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Ch 24 : The Sacrifice of the Mass and Proficients

When we discussed the purification of the souls of beginners(1), we spoke of assistance at Mass as a source of sanctification. We shall now treat of the Sacrifice of the Mass in the illuminative way of proficients.

The excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, as we said(2), comes from the fact that the Mass is in substance the same sacrifice as that of the cross, because it is the same principal Priest who continues really to offer Himself through His ministers, the same Victim really present on the altar who is really offered, only the manner of offering being different: on the cross there was a bloody immolation, whereas in the Mass there is a sacramental immolation through the separation, not physical but sacramental, of the body and blood of the Savior by virtue of the double consecration. This sacramental immolation is the memorial of the bloody immolation that is past and the sign of the interior oblation perpetually living in the heart of Christ, who, as St. Paul says, "is always living to make intercession for us." (3) This interior oblation of Jesus, which was like the soul of the sacrifice of the cross, remains the soul of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which perpetuates in substance that of Calvary.

Deeper penetration daily into what constitutes the infinite value of the sacrifice of the altar is essential to progress in the interior life. Speaking to the Lutherans, who suppressed the Eucharistic sacrifice, St. John Fisher declared that: "The Mass is like the sun which daily illumines and warms all Christian life."

The Christian and Catholic doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass may be penetrated either in an abstract and speculative manner or in a concrete and experimental manner by uniting oneself personally to the Savior's oblation.

Proficients should live by the four ends of the sacrifice: adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. Blessed Peter Eymard insisted greatly on this point. That a proficient may live more profoundly by the Mass, he should, in union with our Lord, offer up everything

painful in each day and throughout his life, even until his entrance into heaven. It is fitting that he make in advance the sacrifice of his life to obtain the grace of a holy death. Spiritual progress is, in fact, essentially ordered to the last act of love here on earth. If well prepared for by our whole life and very well made, this act will open the gates of heaven to us immediately.

To enter the depths of the Mass, we must place ourselves in the school of the Mother of God. More than anyone else in the world, Mary was associated with the sacrifice of her Son, sharing in all His sufferings in the measure of her love for Him.

Some saints, in particular the stigmatics, for example, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena, have been exceptionally united to the sufferings and merits of our Savior. But profound as this union was, in comparison with Mary's it was insignificant. By a most intimate experimental knowledge and by the greatness of her love, Mary at the foot of the cross entered the depths of the mystery of the redemption more than did St. John, St. Peter, or St. Paul. She entered it in the measure of the plenitude of grace which she had received; in the measure of her faith, of her love, of the gifts of understanding and wisdom which she had in a degree proportionate to her charity.

That we may enter a little into this mystery and draw from it practical lessons which will enable us to prepare ourselves for a good death, we should think of the sacrifice we ought to make of our lives in union with Mary at the foot of the cross.

The dying are often exhorted to make the sacrifice of their lives in order to give a satisfactory, meritorious, and impetrating value to their last sufferings. The sovereign pontiffs, in particular Pius X, have invited the faithful to offer in advance these sufferings of the last moment, which may perhaps be very great, that they may be well disposed to offer them more generously in their last hour.

But that we may even now make this sacrifice of our lives rightly, we should make it in union with the sacrifice of the Savior sacramentally perpetuated on the altar during Mass, in union with the sacrifice of Mary, Mediatrix and Coredeptrix. And to see clearly all that this oblation implies, it is expedient to recall here the four ends of the sacrifice: adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. We shall consider them successively and draw from them the lessons that they hold for us.

ADORATION

Jesus on the cross made His death a sacrifice of adoration. It was the most perfect accomplishment of the precept of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve Him only." (4) Jesus used these divine words when He replied to Satan, who,

after showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, said to Him: "All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me." (5)

Adoration is due to God alone because of His sovereign excellence as Creator, because He alone is eternally subsistent Being, Wisdom, and Love. The adoration due Him should be both exterior and interior and should be inspired by love; it should be adoration in spirit and in truth.

