

The Mystic Mass

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The Christian's Life is a Mass.

"Tu es sacerdos in aeternum!" "You are a priest for ever!" What a joy was ours when, on the morning of our ordination, a consciousness of this divine reality dawned in our souls: "You are a priest for-ever!" Yes, we were happy then with a happiness we could not measure, a happiness which the passing years have served but to increase.

Many Christians in the world envy us our sacerdotal dignity. Well do I understand their holy jealousy. For their consolation, I would remind them of a truth which they do not perhaps sufficiently recognize — Every Christian has received a true participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ; as a member of the mystical Body of Christ, he belongs, as St. Peter has authoritatively declared, to "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood." St. Ambrose repeats the same truth to the people of Milan: "All the children of the Church are priests; in Baptism they receive the anointing that makes them participate in the Priesthood; the victim which they must offer God is wholly spiritual: this victim is themselves."

I urge you, then, faithful souls, to rejoice. You have not received the Sacrament of Holy Orders, nevertheless you are spiritually united to the Priesthood; you are not in material fact priests, yet, because you are Christians, you have the sacerdotal character imprinted on your soul, you are endowed with the soul of a priest.

Since this is the case, Our Lord has reserved a share in His Divine Priesthood for you. But, you ask, how are you going to exercise this share in His Priesthood? The answer is, as the priest, by saying Mass.

It is clear that you cannot say a real Mass, like the priest, but you can say a spiritual Mass, a mystic Mass, which bears certain resemblances to the Mass that is celebrated at the Holy Altar: it is the one and only Mass which begins with your life and which will be ended only with your life. This Mass it is possible for you to say is, in certain respects, a reproduction of the priest's Mass. Hence in your Mystic Mass you can and must find the three essential acts that compose the real Mass: the Offertory, the Consecration and the Communion.

With the aid of analogy and comparison, I will try to give you an understanding of the mystic Mass, and at the same time, I will teach you how to say your Mass well. As I do this, there will dawn a light over your whole life, opening up to the eyes of your soul magnificent and mysterious horizons of whose existence you have perhaps hitherto never dreamed.

I. — The Offertory.

1.

To say Mass, the priest needs a host. Then to say your mystic Mass, you, too, must have a host. But where will you seek it? Listen to St. Augustine, as he supplies the answer to your question: "Do not seek outside yourself the host you need: You will find this host in yourselves." St. Paul makes the same truth evident when he says "I beseech you that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy, pleasing to God." Now you have the answer to your question: the host of your sacrifice, the host of your Mass, is your own self. You are the host, with all that you are, all that you possess, all that you do.

2.

Now you have your host, but it must bear some resemblance to the host that the priest offers.

The priest's host is formed from the purest wheat; moreover, it is the bread of the azymes, that is to say, unleavened bread.

You, too, must be the bread of the azymes, unleavened bread. The leaven of which I speak is symbolical of all that is not pure, all that is evil, all that is not in accordance with the Christian spirit. You must then remove from yourselves every trace of this evil leaven.

Seek out in yourself, in your mind, in your will, in your heart, in your intentions, all that is too natural. all that is too human, all that is not absolutely worthy of a good, true Christian; seek it out, I say, and then uproot it, destroy it: as each day comes, strip yourself one further degree, purify yourself, sanctify yourself: become each day more supernatural, more pure, more holy, and then your host will resemble in some small degree the priest's own host.

3.

The priest takes his host in his hands and offers it to God. You too have to make the offering of your host, that host which is your own self. Take yourself then, whole and entire, and making no reserves, offer yourself to God. Take your body with all its senses, your soul with all its faculties, your will with all its desires, your heart with all its affections; take each day of your life, with your work, your sufferings, your struggles, your strivings, your prayers, your good actions, and say to God: "Lord, all this is Yours, I offer it all to You."

Make this offering of yourself in a spirit of total abandonment and renunciation, in a spirit of generosity and joy. Do not be like Cain who offered God only the least he had to offer; give Him of your best; the best your soul can offer, the best your heart can offer, the best your life can offer. Again do not be like Ananias and Saphira who wanted to keep back a part of their goods (and then lied about it): offer God your victim, your host, whole and entire; offer Him all that you are, all that you possess; all that you do; keep nothing back either for yourself or for others.

4.

