

THE MASS, THE CENTRE OF CATHOLICISM

(J.F.M.H. – 8.11.2018)

The Mass, in a real sense, is the centre of Catholicism. At the end of the Mass the Priest or Deacon says the 'Dismissal'. There are several versions of this and one of them is, "*Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*". If we follow this instruction carefully, we come to the part, recorded in all four Gospels, where Christ tells His Disciples as well as the crowd who were present at the time, what He wants of His followers, "*If anyone wants to be My disciple, let him take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*" (Lk. 9.23, Matt. 16.24, 10.38, Mk. 8.34) It's a very good description of the vocation of a victim soul of substitution. At the same time it holds out the surprising offer, of our sharing in His work. Note how it takes account of the God given Free Will of those choosing to follow Him and join in His Passion. They must indeed be intentional Disciples for such a mission. A powerful example of this sharing work, tied to Christ's Passion, is given in St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, "*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His Body, that is the Church.*" (Col. 1.24) This suffering is not only accepted by St. Paul, but was forecast to Ananias by Jesus before Ananias agreed to go and baptise him. "*I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.*" (Acts 9.16) Like St Paul we do not have to go and look for suffering as it is always provided to the degree which suits our individual ability, with God's help, to share Christ's mission for the Church. Of course with every vocation or calling, God does not force our acceptance, we have Free Will and must give our consent/rejection to the call. Suffering in this life comes to everyone whether they accept it willingly or not. The first is sometimes called "accepting with grace", while the second as "without grace". It is with good reason the two different reactions have attracted these names.

The faith of the Church, expressed in the Apostles Creed, can be seen or deduced from the words of the Mass. The Divinity of Christ is clear in the wonderful power given to the priest to perform this amazing act of worship, for no man let alone a believing Jew, would have imagined the possibility of the truth of what Christ had done and instructed His Apostles to do. In fact so staggering was the doctrine of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ, that when first announced, even by the Preacher, who spoke "as none other ever spoke," it broke up the little band; and only the implicit trust, that the Apostles had in their Master, made them continue as His Disciples. They stayed because they had nowhere else to go. Then if He is God, it can only be because He is the Son of God, nor can He be God without also being man, for the words of consecration tell us of His Body and His Blood. So again, besides the Trinity, and the Incarnation, we can arrive at the Divine Motherhood of our Lady and the other mysteries of our faith.

The sacraments are arranged round this wonderful sacrifice as the setting round a gem. Baptism prepares us for our part in it; Confirmation strengthens us in our belief in it; Reconciliation makes us worthy of it; Holy Orders ensures for us the continuation of it; Matrimony, says St. Paul, is the symbol of it; and the Sacrament of the Sick imparts to us its fruits. Because of it, our churches are built and it is the central idea behind their construction. Without the Mass the most splendid places of worship seem empty and cold, and with it, however poorly or badly they are constructed, they are made alive. Our faith, our ceremonies, our lives are grouped round this supreme act of worship.

The reason why the Mass stands as the most central of all our mysteries is because it is itself nothing other than the continuation of Calvary. Calvary meant for us the undoing of all our sorrows and the building up of our lives in the service of God. In consequence, the Mass being but a prelongation of that 'far-off-event,' becomes the living reality of the saving sacrifice of Christ to His

Almighty Father. It is not indeed a repetition of His death, for the death of the Son of God is so unique that repetition of that becomes impossible. Moreover, St Paul proclaims that, "*Christ being risen from the dead dies now no more; death shall no more have dominion over Him.*"(Romans 6.9) Though the Mass is not a repetition of Christ's death but a continuation of Calvary, it is one in essence, (though not in appearance), as the Body of Christ on our altars is the same as the Body that walked the earth. The priest by the double act of consecration portrays the complete sacrifice of the Divine Victim, for though Body and Blood cannot be severed while life on earth remains, they are represented as distinct in the difference of accidents of bread and wine. They will continue to be shown in this way until He comes again. This then, is the reason of the acknowledged supremacy of the Mass, witnessed to by persecutor and persecuted in the differing ways they act, and is for us Calvary still continued. So since all our happiness and all our chance of happiness, come from that saving redemption, obviously that which is a continuation of it of it, must necessarily be held in deep reverence. It is the eternal testimony of God's love for man and the eternal stimulus to man's love for God.

Think what the mystery of the Mass means to the Mother of God. When her Child had been taken from the Cross and laid in the tomb, she was to see Him on earth after He had risen from the dead. However after the Ascension she was to see Him no more until the day when she watched the Beloved Disciple hold up what seemed to be Bread, then she knew Him once again in the breaking of Bread. She saw as on Calvary, her Son's death. For St Peter, St John and the other priest witnesses of the Crucifixion, how fervent they must have been at every Mass they then offered or attended. Remembering their own reactions on that sad night when they saw Him hanging on the cross, and, those who denied Him, or stood far off, they would have memories of their own to ponder. Our fathers in the days of persecution risked all for the chance of Mass, and the infrequent visit of a priest, who might repeat for them the ceremonies of the upper Room, and make the loss of lands and life easy compared with gaining the presence of Christ. If we too wish to value fully our privilege of the Mass, we should follow as well as we can the whole ceremony, and then as the priest or deacon says, "*Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*", we pray our ardent and loving proclamation of it is the catalyst that brings new disciples to Christ.

The best way to receive Christ is in Holy Communion at Mass. However just as some Catholics are unable to receive Holy Communion for a time, for whatever reason, so too a new disciple may be in a similar position. Then it is well to think in terms of a 'Spiritual Communion'. A Catholic priest could help with advice on a more suitable version for use for an individual. An example of a Spiritual Communion prayer follows:- **(all Read)**

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul. Since I cannot now receive You sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace You as if You have already come, and unite myself wholly to You. Never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.