Masses for Money

By Herbert Thurston, S.J.
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Some short time ago an English religious journal of the ultra-Protestant type informed its readers that in consequence of the separation of Church and State in France the price of Masses was rapidly going up, and that pious French Catholics were in despair at the thought that their dead relations would now have to work out their full sentence in Purgatory, seeing that the usual ticket-of-leave had become so ruinously expensive. I have not the reference by me, and I cannot be sure of the exact words, but this was the drift of the paragraph in question. Whether it was founded upon any echo of what is, apparently, a fact, that the approved stipend for Masses has lately been raised in several French dioceses, or whether it was pure facetiousness of the kind dear to the Protestant Alliance and their supporters in the press, need not concern us here. The utterance may, in any case, serve as a peg upon which to hang a little discussion of the question of offerings for Masses. It is a subject upon which those within, as well as those without, the Church not infrequently find a difficulty, and this may serve as sufficient excuse for the following simple statement of a few principles and a few historical facts, none of which can make any pretence to novelty in themselves.

The difficulty just referred to generally takes one or more of these three forms. People feel shocked:

(1) That there should be, or appear to be, any recognition of a money equivalent for the offering of the Holy Sacrifice.

(2) That there should exist considerable diversity of usage regarding the stipend expected — so much so, that the honorarium paid for a single Mass in England or America would, in certain foreign countries, suffice to secure the offering of three or four Masses.

(3) That, however low the stipend, the poor are always enormously at a disadvantage as compared with the wealthy; in other words, that it costs a rich man less of self-sacrifice to have a thousand Masses said for himself and his friends than it does a poor man to have the Holy Sacrifice offered but once.

In the following pages a few words may be said upon each of these objections in order.

The Lawfulness of Money Payment for Masses

With regard to the first issue, the admissibility of any money payment for Masses, it will probably be allowed by fair-minded people that this is after all only a particular application of a much more general principle. Whether a salary should be paid to a chaplain for his services during a twelvemonth, or whether the performance of some special function should be remunerated by its own special fee, is really a matter of convenience and sentiment. We need not urge that sentiment should go for nothing in such a question, but it is reasonable to maintain that sentiment should itself be guided, and in fact usually is guided, by the voice of authority and the practice of high-minded Catholics. However the matter be arranged, it is impossible to avoid some appearance of

remuneration and exchange, even though every means be taken to make it clear that the money is not the price of the spiritual service. The natural delicacy which is often felt about such transactions is not at once to be interpreted as the accusing voice of conscience in revolt against flagrant simony. Even in civil life a similar awkwardness is perceptible. We must all recognize the artificiality of the conventions which obtain regarding a barrister's fees; neither does the considerate patient require his physician to hold out an expectant palm until there be counted into it the requisite number of sovereigns and shillings. A different code prevails in the consulting-room from that which obtains at the railway booking-office or the shop counter. From all which we may infer that the repugnance which is often felt to the stipendium mammae in the matter of Masses or sacraments is due quite as much to the artificiality of modern life as to any deep spiritual instinct.

On the other hand, with regard to the question of principle, the lawfulness of some exchange of temporal support against spiritual service has been upheld from the very beginning of Christianity. It was our Saviour Himself who proclaimed during His public life, Dignus est operarius cibo suo — "The labourer is worthy of his meat"; and if He also laid upon His Apostles the command, Gratis accepistis date, — "Freely have ye received, freely give," it seems clear from the later action of these same Apostles that they understood this only as a special counsel of disinterestedness, which was temporary in its nature, and not to be regarded as a universal law. St. Paul's teaching, at any rate, is most explicit:

Who serveth as a soldier at any time at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock... If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it great matter if we reap your carnal things?

It is true that St. Paul waives the right in his own case, and prefers to live by the labour of his hands, but he is at pains at the same time to point out to the Thessalonians that this is a pure concession on his part, in order that he might "give himself as a pattern" for those sluggards to imitate who were too ready to live on the alms of others. In the case of the Philippians, where the same motive did not exist, St. Paul accepts their offerings; and in his Epistle to Timothy he goes so far as to approve the principle of some gradation in the offerings of the faithful proportioned to the dignity or merit of the pastor, whose needs they supply:

Let the priests who rule well be esteemed worthy of double honour [the context shows that it is their temporal support which is here in question], especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn," and "The labourer is worthy of his hire."

