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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

Volume 3 = THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

TRINITY SUNDAY

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Holiness of the Sacrifice of the Mass

*“Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.”* St. Matthew 18:20.

What a comfort and happiness for all true Catholics to hear from the lips of Jesus the assurance: “Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,” by my real presence on the altar as a victim constantly offered to me and your heavenly Father in the holy Mass, an infinitely holy sacrifice, by which you can give him infinite honor, infinite thanks for all his benefits, infinite atonement and satisfaction for all your offences, and obtain from him most effectually all imaginable graces. On this real presence of Jesus Christ in the holy Mass I shall speak in this and the following four sermons. It is a most useful and consoling subject for all men, whether they are sinners or just. For the sacrifice of the Mass is a most holy sacrifice.

*I. Most holy on account of the priest who offers it:*

*II. Most holy on account of the victim offered.*

What a magnificent temple Solomon had to build for the sole purpose of sacrificing to God in a becoming manner! It was by its size and the art displayed in its construction a wonder of the world, an immense treasure-chamber by reason of the wealth of silver and gold vessels, censers, and countless articles of the kind that were used in sacrifice. And how costly the vestments the priests had to put on before officiating! Some of the books of the Old Testament are half full of the laws relating to the ceremonies and to the different usages intended to foster devotion which had, by command of God, to be observed most exactly before, during, and after the sacrifice. Holy Writ itself testifies to the devotion and reverential awe with which the people assisted at those rites. When Solomon caused the priests to offer many sacrifices, “all the children of Israel saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord upon the house; and falling down with their faces to the ground, they adored and praised the Lord. And the priests stood in their offices, and the Levites with the instruments of music of the Lord” (Paral. 7:3, 6). When Pompey took Jerusalem, he could not sufficiently express his astonishment at the devotion and reverence with which the Jews assisted at their sacrifices: God himself often showed in a miraculous manner how pleasing those sacrifices were to him. When Solomon brought the ark into the temple, there were so many victims offered that they could not be counted. And the Lord showed how pleased he was, for his glory filled the temple like a bright cloud, in which he permitted a visible ray of his divine splendor to appear. The same Solomon in his youth offered a thousand head of cattle on one day as a holocaust, and the following night the Lord gave him in a vision that wisdom which made him celebrated over the whole world. When the people of Israel had assembled in Masphat, and knew not what to do to defend themselves against the mighty army the Philistines had brought to attack them, they fled to Samuel, who at once offered sacrifice, and the result was that God so frightened the enemy by thunders and lightnings, that they took to flight, and a few of the Israelites followed and utterly routed them.

And what were those ancient sacrifices, after all? “Weak and needy elements” (Gal. 4:9). They were mere shadows and figures of the holy Mass: “Now all these things happened to them in figure” (I. Cor. 10:11). As a magnificent building surpasses the mere sketch made of it on paper, so, too, nay, infinitely more excellent, is the holy Mass compared to all the sacrifices of the Old Law put together. How and why? Consider the priest who *then* offered, and him who *now* offers, and you will see that there is an infinite distance between the holiness of the two sacrifices.

The chief priests *in the law of nature* were Noe, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Melchisedech; and *in the written law of Moses*, Aaron, Heli, Samuel, Mathias and many others. They were the holiest and best of their priests. But holy and good as they were, they were only mere creatures, poor, miserable, weak, sinful men, inclined to evil, who, if they could have offered all the treasures of the world as a holocaust to God, would not even then have offered him anything suitable to his majesty, on account of the person from whom the gift would come. God was indeed satisfied with those sacrifices at that time, for he knew that they had nothing better to give him, and he received them with pleasure from the hands of the priests, but only because they were figures and shadows of that Priest from whom he was afterwards to receive the true and perfect sacrifice. We Catholics are now living in those desirable times which Jesus announced to the Samaritan woman at the well: “The hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23), and not as formerly, in figures and shadows. For now for the last eighteen, almost nineteen hundred years an infinitely holy Priest has been offering to the God of infinite holiness an infinitely holy sacrifice, which is the Mass, that is daily said on the altars in our churches.

But you will ask, are not our priests who say Mass men too? By all means! But you must not look at them on the altar as if they were the only persons offering the sacrifice. No, they are, so to speak, but the poor laborers who perform the outward ceremonies, the plenipotentiaries who stand there in the name of their great Sovereign, to furnish the outward signs and pronounce the words of consecration with their lips. Standing beside them there is another invisible Priest, whose person they represent, and who is the principal offerer, who makes use of them as mere instruments, and of whom David says: “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech” (Ps. 109: 4). He is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ himself, who not only filled his priestly office on the cross, when he offered and sacrificed himself in a bloody manner to his Father for the salvation of the world, but now continues to offer himself until the end of the world and to fill the same office of priest in an unbloody manner on our altars. The Council of Trent has published the following decree as an article of faith:

*“The same who offered himself on the cross now offers himself by the ministry of the priest.”*