Adoration of infinite value was offered to God by Christ in Gethsemane when He prostrated Himself, saying: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (6) Christ's adoration of the Father recognized in a practical and profound manner the sovereign excellence of God, Master of life and death, of God who, through the love of the Savior, willed to make death, the penalty of sin, serve as reparation for sin and for our salvation. In this eternal decree of God, which contains the entire history of the world, there is a sovereign excellence, recognized by the adoration of Gethsemane.

The Savior's adoration continued on the cross, and Mary associated herself with it in the measure of the plenitude of grace which she had received and which had not ceased to grow. At the moment of the crucifixion of her Son, she adored the rights of God, the Author of life, who for the eternal good of souls was about to make the death of her innocent Son serve as reparation for sin.

In union with our Lord and His holy Mother, let us adore God and say from our hearts, as Pius X invited us to do: "O Lord, my God, from this moment with a tranquil and submissive heart, I accept from Thy hand the type of death that it shall please Thee to send me, with all its anguish, sufferings, and sorrows." Whoever recites this act of resignation after confession and Communion once in the course of his life, will gain a plenary indulgence that will be applied to him at the hour of death, according to the purity of his conscience. We would do well, however, to repeat this act of oblation daily, and by so doing prepare ourselves to make our death, in union with the sacrifice of Christ continued in substance on the altar, a sacrifice of adoration. And while we are making this act, we should consider the sovereign dominion of God, the majesty and goodness of Him who "leadest down to hell, and bringest up again." (7) "For it is Thou, O Lord, that hast power of life and death, and leadest down to the gates of death, and bringest back again." (8) This adoration of God, Master of life and death, may be made in quite different ways, according as souls are more or less enlightened. Is there a better way than thus to unite oneself daily to the Savior's sacrifice of adoration?

Let us from now on be adorers in spirit and in truth. May our adoration be so sincere and so profound that it will be reflected on our life and dispose us for that which we should have in

our hearts at the moment of our death.

REPARATION

A second end of the Sacrifice of the Mass is reparation of the offense offered to God by sin and satisfaction for the punishment due to sin. Since adoration should, properly speaking, be reparatory, we ought to make our death a propitiatory sacrifice.

Christ satisfied superabundantly for our sins because, says St. Thomas,(9) in offering His life for us, He made an act of love which pleased God more than all the sins of the human race displeased Him. His charity was far greater than the malice of His executioners; His charity had an infinite value which it drew from the personality of the Word.

He satisfied for us, the members of His mystical body. But as the first cause does not render the secondary causes superfluous, the Savior's sacrifice does not render ours useless, but arouses it and gives it its value. Mary set us the example by uniting herself to the sufferings of her Son; she thus satisfied for us to the point of meriting the title of coredemptrix. She accepted the martyrdom of her Son, whom she not only cherished but legitimately adored, and whom she loved most tenderly from the moment she conceived Him virginally.

Even more heroic than the patriarch Abraham ready to immolate his son Isaac, Mary offered her Son for our salvation, and saw Him die in the most atrocious physical and moral sufferings. An angel did not come and put a stop to the sacrifice and say to Mary, as to the patriarch, in the name of the Lord: "Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake." (10) Mary saw the effective and full realization of Jesus' sacrifice of reparation, of which that of Isaac was only a figure. She suffered then from sin in the measure of her love for God whom sin offends, for her Son whom sin crucified, for our souls which sin ravages and puts to death. The charity of the Blessed Virgin incomparably surpassed that of the patriarch, and in her more than in him, were realized the words which he heard: "Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven." (11)

Since the sacrifice of Jesus and Mary was a sacrifice of propitiation or reparation for sin, of satisfaction for the punishment due to sin, let us, in union with them, make the sacrifice of our lives a reparation for all our sins. Let us from now on ask that our last moments may have both a meritorious and an expiatory value, and let us also ask for the grace to make this sacrifice with great love, which will increase its twofold value. We should be happy to pay this debt to divine justice that order may be fully re-established in us. If, in this spirit, we unite ourselves intimately to the Masses that are being celebrated every day, if we unite ourselves to the oblation always living in the heart of Christ, an oblation which is the soul of

these Masses, then we shall obtain the grace to unite ourselves to them in the same way at the hour of our death. If this union of love with Christ Jesus is daily more intimate, the satisfaction of purgatory will be notably shortened for us. We may even receive the grace to complete our purgatory on earth while meriting, while growing in love, instead of after death without meriting.