That the early Christians fully understood, and zealously put in practice, this duty of contributing to the support of their pastors, seems to be clearly shown not only by that community of goods (produce and revenues of all kinds being brought to the Apostles themselves) which we read of in the Acts, but also by such early documents as the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas. In the Didache more particularly we read:

But every true prophet desiring to settle among you is worthy of his food; in like manner a true teacher is also worthy, like the workman, of his food.

And the writer goes on to particularize how the firstfruits should be given "of the wine-vat and the threshing floor, of oxen and of sheep," giving expression therein to well-recognized traditions which, if partly of Jewish origin, had nevertheless been explicitly accepted by the earliest Christian

teachers. The Fathers of the fourth century echo the same strain, and St. Augustine in particular often returns to the subject. For example:

As for the means of livelihood, it is necessary to receive, just as it is a charity to give; not as though the Gospel were sold for money, and the price paid were the sustenance of those who preach it. Surely if they do so sell it, they sell a great matter for a small fee. But let them receive the relief of their necessities from the people, and for the reward of their ministrations let them look to God.

It would seem that the maxim clerici de altario vivant ("let the clergy live by the altar") was already received before the end of the fourth century as a principle of ecclesiastical law. We shall hardly be wrong if we see a certain significance in the fact that although no money honorarium was then associated with the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, still it is the altar which is put forward as the foundation of their claim. Also the burthen seems to have been recognized as one of universal application, not limited to the wealthy. St. Jerome, who, though he had divested himself of his worldly goods to live as a hermit, was not then a priest, writes in such terms as these:

The clergy indeed live by the altar. But for myself I should feel that, like an unfruitful tree, the axe is already laid to the root, if I bring not my gift to the altar. I cannot plead poverty in excuse, since our Lord in the gospel commended the aged widow who dropped into the treasury of the temple the only two mites which remained to her.

Early Church Offerings at Mass

It must be remembered in regard to this phrase, "living by the altar," that in St. Jerome's time and for many centuries afterwards very substantial offerings, more particularly of bread and wine, were made by the faithful, both before and in the course of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. How far these offerings may have been associated with the primitive institution known as agapae, or love feasts, is a matter of dispute. The solution does not much concern us here. What is certain is that in the early Church the faithful brought offerings of bread and wine much in excess of what was actually needed for the Sacrifice, even when all who assisted communicated in both kinds. According to the Apostolic Canons, ears of corn and grapes were also brought to the altar, but all other forms of produce were taken to the residence wherein the Bishop and his clergy lived a sort of community life. To discuss at all adequately the nature of these offerings, and the manner in which they were disposed of, would require much space, for our testimonies are by no means in complete accord. Practice evidently varied considerably in different places and at different periods. Certain facts, however, stand out prominently, and are admitted by all students of early history. For example, in the earlier centuries it was undoubtedly accepted as a principle that all who communicated should also contribute to the Offertory. Those who for any reason neglected to offer were considered to have been guilty of a meanness which was an occasion of scandal to the faithful at large. St. Cyprian, St. Caesarius of Arles, and other Fathers speak strongly on this subject. This usage, according to which the faithful contributed bread and wine in considerable quantities, far, of course, exceeding the needs of the actual Sacrifice, was maintained for several hundred years. The Ordines Romani of the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries supply minute instructions for taking up these offerings of loaves in cloths of white linen, and laying them either upon the altar or upon a special table beside it which was set apart to receive them, and similarly give directions for pouring into a great amphora, or flagon the contributions of wine which the faithful brought in their smaller cruets. In illustration of this, we may note in passing an alleged miracle, recorded first in an English document of the eighth century, and attributed to the ardent faith of Pope St. Gregory the Great.

When celebrating the Holy Mysteries on one occasion, a woman presented a loaf in the usual way at the Offertory. When the time had come for the Communion, and St. Gregory was distributing the Consecrated Bread to the faithful, saying to each, almost as the priest does now, "May the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul," he noticed a woman who, when about to receive her portion, laughed irreverently. The Saint withheld the morsel proffered, bade it be laid upon the altar, and taking a convenient moment afterwards, summoned the scoffer, and asked her the cause of her mirth. "To think," she said, "that you should call that the Body of Christ which I myself this morning baked with my own hands." St. Gregory, we are told, bade his people kneel and pray in common accord that Almighty God, by some prodigy, might vindicate the reality of these Holy Mysteries. When the prayer was concluded, he took up from the altar the portion of the Sacred Bread which had been placed there, and lo! on showing it to the woman and the people, it was found to be in the likeness of human flesh dripping with blood. The woman deplored her sinful doubt, and when once again prayer had been made by all the assembly, the morsel was found to have returned to the appearance of bread, and was received by her in Holy Communion, now with earnest faith.

