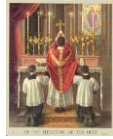




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JMJ

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
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

How to Hear Mass with Fruit

“And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.” Matt. 5:24.

God is not always and on every occasion pleased with sacrifice; for the Gospel of this day says: *“If, therefore, thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee,”* that is, that you are living in hatred, disunion, or enmity with any one, *“leave there thy offering before the altar;”* such a sacrifice does not please me. *“Go first to be reconciled to thy brother.”* Forgive him from your heart, renew your friendship with him, and then you can return, and I will receive your sacrifice favorably: *“And then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift.”* I have already preached four sermons on the holy Mass, and have shown that it is *an infinitely holy sacrifice*, in which God offers and God is offered; that it is a sacrifice by which we offer *infinite adoration, honor, and glory to the divine Majesty: a sacrifice of atonement* whereby we offer to God’s justice an infinite satisfaction for our sins *a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving* whereby we offer infinite thanks to the divine Generosity for all the benefits conferred on us, and at the same time present him with a gift of infinite value, to obtain from him all imaginable fresh graces and favors. And yet this most holy sacrifice does not help all who assist at it in an equal degree, nor does it offer to God the same honor, gratitude, and thanksgiving on all occasions, nor do all who hear Mass derive there from the same advantage and fruit, or receive the same graces and favors.

I. What is the cause of that?

II. In what way should we assist at Mass, in order to receive many favors and graces by it?

All the holy sacraments have a special strength and efficacy either to atone for our sin, to increase sanctifying grace and our future glory in heaven, or to obtain new graces and benefits from God. This efficacy they have by the work itself that is performed in them, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ which are united to the sacramental action. This is the chief difference between the Sacraments of the Jews in the Old Law and ours. The former obtained nothing from God beyond what their own prayer, devotion, fervor, reverence, and especially their belief in the coming of the Messias, merited for them in the sacramental action. But we Christians, besides the merit of our own devotion and other good works while receiving the Sacraments, gain also a great treasure of grace, which is immediately conferred on us out of the inexhaustible merits of the

Passion and death of Christ; yet, even our Sacraments do not of themselves cause the same degree of grace in every one who receives them, but gives more to some and less to others, according to the difference of disposition, capacity, and preparation on the part of the recipient. For instance, two persons go to holy Communion on the same day, at the same time; both are in the state of grace (that must be taken as a matter of course, for no sacrament produces its effect, Baptism and Penance excepted, unless he who receives it is free from the guilt of mortal sin); both receive in the holy Communion Jesus Christ, the Author and Dispenser of grace; and yet one will be richer in grace than the other and will merit more, because he has prepared himself better and has more charity than the other.

It is nearly the same with the Mass, which contains infinite treasures and graces, because Jesus Christ, the true God, is himself the priest and the victim therein. By virtue of this sacrifice, when we assist at it with due attention, besides the merits of our own devotion and prayers, we also gain each time something of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, who offers himself for us to his Eternal Father; we receive also those graces which we have not merited ourselves, but which Christ has merited for us, and, moreover, something is always remitted of the punishment due to our past sins by virtue of the Passion and death of Christ, which for this purpose is mystically renewed in the Mass. We obtain from God what we ask, not merely in virtue of our prayer, but also on account of that most powerful prayer which Christ offers for us on the altar, and presents to his Father in our name. And yet, not all receive an equal share of the effects, fruits, and graces of this holy sacrifice. The first part of these fruits comes to him for whom the Mass is said, whether he be living or dead, if he is still in want of it. The second part comes to him who has the Mass said by a priest selected for the purpose. The third comes to the priest himself who celebrates the holy mystery, according to the measure of his devotion and charity. The fourth comes to him who serves the Mass. The fifth, to all Christians present who assist at the holy sacrifice with due attention and devotion. The sixth, to the Church at large, and to all the faithful, especially to those whom the priest makes a particular memento for, recommending them to God.