If Jesus Christ were not the chief priest on the occasion, the words of the consecration, in which the substance of the sacrifice consists, would be false and untrue. For, what are those words? “This is my body; this is the chalice of my Blood.” If I pronounce those words at the altar, what do I mean by them? Do I wish to say, this is my own body, my own blood? By no means; for it is clear enough that the bread is not changed into my body, nor the wine into my blood; it must be, then, that these words refer to the body and blood of Christ; and therefore, since the priest does not say : This is the body of Christ, the blood of Christ, but This is my body, this is my blood, it is beyond a doubt that the priest is not speaking in his own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ. No mere creature can by his own power change bread and wine into the substance of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that what was before bread and wine becomes after the words of consecration, and still retaining the outward appearances as before, the body and blood of the Lord, the former substance of the bread and wine having completely disappeared. “This is not the work of human power.” We priests are but the Servants; He is the Lord and Master. We hold the place of ministers; he it is who consecrates and changes. When you see the priest beginning to utter the wonderful words of consecration, imagine you hear the powerful voice of the Lord himself, who by the breath of his mouth commanded all things to be made out of nothing, and they were made; and who at the word of the priest, his servant, orders the destruction of the whole substance of bread and wine, and at the same time enters into the accidents, invisible to our eyes, but visible to our faith, and remains there.

From this it follows, my dear brethren, that the Mass is always good, always holy, always pleasing to God, always of the same merit and value, no matter who the human priest is who says it; for whether he is pious or wicked, a friend or an enemy of God, in the state of grace or the state of sin, that does not touch the essential part of the sacrifice; the piety of the priest does not make its substance and essence holier in itself; nor can the wickedness of the priest, provided he has the right intention, detract in the least from its holiness and dignity;

just as the wickedness of the servant does not lessen the merit and value of the generous alms which a good master gives to the poor, through Christian charity and mercy, by the hands of that servant. Why so? Because the giver of the alms is not the godless servant, but the pious master. In the same way, too, the chief priest in the holy Mass is not the man who stands at the altar, but Jesus Christ Himself, the Holy of holies.

Every gift must bear some proportion to the high position of him who gives it, and also to the dignity of the person to whom it is presented. A penny is a suitable offering for a poor man, but not so for a prince. A gold piece is a suitable gift for a king to bestow, if it is given to a poor man; but not so if it is to be offered to another king. What were the victims of the Old Law? Pigeons and turtle-doves, oxen and calves, sheep and lambs, rams and goats; that was all. Oh, what a poor present to offer the great God! Yet those things bore some proportion to the poverty of the priests of those days, who, being mere mortals, had nothing better to offer. Now it is God, Jesus Christ Himself, who offers. Therefore, that the gift might be proportioned to the infinite God who offers and the infinite God who receives, it must also be in itself of infinite value and excellence.

Such is the case with what is offered in the holy Mass. The gift that Jesus Christ presents to his Eternal Father is the life of a God; it is he himself, in all his infinite greatness, with his divinity and humanity, his body and soul, his flesh and blood, that immaculate lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world, of whom St. Andrew said to the tyrant who tried to make him sacrifice to false gods: "I sacrifice daily to the Almighty God on the altar the unspotted Lamb, whose flesh all the faithful people present eat, and yet the Lamb that was sacrificed still remains whole and living."

To understand this better; we must know that the holy Mass is still the same sacrifice that Jesus Christ offered on the cross; such is the express teaching of the Council of Trent: "One and the same is the victim, one and the same the offerer, by the ministry of the priest, who offered himself on the cross, the only difference being in the manner of offering. As often as the commemoration of this victim is celebrated, the work of our Redemption is being performed" not otherwise than if the Son of God again shed his blood and lost his life for us on the cross; with this sole difference, that on the cross he really shed his blood and lost his life, but in the holy Mass he does this morally and mystically. The love of Jesus Christ for his Eternal Father, and for us, too, is indeed so great that, if necessary, he would hang on the cross until the end of the world in his own person, so that he might always offer himself for the service of the divine majesty and for our reconciliation *with* God. But as this would hinder the glory that is due to his adorable body, and, moreover, as it is not suitable that such a terrible, murderous spectacle which the Jews perpetrated on our Lord should continue so *long* on earth, therefore, *by* the institution of the holy Mass, he has found a wonderful means of being in glory in heaven and at the same time, without actually shedding his blood, of always suffering and dying. How is that? Just as on the cross the blood was really separated from the body of Christ, so it is also separated at the consecration in the Mass. For by virtue of the words of consecration, "this is my body; this is my blood," under the appearance of bread there is only the body, and under the appearance *of* wine only the blood of Christ, although both are united under either appearance, since Christ cannot *any* more really die. Just as the body of Christ hung lifeless on the cross, so the same body is in the accidents as if he had not life, since it appears to be lifeless food and drink. And just as Christ remained attached to the cross until his sacrifice was consummated, so he remains under the accidents of bread and wine until they are consumed. Thus our Lord has become an everlasting sacrifice, which, according to his prediction, will be always offered upon our altars to the Eternal Father till the end of the world.

