the circumstances affixed by the donor the priest suffers any inconvenience. The priest may accept larger stipends when freely offered, and the bishop cannot prohibit him from so doing. Occasionally the priest may accept a smaller amount, unless the bishop has expressly prohibited such a practise.

When a large sum of money is given the priest for Masses and no mention is made concerning the exact number to be said, it is understood that a Mass will be said for each and every dollar contained in the offering, unless the priest knows that the donor intended otherwise. By accepting a stipend the priest enters into a quasi contract and is obliged in justice to fulfill his part or make restitution to the donor. Besides offering the Holy Sacrifice for the donor's intention, the celebrant must verify all specified circumstances pertaining to time and place. When, however, no day has been specially requested but the donor makes known the hope of obtaining some temporal or spiritual blessing within a stated period, the Mass must be celebrated before the expiration of that time. Mass must be said within a month for individual stipends when the donor's intention is not ascertained and under the same conditions a priest

is permitted six months for celebrating a hundred Masses. Furthermore the Church forbids her priests to accept more stipends than can be satisfied for within a year.

Executors of wills are granted one full year in which to fulfill their duty of having Masses said for the deceased. Should, however, after twelve complete months to the day, there still remain stipends for Masses, the executors shall give the bishop these stipends and he will have the Masses said. Likewise administrators of pious causes have one civil year to satisfy for those Masses which they must have said for others. If it has been impossible for them to do so, they must give the bishop the stipends for the remaining Masses to be said and the bishop will see that justice be done to the donors.

The bishop must see to it that each priest of his diocese has said a Mass for every stipend received, and religious superiors have the same obligation with regard to their subjects. Hence Canon Law prescribes that each pastor and local religious superior must provide a special book in which are to be recorded accurately the number of Masses, the stipends and the time when the Masses were celebrated. The bishop and religious superiors or some one delegated by them, must examine these books of the respective subjects once a year and correct whatever be wrong.

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