PETITION

The daily sacrifice, like that of the hour of death, should be not only a sacrifice of adoration and reparation, but also a sacrifice of petition in union with Jesus and Mary.

St. Paul writes to the Hebrews: "[Christ] offering up prayers and supplications. . . was heard for His reverence. . . . And being consummated, He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation." (12) Let us call to mind Christ's sacerdotal prayer after the Last Supper and shortly before the sacrifice of the cross: in it Jesus prayed for His apostles and for us. And let us be mindful of the fact that He is "always living to make intercession for us," (13) in particular in the Sacrifice of the Mass, of which He is the principal Priest.

Jesus, who prayed for His executioners, prays for the dying who recommend themselves to Him. With Him the Blessed Virgin Mary intercedes, remembering that we have often said to her: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

The dying man should unite himself to the Masses being celebrated far and near; he should ask through them, through the great prayer of Christ which continues in them, for the grace of a good death or final perseverance, the grace of graces, that of the elect. He should ask this grace not only for himself, but for all those who are dying at the same time.

To dispose ourselves even now to make this act of petition in our last hour, we should often pray at Mass for those who will die in the course of the day. Following the recommendation of Pope Benedict XV, we should occasionally have a Mass offered to obtain through this infinitely valuable sacrifice of petition the grace of a good death, or the application of our Savior's merits. We should also have Masses offered for those of our relatives and friends about whose salvation we have reason to be concerned, in order to obtain for them the final grace, and also for those whom we may have scandalized and perhaps led astray from the way of God.

THANKSGIVING

Lastly, everyone should daily prepare himself to make his death, in union with our Lord and Mary, a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all the benefits received since baptism, keeping in mind the many absolutions and Communions that have reinstated or kept him in the way of

salvation.

Christ made His death a sacrifice of thanksgiving when He said: "It is consummated"; (14) Mary uttered this "*Consummatum est*" with Him. This form of prayer, which continues in the Mass, will not cease even when the last Mass has been said at the end of the world. When there will no longer be any sacrifice properly so called, there will be its consummation, and in it there will always be the adoration and thanksgiving of the elect who, united to our Savior and to Mary, will sing the Sanctus with the angels and glorify God while thanking Him.

This thanksgiving is admirably expressed by the words of the ritual which the priest says at the bedside of the dying after giving them a last absolution and Holy Viaticum. "Go forth from this world, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father almighty, who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee, in the name of the glorious and holy Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the name of Blessed Joseph, her predestined spouse, in the name of the angels and archangels, in the name of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, in the name of all the saints of God. May thy dwelling today be in peace and thy rest in the heavenly Jerusalem, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

To conclude, we should often repeat, in order to give it its full value, the act recommended by Pope Pius X, and we should ask Mary for the grace to make our death a sacrifice of adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. When we assist the dying, we should exhort them to make this sacrifice while uniting themselves to the Masses then being celebrated. We ourselves should even now make it in advance and often renew it each day as if it were to be our last. By so doing we prepare ourselves to make it very well at the last moment. Then we shall understand that if God leads the soul down to the gates of death, He brings it back again.(15) Our death will be as if transfigured; we shall call on the Savior and His holy Mother that they may come and get us and grant us the last of graces which will definitively assure our salvation, by a last act of faith, trust, and love.(16)

What we have just said of the sacrifice of our lives in union with the Sacrifice of the Mass, should be understood by an interior soul in a realistic and practical manner that will make him live the words of St. Paul: "I die daily." (17) It is a question here of accepting in advance with patience and love not only the sufferings of the last moments of life, but all the physical and moral sufferings which God has prepared from all eternity to purify us and make us work for the salvation of souls. These sufferings are of all sorts: want of consideration, contradictions, defamation. They are insignificant in comparison with those which Jesus bore for love of us; nevertheless, because of our weakness, they seem very heavy to us at times. Let us accept them at Mass, before Holy Communion, at the moment of the breaking

of the host, which symbolizes the breaking of all the bruises that Jesus bore for us.