Thus the holy Mass is an infinitely holy sacrifice, because the priest who offers it is the infinite God, and the victim offered is the same infinite God. From this it follows that we have nothing holier, higher, worthier, more perfect to present to God than this divine sacrifice. Prayer, fasting, alms giving, watching, penance and bodily mortification, and all imaginable works of piety that man can perform; praises, blessings, thanksgivings, and all the acts of love of the Angels and blessed in heaven, cannot approach this in worth and excellence! A single Mass is of more value in the sight of God than all other acts put together. Why? Because they are and remain the acts of creatures, but the holy Mass is the work of God; nay, it is God himself.

And is it possible that, as long as we are in good health, we can allow a single day to pass by without assisting at this divine sacrifice? If there were only one place in the world in which our Lord would descend in visible form once in the year, and again hang on the cross as he did on Calvary, to offer himself to his Eternal Father for all present, and to give them countless graces and blessings, what a concourse of Christians there would be to that place, in spite of distance, from all parts of the world! What innumerable pilgrimages would be

made to it! I believe that the whole Catholic world would assemble there to assist at the divine sacrifice with the utmost devotion, modesty of behavior, reverence, and humility. Is not that so? Ah, how great is our good fortune! Not merely in one place alone, and that at a distance from us, but in all the churches in this town, which are but a few steps from our doors; not merely once a year, but every day, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers himself up for us, although not so that the eyes of the body can see him, yet he is visible enough to the eyes of faith. Thus daily, hourly, he renews on our altars in a mystic manner his sufferings and death on the cross. Daily, hourly, if we wish to take the trouble of going a few steps, we can have our share of the great treasure of graces that he then so liberally distributes. What is the matter with us, Christians? What ails us? Shall we always continue so slothful, tepid, and sunk in earthly things, that we do not care to assist at this holy sacrifice even once in the week?

Or, if we do hear Mass once a week as I hope all good Catholics do, is it possible that we do not display the greatest devotion, love, fervor, humility, and reverence? We have already seen that the Jews in the Old Law were most reverent when offering their sacrifices, which consisted of nothing better than sheep, oxen, and goats immolated by a sinful mortal. How should we not, then, behave at this sacrifice, in which the great God offers, and the great God is himself offered? Truly, we are not worthy of being present at such mysteries if we do not feel a shudder of holy awe at the entrance of the church, or at least the beginning of the Mass. Faith, where art thou? If thou didst shine with all thy light in our hearts, we should imagine, when we are entering the church to hear Mass, that we are being led into heaven, before the throne of Jesus Christ; and at the words of consecration we should think that heaven was ravished out of itself with admiration, while hell trembles with fear because the Son of God is immolated to his Eternal Father. During the whole Mass we should think we see Angels descending from heaven in visible human form, barefooted, with downcast eyes and folded hands standing round the altar, and at the consecration prostrating themselves on the ground to adore their Lord, and maintaining that humble posture till the end of Mass.

And we poor worms of the earth, how do we assist at such an infinitely holy mystery? Ah, I am ashamed when I think of it. I can often hardly bear to look at the bad behavior of some Catholics at Mass. To hear Mass on bended knees, with downcast eyes, folded hands, meditating on the holy mysteries or praying orally oh, that is well enough for the common people; but it would be a mortal sin against the present usages of the world; it would be a most unbecoming thing for a gentleman or lady who has seen the world. So sit down in an easy posture, with the hands in the breast of your coat; or to stand with your hands in your pockets, idly staring around you, bowing to those who come in and go out; to gaze at another's beauty, and thus often stain your souls with sinful desires; to laugh and talk, and, if there is that much piety left, to bend one knee at the consecration, but without attention, devotion, or reverence, that is the way to hear Mass now a-days, according to the fashion of the world.

Hear, all you who forget the proper modesty, reverence, devotion, and attention during Mass! either you believe what the faith infallibly assures us of with regard to the sacrifice of our religion, or you do not believe it. Whatever answer you make to this, you are still inexcusable. For, if you believe that in the holy Mass the great God is present offering, and the great God is present as the victim offered, then you are more shameless and in a certain sense more wicked than the Jews and heretics. They crucified our Lord, and mocked him as he hung on the cross, but they did so through ignorance, not knowing that Christ was God. The heretics often pillaged the tabernacle and trampled the sacred Host under foot; but they did that because they denied the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. But you Catholics, by your misconduct and bad behavior, mock and turn into ridicule even that very God whom you know to be present. If, on the other hand, you are wanting faith; if you do not believe that Jesus Christ is the priest and the victim in the Mass, then why do you come to church to be present with us at this sacrifice? You are guilty of idolatry; for you wish to be looked on as adoring the Lord God in the Mass, although you do not believe in your hearts in what you are doing outwardly. What shall I say to you then? Shall I tell you to remain away from the church, to separate yourselves from the communion of the faithful, to give up hearing Mass? No, my dear Christians! far different shall our conclusion be. We will hear Mass but we shall always assist at it with due respect, with profound humility and modesty in our outward and inward demeanor, with minds recollected in God, and with outward attention, uniting our prayers with all possible devotion with the prayer of Jesus Christ, and offering up our life and death in union with his. Amen.

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