The priest offers his host in the venerable Liturgy authorized by Pope Saint Pius V with the following words: "Receive, O Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God, this spotless host, which I, Your unworthy servant, offer unto You, my living and true God, for mine own countless sins, offences and negligences, and for all here present; as also for all faithful Christians living and dead, that it may avail both me and them unto salvation for life everlasting. Amen." Do you also offer yourself to God and say to Him:

"My God, I offer myself to You, to be the living host of my family: I desire to be sacrificed, in order that my parents and my family and all those I love may be blessed, sanctified and saved.

“My God, I offer myself to You, to be the living host of the work to which I have devoted all my interests; I desire to be sacrificed in order that this work may live and prosper.

“My God, I offer myself to You to be the living host of Your priests. I desire to be sacrificed in order that I may thereby help Your ministers, in order that their ministry may be holy and fruitful.

“My God, I offer myself to You to be the living host of Your Holy Will. I desire to be sacrificed, in order that I may sanctify myself, in order that I may attain the end of my vocation, in order that I may accomplish my whole mission even to the least iota, in order that I may realise all Your designs for me.

“My God, I offer myself to You, to be the living host of Your love. I desire to be sacrificed in order that Your name may be blessed, in order that Your Kingdom may come, in order that Your Will may be done, in order that You may be better known, loved and glorified.

My God, I offer myself to You to be the tiny living host of sinners. I desire to be sacrificed in order to share in Your Son's work of Redemption and in order to make up what is wanting in His Passion, His Sufferings and His Death: I desire to be sacrificed in order to expiate, to repair and to merit, all in union with Him."

By doing as I have directed you, you will accomplish a noble, a fruitful, a necessary apostolate. Now, more than ever before, the world is in need of generous, saintly souls, living victims of holocaust, who will vow themselves to sacrifice and immolation. Do you then become one of these consecrated souls, these souls united to Jesus Crucified. We shall never know the supernatural influence, the sanctifying, fruitful apostolate we will exercise around us from the hidden sanctuary of our immolation. We shall never know it, I say; only God shall.

Such is the offering you have to make. But remember, your offering ever remains an unfinished work: at every instant of the day and of the night, you can and should renew it and carry it to its completion: so act that your life may be one continual and ceaseless offering. And so doing, you will fulfill the first act of your mystic Mass.

II. — Consecration.

The priest, when saying Mass, takes the host he has offered into his hands and pronounces the words of consecration over it.

You too have to consecrate the host you have already offered to God. What the real Consecration of the priest produces in the wheaten host, your mystic consecration must, in a certain manner, produce in you, the living host. I shall try and show you how this mystic consecration is accomplished, and again I shall make my meaning clear by means of analogy and comparison.

1.

The priest consecrates his host by pronouncing over it the four words "Hoc est corpus meum": "This is My Body." At that same moment as he says the words the substance of the wheat disappears; there remains only what we call the species, the appearance of bread. Hence the first result of the Consecration is the disappearance of the substance of the wheaten host.

You too have to disappear, not suddenly, but gradually, little by little. You will disappear by humiliating yourself, by forgetting yourself, by renouncing yourself, by making self die within you.

By realising the 'I die daily' of which St. Paul speaks, you will attain to this mystic death of yourself which will be the first act of your Consecration.

2.

The words of consecration pronounced by the priest have a second effect even more marvellous than the first: they accomplish what we call transubstantiation. Hence the Consecration is the changing of the substance of wheaten bread into Jesus Christ, into the living Jesus Christ with His Divinity and His Humanity. You, too, must be changed into Jesus Christ: you must become another Christ: I do not say really, that is substantially, but spiritually, in a mystic manner. You have then to consecrate your body, so that it may be in some faint measure pure and holy as the Body of Jesus: you must consecrate your soul so that it may be divinised and in some degree become like the soul of Jesus: you must consecrate your heart, so that it may love just a little as the Heart of Jesus loves; you must consecrate your mind, so that your thoughts may bear some resemblance to the thoughts of the mind of Jesus; you must consecrate your will, so that it may will as the Will of Jesus wills; you must consecrate your life each day, so that, by becoming the continuation, the prolonging, the extension of the life of Jesus, it may be just a little like His life, a life of holiness, charity, apostolate and redemption.