With regard, now, to those who assist at Mass, and it is of them alone that I now speak, we must remember that the fruits of this divine sacrifice, that is, the merits, satisfaction, and the graces of Jesus Christ, are given and dispensed to them according to the measure of the devotion, reverence, fervor, and good intention with which they hear Mass. Such is the reason why the Catholic Church places in the mouth of the priest, before the consecration, in the memento of the living, the words: "And of all present whose faith and devotion are known to thee, for whom we offer." From this it follows that one man can gain greater treasures of grace in one Mass than another who hears ten, twenty, or thirty Masses, if the former has more devotion, reverence, and charity during the one Mass than the other in the many Masses. It is like what would happen if a large sum of money, or a spring of water, were left open for every one, to take what he likes; he who has the larger hand, or the more capacious vessel, carries off the most money or water. If his hand is small, he can take only a little money; if the vessel is narrow or full of holes, it cannot contain much water, or it allows what has been poured into it to flow out again. Let a grown up man put his hand into the coffer, and he will take away a large sum, whereas a little child will not be able to carry off much; and if the child puts in only two fingers it will have less still; but if one who is present does not stretch out his hand at all, he will have nothing. What is the Mass? It is an inexhaustible spring of all imaginable graces and gifts of God, which we owe to the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is an immense treasure of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, a treasure which lies open to all who assist at this sacrifice, so that they can take from it what they please. The hand that we put into the treasure, the vessel with which we draw from this spring of grace, is the faith and fervor of devotion with which we hear Mass. According, then, as we are more or less fervent, or tepid and cold, or distracted and utterly inattentive, we shall derive more or less fruit or even none at all, from the Mass.

It seems to me that this is just what happened on Mount Calvary amongst the crowd who were looking on at the death of our Lord. Many of them, along with the centurion and some of those who helped to nail our Lord to the cross, received the grace of conversion and true repentance; the good thief who was crucified beside our Lord, through his perfect contrition and detestation of his sins, received complete pardon and was assured by Christ himself that he would be that day with him in paradise. St. John, in the person and name of the whole Catholic Church, received Mary, the Blessed Virgin, as his loving mother; while she adopted as her children all the faithful in the person of St. John. Magdalene and the other holy women who accompanied our Lord to the place of execution, and remained with him till the end, received a great increase of sanctifying grace. There

were others who derived no fruit whatever, although they were present at the crucifixion, through want of faith in Jesus Christ, their Saviour nay, many, and perhaps the greater number, on account of their blindness and obstinacy, became more hardened in guilt, made their sins more inexcusable, and increased their eternal damnation. There you have an exact picture of the different sorts of Christians who assist in our churches at the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass. Some hundreds of Catholics hear Mass at the same time in the same church, in which the adorable flesh and blood of Christ is offered up to God for all of them, while the same inexhaustible spring of grace, the same infinite treasure, lies open to each and every one; but if we could see the state of their souls when they come out of the church after the holy sacrifice, we should find a great difference between them. Some return home striking their breasts like the people on Calvary: “they returned striking their breasts” (Luke 23:48). For many Christians, after having heard Mass, are converted by the virtue of that adorable sacrifice, and return home justified before God. Others are clothed with a still more beautiful robe of sanctifying grace than that which they brought to church. Many a one goes away just as poor and miserable as when he came, without having gained the least merit. Many a one, like the scribes and high-priests, who assisted at the death of the Son of God for the sole purpose of mocking and laughing at his suffering, come away from the holy sacrifice still more abominable, and deformed, and hardened in guilt than he was before.

For, what advantage can they expect who hear Mass through mere fashion and routine? Who are present in the body only, while their minds and hearts are a thousand miles away? Who do not consider what this sacrifice is, and why it is offered, and therefore have neither a lively faith nor a good supernatural intention? Who during the whole time of Mass almost, allow their thoughts, desires, and eyes to roam about unchecked? Who on Sundays and holy-days, through fear of eternal damnation and on account of the command of the Church, seek out the shortest Mass they can find? For, half-an-hour seems too long for them, and they are impatient for the Mass to come to an end. I would not give much for the merit gained by such people. They have had a vast treasure in their power, but did not think it worth while to stretch forth their hands to seize it; they were at a spring of grace, but the vessels they carried were full of holes, so that not a drop of the heavenly water remains to them. And what are we to think of those half-Christians, who misbehave in such a manner during Mass that all pious Catholics must be scandalized at them? For they hardly bend both knees even at the elevation, when the great God is held up for public adoration; they keep on laughing and talking, and reading the news, and speaking of it; nay, they cast their impure eyes, thoughts, and desires on others, to whom they make more profound reverences than to their God who is offered for them on the altar; and often their only object in going to church is to conduct thither some fashionable lady, or to bring her home again. What advantage can such people expect to find in the Mass? Truly, the only treasure they will gain from it will be that of which St. Paul speaks: “But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works” (Rom. 2:5, 6). Instead of paying due honor to the divine Majesty in the Mass, they offer him the greatest insults and injuries; instead of satisfying the divine Justice for their sins, they make themselves guilty of fresh sacrilegious sins; instead of receiving many graces and favors from the goodness of God, they place a rod in the hands of the divine Justice to chastise themselves, and thus wickedly pervert the means of salvation into one of destruction to their souls and deeper damnation in eternity.