May this breaking make us think of what should be in us: fervent contrition. Then, more conscious of our sins and of the necessity of making reparation, for them, we shall more willingly accept in advance the physical and moral sufferings which Providence reserves for us. We shall accept them, asking for a serious beginning of the love of the cross or the love of Jesus crucified. Should we not return Him love for love?

We should reread what Christ says to His faithful servant according to *The Imitation*: "Son, let not the labors which thou hast undertaken for My sake crush thee, neither let tribulations, from whatever source, cast thee down; but in every occurrence let My promise strengthen and console thee. I am sufficient to recompense thee beyond all bounds and measure. . . . Mind what thou art about: labor faithfully in My vineyard: I will be thy reward; write, read, sing, lament, keep silence, pray, bear adversities manfully: eternal life is worth all these, and greater combats. Peace shall come one day, which is known to the Lord. . . . Oh! if thou couldst see the everlasting crowns of the saints in heaven, and in how great glory they now triumph, who appeared contemptible heretofore to this world, and as it were even unworthy of life, doubtless thou wouldst immediately cast thyself down to the very earth, and wouldst rather be ambitious to be in subjection to all, than to have precedence over so much as one. Neither wouldst thou covet the pleasant days of this life, but wouldst rather be glad to suffer tribulation for God's sake, and esteem it the greatest gain to be reputed as nothing amongst men." (18)

In assisting at the Sacrifice of the Mass or in celebrating it, we should unite our personal oblation to our Savior's, offering Him the contradictions and tribulations which await us in life, mindful that they may thus become most fruitful for us. Obstacles may in this way be transformed into means. The cross was the greatest obstacle that men raised against Jesus; He made it the greatest instrument of salvation. If each member in the mystical body performs his duty supernaturally, all the others benefit, just as, when each little cell in our body functions as it should, the entire organism profits. For this reason, however little we may be able to do, its worth is great if it is accomplished in the spirit of the love of God and of neighbor, in union with Jesus the eternal Priest. In the greatest calamities little children are asked to pray; their earnest, humble prayer, united to that of the Savior, cannot fail to be heard by God.

We may better comprehend what the Mass should be for proficients by reflecting that its different parts correspond to the love which purifies (Confiteor, Introit, Kyrie, Gloria), to the love which enlightens and offers itself (Collect, Epistle, Gospel, Credo, Offertory), and to the love which sacrifices itself and unites itself to God (Consecration, Communion, Thanksgiving). Such consideration reminds us of the purgative way of beginners, the

illuminative way of proficient, and the unitive way of the perfect. These are the normal phases of the ascent of the soul toward God.

NOTES to Ch 24.

1. Cf. Vol. I, chap. 31.
2. Ibid.
3. Heb. 7:25.
4. Deut. 6:13.
5. Matt. 4:9.
6. Matt. 26: 39.
7. Tob. 13:2; cf. Deut. 32:39.
8. Wisd. 16: 13.
9. Summa, IIIa, q.48, a.2.
10. Gen. 22: 12.
11. Gen. 22: 16 f.
12. Heb. 5:7,9.
13. Heb. 7:25.
14. John 19:30.
15. Wisd. 16: 13.
16. To live profoundly by the Mass, we recommend the book of Father C. Grimaud, *Ma Messe* (Tequi, 17th ed.), which shows how we should unite ourselves practically to our Lord's sacrifice perpetuated on the altar by recalling the four ends of the sacrifice. The author also sets forth at length the fruits of the Mass as well for the living as for the dead.
17. Cf. I Cor. 15:31.
18. *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 47.