In this spirit, you will work at your consecration, this consecration which is to transform you, to change you gradually into Jesus Christ. And when you are able to say like St. Paul "I live now, no longer I, but Christ lives in me," you will have realised the second effect of your mystic consecration.

3.

I said before that after the priest's consecration, there remains only the species, the appearances of bread. Now Jesus makes use of these species, these sacramental appearances, to live His Eucharistic Life.

In the measure in which your mystic consecration is accomplished, in that same measure, will Jesus make use of you to live and act in the world. He will make use of you to think, to speak, to pray, to love, to suffer: He will make use of you to do battle for Him and drive away the enemy; He will make use of you to console, convert and sanctify, to save, to expiate, to make reparation: in a word He will make use of you to continue to go about doing good among men.

Then you will carry out, in some measure, the divine role of the species of the sacramental appearances of the living Host. You yourself will be the species, the living appearances, not sacramental species, but spiritual, mystical species, hiding Jesus behind a veil, concealing His Presence and His action in the world: the life you spend for Jesus on earth will be as it were a life added to His own life. You will be living members of His mystic Body and in a certain manner you will take the place of His Sacred Humanity on earth.

Revise now the consecration you have to make. See that you understand clearly that your consecration consists in transforming yourself, in changing yourself into Jesus, in making Jesus live within you, in giving Him all that you do, so that He may make use of it; see how, since it is never perfect, never completely accomplished, your consecration must go on at every moment of the day; so act that your life may be a continual consecration of your whole self. So living and so acting, you will perform the second act of your mystic Mass.

III. — Communion.

The priest receives as food the Host that he has offered and consecrated and which has become Jesus Christ, and he enshrines it in the sanctuary of his soul. This is Communion, the most intimate divine union of the priest with Jesus.

Of your mystic Mass, too, Communion is the third act. In the same way as the priest, you communicate every time that you receive Our Lord at the Holy Table. This sacramental Communion is the Communion par excellence, the only real Communion in the true sense of the word. But outside Eucharistic Communion, there are other ways of communicating with Christ Jesus, Our Lord. In very truth, every act that unites us to Jesus is a Communion, a spiritual, a mystic communion, no doubt, but still in a sense, a true Communion. So you must look for Jesus wherever He is, everywhere He hides His Presence and you must communicate with Him — unite yourself to Him by communion.

1.

Jesus is in the Holy Gospel, which in a certain manner, is a kind of incarnation of Christ hidden beneath the printed word. When you meditate upon the word of God — here I am but repeating the idea of Monsignor Landriot, who gives a summary of the doctrine of the Holy Fathers on Spiritual Communion in Christ — when you bring to light the divine significance of the sacred text, when you penetrate into the inmost depths of its priceless treasury, a true eucharistic mystery takes place within you, the Word enters into your soul, nourishes your mind, inflames your heart, renews your life, and transforms you into Himself: at that moment, you enter into communion with Jesus hidden under the Holy Gospel.

2.

Jesus is in souls that are in the state of grace. He Himself has declared in a formal, public discourse that He dwells in such souls in a permanent manner. "If any man love Me, He will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode in him." On many other occasions He confirmed these same truths. Consequently when you are united by the bonds of thought, affection or charity to souls that possess the life of grace, you are communication with Jesus living in them.

3.

Jesus is in little children, He is in the humble, the poor. He is in all those who suffer. Again, it is Jesus Himself who has told us this "Amen, amen I say to you, all that you do to one of these My little ones, you do unto Me." Hence when you are engaged in the intellectual, moral or religious formation of little children; when you give your services and help those in need; when you visit and look after the sick; when you fulfill the role of consoling Angel or of the Cyrenean for those who have a Cross to carry or a Calvary to climb; when you impart some tiny portion of joy and happiness to those who are beggars in this world's goods; in all these circumstances, you are communicating with Jesus.

4.

Jesus is in your Superiors. Call to mind the exquisite words of the young Carmelite, Sister [now Blessed] Elizabeth of the Trinity, words that breathe the very air of the supernatural. One of her Sisters had just been to visit her in her poor, humble sick-room and as she was going out of the cell, she said: "I am leaving you now to go and see our Mother Superior." "Ah," said Sr. Elizabeth, "you are going to see our Mother Superior. Profit well from your visit; it is a sacrament." Hence when

you are in the presence of your Superiors, your mother, your father, your director, when you listen attentively to their advice, and their commands, when you obey and carry out those orders to the best of your ability, you are communicating with Jesus present in them.