Of the large offerings of bread and of wine which were presented by the people at the public Masses of the early centuries, a certain portion was used in the Holy Sacrifice, a certain portion was blessed and distributed as eulogiae to those who did not communicate (I am, of course, speaking now of the times when Communion had ceased to be universal); but by far the greater part was regarded as given to the Church, and was reserved for the needs of the clergy and of the poor. Already in the so-called "Canons of the Apostles" (a sort of Appendix to the "Apostolical Constitutions," and consequently a document of the fourth century), it is laid down in regard of these gifts offered at the altar "that the Bishop and the priests must assign their proper share to the deacons and the inferior clergy." This no doubt was the arrangement followed so long as some sort of community life was observed by all the ecclesiastical order, but in course of time the dominion of such offerings was no longer regarded as vested in the Bishop, but they remained in the hands of the local clergy, a certain contribution being set aside as an episcopal due. An incident which must be of earlier date than 558 is recorded by St. Gregory of Tours, and throws some light upon the character and destination of the gifts made at the Offertory.

It is said [wrote Gregory] that there were two people in this city (Lyons), to wit, a man and his wife, both of them of senatorial rank, who dying without children, left their property to the Church. The man died first and was buried in the basilica of St. Mary. The wife for a whole year, taking up her abode near the church, devoted herself assiduously to prayer, celebrating daily the Sacrifice of the Mass, and making an offering in memory of her husband. Hence, relying upon the mercy of our Lord that the dead man would experience relief (requiem) on the day that she had presented an offering for his soul, she always brought a gallon (sextarium) of the wine of Gaza to the sanctuary of the holy basilica. But an unprincipled subdeacon, reserving the wine of Gaza for his own gluttony, put some exceedingly sour vinegar into the chalice in its stead, since the woman did not always herself come up for Communion. Now when it pleased God to bring this trickery to light, the husband appeared to the wife saying, "Alas! alas! my dear wife, what has all my hard work in the world come to, that I should now supply vinegar for the offering?" To whom she answered: "In good sooth, husband, I have never forgotten the lesson of thy charity, but every day for the repose of thy soul I have offered the strongest wine of Gaza in the sanctuary of my God." However, when she awoke, wondering at this vision and not allowing herself to forget it, she rose as she was accustomed to do to attend Matins. When these were over and Mass had been said, she came up to

receive the lifegiving Cup, and thereupon she drank from the chalice a draught of vinegar so acid that she thought her teeth would have been wrenched out of her head if she had imbibed the draught slowly. In this way the subdeacon was rebuked and his scandalous trickery was put a stop to.

The story is interesting, because it shows pretty clearly what indeed we know otherwise — that the wine used for the Communion of the laity was consecrated in a separate chalice from that used by the priest; and what more particularly concerns us here, we may discern the beginnings of the practice of making special offerings that the Mass may be celebrated for a private intention. This, as all admit, was a custom which gradually established itself in the early Middle Ages. Mabillon is inclined to assign its introduction to the eighth century, but a good many suggestive examples of the same kind have been quoted by Binterim and others from an earlier date. It is difficult, for example, to give any other interpretation to the story told by St. Epiphanius of a certain convert patriarch, who brought a sum of gold, and putting it into the Bishop's hands, said to him, "Offer for me," more especially when we have regard to the technical character of the word (προσφορε), which we translate by "offer." So far as we can trace the history, the payment of a sum of money in lieu of the bread, wine, wax, oil, milk, or the fruits of the earth, of which the offerings originally consisted, only developed slowly. Not improbably, the change began in connection with the Masses for the dead; for in these, as there was commonly no Communion of the faithful, the offering of bread and wine seems not to have been made in some localities; and we find indications already in St. Augustine's time of a tendency to substitute a payment of coin, a substitution which does not seem altogether to have met the Saint's approval. The general introduction of an alms in money cannot safely be assigned to an earlier date than the tenth or eleventh century, for even the passages in the Rule of Chrodegang or Walafrid Strabo, which are generally appealed to, do not speak explicitly of coin. On the other hand, it is certain that from a very early date the claim of benefactors to a special share in the fruits of the Mass was quite clearly recognized. In the primitive Roman liturgy they were twice commemorated — once in general, and once by the explicit mention of their names; and this usage was perpetuated by the diptychs in which the names of benefactors were written down either to be read aloud from the pulpit, or at least to be laid upon the table of the altar during the Holy Sacrifice.