II. The chief thing necessary to hear Mass with profit to our souls, and that on which all the rest depends, is, due attention, reverence, and fervent devotion during the whole time of the holy sacrifice. We shall have and retain that devotion and reverence if, on entering the church, or when the priest is going to the altar, we remember with a lively faith that now is about to commence that incomprehensible mystery of the renewal of the Passion and death of Christ, at which the heavenly spirits cover their faces and tremble with awe; in which the Son of God is the high-priest who offers, and also the victim who is offered to God; by which infinite honor is given to the Blessed Trinity, while the goodness of God receives an infinite thanksgiving for his benefits, his justice an infinite atonement for all the sins of the world, and to us mortals is thus opened an infinite treasure of all imaginable graces.

This thought must necessarily fill us with a holy awe and a great desire to assist at such an adorable sacrifice with the most perfect intention; and that intention is the other requisite to hear Mass with profit. It may be formed for the fourfold end already mentioned, in the following or some similar way: I prostrate myself with

the utmost humility, before thy face, O Lord worthy of all love and honor, and I offer thee with the priest this sacrifice of the flesh and blood of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and unite myself completely in life and death according to thy holy will with that same sacrifice. I offer it to Thee for thy infinite honor and glory, as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all the benefits conferred on me and all creatures; to appease thy just anger against me, a poor sinner; in satisfaction for my sins and those of the whole world. There you have a form of intention for hearing Mass, such as you can find easily in any prayer-book.

They who do not understand it, or who through want of schooling cannot read, would do well to say in the beginning of Mass My Sovereign God, I have not studied, and know not how to speak to thee, nor how to act becomingly during this holy sacrifice; but I unite my intention with that of Jesus Christ, and wish to say to thee all that he says in this sacred mystery. Believe me, that an intention of this kind is not a foolish one, but, when it comes from a well-meaning heart, is rather most pleasing to God and profitable for the soul.

If you were to do nothing else during the whole Mass but kneel down, and with folded hands and eyes downcast, or directed to the altar, keep on continually renewing that intention in thought, thus fixing your whole heart on the adorable sacrifice, you would hear Mass in a most excellent and profitable manner. A pious soul once said: I am sometimes filled with such darkness in the mind, and such dryness and want of fervor in spirit, that I sit there like a stock or a stone, and cannot say one devout prayer; yet I do not interrupt my prayer, but keep myself during the holy Mass always in presence of Jesus Christ, just as a hungry dog lies down at his master's table, expecting to get the crumbs that fall from it. Think of this, pious Christians, who mean well towards your God, if you find no pleasure or fervor even in the thoughts of God himself when you are engaged in works of devotion; by thus humbly placing yourselves before him, you will receive and merit more from him than you would on other occasions by long, fervent prayers filled with consolations. Finally, they who, after having made an intention of that kind, read their prayer-books or say the rosary during Mass, should unite their prayer with that which Jesus Christ offers his heavenly Father for us in this holy sacrifice, and briefly renew their intention several times, especially in the three principal parts of the Mass, the Offertory, the Consecration, and the Communion; and if they are saying the rosary, they could cast a flying thought at the holy sacrifice when they come to the name Jesus in the Hail Mary; for instance, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, who now offers himself for us to his eternal Father." O dear Christians, if you thus heard Mass, what great honor and glory you should give to God; how you should blot out the punishment due to your sins; what an immense treasure of merits you should heap up for eternity; what copious graces and benefits you should ask and obtain from the divine Liberality! Then would be verified in you the words of St. Paul: "I give thanks to my God always for you, for the grace of God that is given you in Christ Jesus: that in all things you are made rich in him, so that nothing is wanting to you in any grace." Ah, would to God that I had known this before, and had always heard Mass in that way! Hitherto I have heard Mass, and yet I did not rightly understand what a precious mystery it is, and what immense graces God had prepared for me in it. Therefore in future I will hear Mass with such faith, intention, devotion, attention, and reverence, that I may merit after this short life to see face to face that God and Saviour whom I now adore and offer on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. Amen.

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