5.

Jesus is in all that you do. Every action, every sacrifice, every smallest detail of your everyday life, all of these are, in Father Faber's words, "so many sacraments, so many 'real presences' for God is found buried in each of them." So when you endeavour to follow out the advice of St. Paul, striving to have "that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus," when you are striving to think, to will, to love, to feel as Our Lord Himself did, do you know what you are really doing then? You are communicating with the interior life of Jesus: you are communicating with His mind, His Will; His Heart; His Soul. Our Divine Lord said: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, do you also."

When you fulfill this precept of the Master, you set yourself to work to produce His way of life, His conduct towards others, towards events as they come to pass, towards all circumstances of life. And when you do do this, what in reality are you doing? You are communicating with the exterior life of Jesus. When you are suffering in body, in soul, in heart; when weighted down with the weight of your Cross you climb the steep and painful Calvary of your life; when stretched out upon your Cross, you offer expiation, you make reparation, you gain merit for yourself and for others, do you know what you are doing then? When Father Faber says "suffering is the greatest of the Sacraments," he gives you the answer — you are communicating with the Passion of Our Saviour.

When you visit the poor and the sick and do good to those who are in suffering; when you help in the sanctification of souls by teaching Catechism, by helping in the work done in orphanages and such undertakings of zeal; when you give the example of Christian virtue to those around you; when you say a good, a kind word in the right place, a word that brings consolation, encouragement, edification; a word that heals a hurt, a word that is productive of good, do you reflect on what you are then doing? You are communicating with the Apostolate of Jesus.

When you give yourself to recollection, when you pray, when you meditate, you are communicating with the prayer of Jesus.

So you see how by uniting yourself to Jesus sacramentally or spiritually, by participating in His interior and in His exterior life, you are communicating just as the priest does. But you must carry your resemblance to Him to its very utmost limits. The priest saying Mass is not selfish: he shares his Victim, his Host, with his brethren. And you must do likewise. You communicate with Jesus, but do not keep Jesus within you for yourself alone: give Him to others. For the members of your family, for your friends, for all those with whom you live, you must be a living Eucharist, a living Eucharistic table; invite them all to sit down at the Banquet of your soul and your heart; share with them your thoughts, your affections, your words, your good works. In an overflowing of charity and generosity, distribute to them the Jesus Who is in you. Following the counsel of St. Frances de Sales: "Have Jesus ever in your mind, in your heart, in your breast, in your eyes, in your hands, on your tongue, in your ears, and on your feet." And then distribute Him, give Him, communicate Him to all with whom you come in contact, to everyone who draws near to you. "You are my living Sacrament" Jesus once said to a mystic of our own day. "I give Myself to you and through you to souls." He says these very same words to each of us.

I think that you now understand what it means to communicate with Jesus: I think too you now understand that this kind of communion is easy and possible at every moment: then so act that your life may be one continuous Communion with Jesus. And thus you will accomplish the third act of your mystic Mass.

And now, my dearly beloved children of Christ, remember that you have a priestly soul, and that you have a Mass to say. Each day and many times each day, ascend the altar of your heart, repeating the words of the priest said at the beginning of the Liturgy of Saint Pius V: "Introibo ad altare Dei" — "I shall go into the Altar of God". And say your Mystic Mass. Say it first of all for yourself, that you may always remain faithful to Jesus, to remain His own faithful friend; say it for your parents, for your family, for your friends, for all those who are dear to you and whom you love, that Jesus may bless them and guard them for you: say it for the Church and for your own country that they may safely cross the stormy seas of strife and trial, that Jesus may shorten the days of stress and hasten the dawn of deliverance and triumph.

Remember too that you must say your Mass as the priest says his; holily, with faith, reverence and love. Remember too that your Mass will be always a Mass that has commenced but never ended, and so you must go on saying it continually until the final call, of the Angel of Death. Then only will you finish your Mystic Mass: your last words on earth will be "Ite, missa est!" ('Go, it is the dismissal', 'Go forth, the Mass is ended', 'Go forth in peace',) and in Heaven you will eternally reply "Deo Gratias!" ('Thanks be to God!')