The Development of Mass Foundations

It was natural to pass from these principles to the full recognition of the system of foundations for Masses, or chantries, as they were called at a later date. Even in Merovingian times, as Mabillon has shown, estates were given or bequeathed to provide maintenance for a body of Religious or priests, whose principal duty was to sing (i.e., chant the Office and offer Mass) for the souls of their benefactors. In the beginning, such foundations were generally vested in a community, and no very precise conditions were prescribed as to the number of Masses to be said, or the solemnities with which they were to be accompanied. Later it became common to endow a particular chapel or altar with a revenue sufficient to support a single priest, who, in return for these emoluments, was required to celebrate Mass frequently or even daily at this particular altar.

Concurrently with this there grew up the practice of the "Mass-penny," an offering which about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries almost entirely replaced the older form of oblation in bread and wine. This offering of the Mass-penny seems to have been represented as voluntary, but those who contributed in this way clearly regarded themselves as having a special share in the fruits of the Mass. We need not hesitate to admit that the custom led in some exceptional cases to abuses of a

serious kind, and that the whole practice was hotly attacked by the Lollards. For example, that fierce satire upon the Friars which passed under the name of Jacke Upland, puts such a question as the following:

Freer, when thou receivest a penie for to say a masse, prithee sellest thou God's Bodie for that penie, or thy praier, or els thy travail [i.e., trouble]? If thou saiest thou wolt not travell for to say the masse but for the penic, then certes, if this be sooth, thou lovest too little meed for thy soul. And if thou sellest God's Bodie, or thy prayer, then is it very simonie; thou art become a chapman worse than Judas That sold it for thirtie pence.

Theological Principles According to St. Thomas Aquinas

This passage may help to bring us back to the main question, from which our historical review of the subject has in some measure distracted us. Clearly, from the very beginning the Church has vindicated the principle that the acceptance of temporal offerings to secure a decent maintenance for the priest, and in this way to enable him to devote himself more freely to his priestly work, is no simony, but a lawful adaptation of means to ends, which our Saviour Himself has sanctioned. St. Thomas Aquinas, in the Summa, lays down the theological principles of the question with perfect clearness. Under the heading, "Is it always unlawful to give money for the sacraments?" the great Doctor writes as follows:

The Sacraments of the New Law are pre-eminently spiritual things, seeing that they are the cause of spiritual grace. This grace has not a money price, and, indeed, it is inconsistent with its essential notion that it should not be given gratuitously. The dispensation, however, of the sacraments takes place through the ministers of the Church, and these last ought to be supported by the people, according to the Apostle's words; "Know you not that they who work in the holy place eat the things that are of the holy place; and they that serve the altar partake with the altar? So also God ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel." Thus, then, we must say that to take money — and by money is understood everything that has a money price — for the spiritual grace of the sacraments would be the crime of simony, which no custom can excuse, because custom avails not to the prejudice of natural or Divine law. But to take something for the sustenance of those who administer the sacraments of Christ, when it is done according to the ordinance of the Church and approved customs, is not simony or any sin, for it is not taken as a price of merchandise (pretium mercedis), but as a contribution to relieve necessity (stipendium necessitatis).

And here St. Thomas appeals to an already quoted passage of St. Augustine. Moreover, when referring more particularly to the Mass, "for saying which certain priests receive a benefice, or money," he observes that "this money is not accepted as the price of consecrating the Holy Eucharist or of celebrating Mass (for this would be simony), but simply as a contribution (stipendium) to the priest's support."

Church Authority and Regulation

The principle being thus established — and it may be added that this principle is sanctioned by the action of every religious body, Christian or Pagan — the only question which remains is that as to the suitability of this particular expedient for attaining the end in view. Is it desirable to levy what is practically speaking a tax upon Masses said for private intentions? To this, in the first place, it may be replied that the Church has for long ages past approved the custom, and by constant legislation

has kept abuses in check. The very terms in which two General Councils, the fourth of Lateran and that of Trent, have condemned all greed and all appearance of traffic in exacting offerings for Masses, imply a recognition of the system according to which such offerings are commonly made. The whole matter is fully discussed in the treatise, De Synodo Dioecesana, of Pope Benedict XIV.; and the task of determining the proper stipend is there declared to rest most properly with the Bishop in Synod.

But, further than this, it is easy to discover a certain appropriateness in attaching such contributions to the saying of Mass for a private intention. Complaint might more easily be made if a fee were required from all who wished to confess their sins, to receive Holy Communion, or to assist at the Holy Sacrifice. These are the ordinary channels of grace, and it would be a hardship indeed if they were inaccessible to the poor except after payment. But the application of Mass to a private intention is in some sense a spiritual luxury. Moreover, the priest who offers the Mass in this way is not only conferring upon an individual a favour to which, apart from the stipend, he has no strict claim in justice; but in most cases the priest, at some trouble to himself, is discharging a function to which he is not otherwise obliged. We have come to think daily Mass so much a part of the life of Catholics that it is difficult to realize that there have been long periods in the Church's history when priests who said Mass more than once a week were regarded as exceptionally devout. It was probably during these ages that the custom of making a special offering in money first came to establish itself. We may assume that it has been continued until our own days because it has been found a fairly simple and convenient form of contribution to the support of the ministers of the altar, and because no sufficient reason has presented itself for substituting any other system in its place.

Variations in Stipend Amounts

The second objection of which I spoke at the beginning of this pamphlet concerns the variations in the amount of the stipend exacted for a Mass in different localities. In England and America this stipend is relatively high. Abroad, as a rule, it is much lower, and it may readily be conceded that this divergence leads in practice to certain anomalies which, when stated in terms analogous to those of secular commerce, can easily be made to look ridiculous. And yet a very little reflection will make it apparent that some difference of tariff between one country and another is absolutely inevitable; and once it is admitted that uniformity cannot be attained, the question of more or less does not seem to be a matter of very great importance. In the treatise De Synodo, referred to above, Pope Benedict XIV. remarks that it was a very wise provision of the Congregation of the Council, which has left it to the Bishop of each diocese to determine the amount of the stipend which should be offered for a Mass, for, he says:

No universal law can be laid down in such a matter, seeing that the alms ought to vary in accordance with the circumstances of different places and periods, and more especially according to the abundance or dearth in the supply of the necessaries of life.

It is stated by many authors that a standard for determining the proper amount of the stipend is furnished by the sum which is necessary to enable the priest to live decently for one day in his ordinary surroundings. No doubt there are those who argue, and fairly enough, that the Mass occupies but a small proportion of the priest's working hours, and that consequently to regard the Mass as the equivalent of an entire day's work is excessive. Still even these do not dispute the soundness in principle of adopting the cost of a day's maintenance as the most convenient measure for an estimate. Now if this be conceded, it must at once be apparent that a priest in South Africa,

where sixpence is practically the lowest sum for which the most trifling thing can be purchased, may fairly look for a larger alms, when asked to say Mass, than a priest in poverty-stricken Italy, where half a lira can be made to go a long way. But there is also something else to be said. In countries where the clergy directly or indirectly are endowed, the stipend for Masses is generally low. The priest can live otherwise. He does not look to that for his support. Insensibly this creates a certain tariff and a public opinion; and such things once established, changes cannot easily be introduced, even though they be judged in themselves desirable. In this country, priests, as a rule, have no assured source of income. The Bishops, accordingly, have tacitly, if not explicitly, accepted the view already mentioned, according to which a priest may reasonably expect such an offering for his Mass, when applied for a particular private intention, as would decently maintain him for one day. Of course it may reasonably be argued that a priest has other sources of income besides this, but then it must also be remembered that there are comparatively few priests who are so beset by requests for Masses that all their free days are occupied.

Further, once the standard is fixed, both Bishops and priests, for very intelligible reasons, prefer that it should be generally adopted throughout the diocese. The principle of competition — say, for example, if the Religious Orders were to seem to be underselling the secular clergy — at once introduces a disedifying suggestion of trafficking in sacred things. Consequently it has been ruled that a Bishop may, if he think fit, require all the priests in his diocese, seculars and regulars alike, to accept no stipend less than the amount which has been determined upon. On the other hand, no one may demand more than this sum for an ordinary Mass, though what is freely given as a pure alms over and above the normal stipend may be accepted. Again, any kind of trafficking in the honoraria for Masses, such as, for example, would result if a priest accepting an alms for ten Masses given him here in England were to have them said abroad at the rates which obtain in France or Italy, keeping the balance for himself — all such trafficking as this, be it noted, is forbidden under the very severest penalties. If a priest, after accepting the stipend for a Mass, cannot say it himself, he is bound in passing it on to be celebrated by another priest, to transfer to this latter the whole of the stipend, which he received. The legislation upon all these subjects during the last four centuries has been very comprehensive, and every avenue seems to have been stopped by which serious abuses could enter.

The Question of the Poor

Lastly, a few words may be said upon the question of the poor, and upon the seemingly unequal conditions under which they find themselves with regard to all these spiritual privileges. We may freely own that the existence of this inequality, at any rate so far as such a matter can be judged by what meets the outward eye, is not to be disputed. But then does it not also extend to the whole range of spiritual privileges of every kind? It is, as a rule, only the comparatively wealthy who have time for such luxuries as retreats, pilgrimages, and multitudinous services, not to speak of the private oratories, the beautiful objects of piety, the pictures and crucifixes, the stimulating religious books, the Papal blessings, the free access to a helpful confessor, and many other things. Indeed the rich seem to be favoured, not only in the luxuries, but in the very essentials of religion, for surely the landowner, with his oratory and private chaplain, has, ceteris paribus, a better chance of obtaining the last Sacraments than the poor labourer who dies, with hardly a soul to wait upon him, upon the sixth floor of a tenement building. Even after death the law habenti dabitur seems still to hold, for the wealthy have many friends to ask prayers for them. Alms are sent to this religious

house and to that, and the good monks and nuns, with real gratitude in their hearts, respond loyally by offering up Communions and penances for their benefactor. In such a long catalogue the thousands of Masses that may be said are but an item. Whatever answer is to be found to the difficulty, it can hardly be this — that the system of saying Masses for alms is an abuse, and that we must strive to bring about a state of things in which the rich shall enjoy no advantage over the poor in having the Holy Sacrifice offered for their private intentions. It is by God's ordinance that equality of spiritual goods here below is almost as much an impossibility as equality of temporal goods. Hence the only real solution is to believe that there is a court of equity in the next world, which, in ways that Almighty God has not revealed to us, somehow adjusts these differences.

But in the meantime we may note two things: first, that every priest who has the cure of souls is bound on all the greater festival days to offer Mass for his parishioners, excluding all private intentions. This is a strict obligation. It has been again and again insisted on by ecclesiastical authority in the course of long centuries, and the very greatest difficulty is made in allowing any dispensation or relaxation of this duty. Secondly, there is hardly anything of which we know less, as theologians themselves confess, than of all that concerns the application of the "fruits" of the Mass. It is a common opinion that the Holy Souls in Purgatory are only up to a certain point susceptible of help; what satisfactions are offered for them over and above that limited capacity are perhaps communicated, as we may piously believe, to those that are most destitute or most forgotten. It cannot even be said with absolute certainty that the offering of a single Mass for a dozen different intentions may not help forward each one of those intentions as fully as if a separate Mass were said for each. No doubt the practice of pious Catholics implies a contrary view, and the practice of pious Catholics is, as a rule, a sound indication of right faith, and an example which ought not easily to be departed from. But with regard to all these things, strictly speaking, we have no certainty beyond the single fact that the offering of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is helpful to the souls of those who are not yet in the enjoyment of the Vision of God. Moreover, as St. Thomas, who discusses the whole difficulty with his usual straightforwardness, frankly allows, there is no difficulty about admitting that the rich may be in a better position as regards the mere expiation of their heavy debt to the Divine Justice. The fact still remains that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs of especial right to the poor; which means, no doubt, that they more readily find entrance there, and that their beatitude, when they reach it, is proportionately greater.

The Fate of the Rich in the Next World

Further, when we read the terribly strong things which are said of the rich in Holy Scripture, no doubt can be felt that these passages have reference, not to the instability of their future in this world, but to the severe judgement that awaits them in the next. There is nothing to suggest that the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, who hardened his heart against Lazarus, saw any reason to change his conduct until death at last opened his eyes. His very desire to warn his brethren implies that his blindness to the nature of the penalties which he had been heaping up against himself was real enough. Again, whatever may be the precise significance of that solemn warning recorded by three of the Evangelists regarding the camel and the eye of a needle, the form in which it occurs in St. Matthew, who speaks of "entering into the Kingdom of Heaven," strongly suggests that our Lord's thought was concentrated upon the fate of the rich in the next world. And the same lesson breathes in that passage of St. Luke (vi. 24-25): "Woe to you that are rich: for you have your

consolation. Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger. Woe to you that now laugh: for you shall mourn and weep."

There seems no evading the conclusion that in the life to come the present order of things will pass away and the position will be reversed. The poor will be judged with all the leniency imposed by their unavoidable ignorance, their temptations, and their lack of opportunities, while the expiation which they have already made by a life of toil and constant privation will leave a comparatively slender account still to be rendered. But the rich who have denied themselves nothing, who have suffered little and worked even less, those especially who have steeled their hearts against those impulses of comradeship and charity which so often ennoble the destitution of the very poor, will have all their atonement still before them. The hundred talents must needs be paid to the uttermost farthing. Though Masses be offered in plenty, and though the sufferer most earnestly desire them as a priceless boon, it may be feared that the alleviation they bring will often be analogous to that described in the terribly vivid picture which our Saviour Himself has painted of the sufferings of Dives: "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." A sensible alleviation, no doubt, and worthy of all gratitude as the best that the most devoted Christian charity upon this side the veil can offer; but nevertheless an alleviation that serves only to throw into relief the unfathomable mysteries of God's justice, and the miserable state of those who leave the reckoning to be paid where suffering is no longer meritorious. If this be at all a true picture of the lot of the majority of the rich who make their expiation in Purgatory, can we find it in our hearts to grudge them the benefit which they may derive from the Masses that they owe to the charity of their wealthy friends? Often enough they have no other asset.

Appendix

As an illustration of the solicitude with which this matter of stipends for Masses is watched over by the Holy See, a summary may here be given of portions of two lengthy enactments of comparatively recent date. At the same time, this must not be regarded as new legislation. The principles clearly laid down in the decrees of the Council of Trent (session xxii. cap. 9), and in the De Synodo Dioecesana of Pope Benedict XIV. (lib. ii. cap. 8, 9, and 10, and lib. xiii. cap. 25), are here applied, emphasized, and developed.

The first decree, emanating from the Sacred Congregation of the Council, and dated 11th May, 1904, prescribes, inter alia:—

That no priest ask for or accept stipends for Masses unless he is morally certain that he can say the Masses within a fixed time; ordinarily he is bound to say the Masses thus accepted personally, unless he be a Bishop or prelate who has under him persons upon whom he can impose this obligation.

The time within which a Mass for which a stipend has been accepted should ordinarily be said, is one month, or six months when a hundred Masses are requested, and in similar proportion for larger numbers.

No person is allowed to accept at one time a larger number of stipends than he can probably satisfy within a year from the date of acceptance, unless with the explicit consent of the people who offer the stipend.

Any bargain or compact to say Masses in exchange for books or periodicals, which makes a sort of traffic in holy things, is forbidden, and in a similar way all stipulations for custom or service, or engagements entered into with purveyors of vestments or church furniture, in which the saying of Masses is a condition, are equally prohibited. This applies likewise to those arrangements sometimes proposed by the guardians of shrines, according to which they agree to devote a part of the offerings of the faithful to having Masses said, and the remainder to other pious uses. The Sacred Congregation forbids all such compacts, however laudable their purpose may be.

The penalty for a violation of the prescriptions contained in the last paragraph is suspension ipso facto, reserved to the Holy See, in the case of clerics, and excommunication, reserved to the bishop, in the case of lay persons.

The amount of the stipend for Masses attached to certain beneficiary institutes is in all cases to be that fixed by the regular diocesan statute. Hence the often assumed interpretation, by which the stipends in legacies for Masses are enlarged beyond the usual amount, is not lawful without some express warrant in the terms of the will.

Later, on 22nd May, 1907, the same Congregation issued another decree confirming the previous legislation and throwing the responsibility in a large measure upon the bishops, the local ordinaries, to see that its provisions were strictly carried out. In particular, stress was laid upon the necessity of maintaining absolutely inviolate the principle, over and over again affirmed in the prescriptions of the Canon Law, that the stipend for a Mass must be passed on without any diminution to the priest by whom the Mass is actually to be said, and appointing measures of precaution to be taken against the danger that Masses might be forgotten, or too long deferred, for which the offerings of the faithful have already been given.

Finally, it may be noticed that all these prescriptions have been reaffirmed and promulgated in the most authoritative form in the new Codex of the Canon Law, issued by Pope Benedict XV in 1917; see especially §§ 824-844.