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The Mass and Man

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A FEW years ago a non-Catholic from Canada dropped into a Catholic church in Washington on a Sunday morning. It was not that the architecture appealed to him. The statues and other ornaments he liked even less. The place was filled, mainly by Negroes. Mass was going on, and the celebrant was a Negro. Still, there were present a very large number of people from the neighboring embassies. That spectacle was food for thought; for, if in Washington racial feeling is well under control, it is none the less very real. "What," he exclaimed to himself, "does it matter if the architecture is in bad taste and the statues are worse! Here are men and women of different races, from different parts of the world, yet forgetting their differences, and worshipping God under a single roof and in a single prayer."

Expand such thoughts to sweep over all the world. One reads of Communist warfare in China, of political unrest in Indo-China, in the Dutch Colonies, in Burma, and in India, of the weight of an uncomfortable neighbor pressing down upon Persia and Turkey, of the agony of Palestine and of Greece, of the death throes of liberty behind the iron curtain, of the several plights of Western Germany, of Italy, of France, even of England, of the strikes without end and the disclosed and undisclosed spy-rings in America. The human family is divided, as the congregation in that church in Washington was not divided. Yet it is the spectacle of the vast and threatening divisions of all mankind, that prompted our Holy Father, Pius XII, to make it the intention of our prayers in the month of June that "from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass be drawn the power of saving human society."

*General Intention for the month of June, recommended and blessed by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius XII

The Symbolism of Calvary

The Mass is our memorial of the passion and death of Our Lord. In His sufferings and in the malice that inflicted them one easily may discern the representative and the symbol of the evils that now afflict humanity. Greed, stooping even to treachery, is Judas. Lust, capable of murder, is Herod. Political opportunism then urged, "Let one man die for the people!" Injustice then cried, "What need have we of witnesses!" Mass propaganda evoked the roar, "Away with Him!" The cowardice of a high official vainly washed its hands. Then the hardy flunkies, interested only in their daily wage, took over to flog, and crown with thorns, and mock, and crucify. To the starving of to-day, He can only say, "I thirst." To the destitute, He can only show His nakedness. To the persecuted, the enslaved, the imprisoned, the tortured, the dying, His wounds cry, "I, too, have been through it."

Yet the real significance of Calvary does not lie in these external events. Many a man has been condemned by an unjust court, and tortured, and put to death, that the violence of the penalty might somehow hide the injustice of the verdict. But of none of them, nor of all together, do we think as we do of the unjust sufferings and merciless death of Our Lord. Is it then that His sufferings and His death so hold our hearts because of the virtue that He displayed? It is, indeed, true that we are drawn by the courage that foretold without fuss a bald, shocking tale of what was to be, a courage that in the privacy of the garden of Gethsemane could melt and dissolve, save for a single, unbroken fiber of acceptance of the Father's will; a courage that, brought to the test in the public gaze, spoke calmly and unerringly but, for the most part, met indignity with the dignity of silence. As we are drawn by His courage, so we are touched by His considerateness. Other men, when they fear and when they suffer, turn in upon themselves; their minds lose breadth of vision; their hearts are embittered. Capable of thinking first only of themselves, in fear and in pain they think of no one else. Loving most of all themselves, they face fear and endure pain by yielding to hatred. Yet Our Lord could point out to Pilate that Pilate's was not the greater sin. He could tell the lamenting women, "Weep not for Me but for yourselves and for your children." For His executioners he could pray, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Suffering did not impair His balanced grip of truth, nor injustice close His Heart.

The Meaning of Calvary

Yet even this splendor of moral virtue is not the real meaning of Calvary. We have been looking at merely human things with only human eyes. We have been thinking of virtue as a human accomplishment and

perfection. We have been thinking of suffering as the greatest of evils. We have been thinking of sin as an injury to one's fellow men. But, if we care to know truly, if we wish to know things as really they are, if we desire to rise above the deception, usually the self-deception, of all partial and incomplete viewpoints, then we must look not with our own eyes but with the eyes of God. Yet how can that be done? How can a man—how can you and how can I—slip off his own knowing and put on the knowledge of God? By our faith in the revealed word of God, by our belief in the certain truth of what He has taught us, not only we can but also we do know what God Himself knows. The penetration of an infinite mind, the impartiality of divine judgment, is within our easy reach, if only we can at once affirm and pray: "I believe, Lord; help Thou my unbelief." Still, is it not childish to believe? It is childlike; but, "unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." On the other hand, it is not childish. Where to-day is the learning, where is the wisdom, to do better than did the Galilean fisherman when he exclaimed: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life?"

The meaning of Calvary, then, is to be known only by faith; it is to be known, not by arguing nor by understanding, but mainly by praying to believe and by believing. One *Hail Mary* can be more helpful than two big books, and fifteen minutes of prayerful reflection than many a long lecture, and most lectures are very long. By faith we know, though we may not understand, that it is not suffering but sin that is the greatest evil; and that sin is the greatest evil, not because it is an injury to man, but because it is an affront to God. But, one may ask, why should God mind? Is He not beyond all possibility of harm? Hush, believing is not a matter of knowing why, but of taking God's word for it. Yet, once one believes, one can come to understand too, though only dimly as does a child. For it is worse to wrong one near to us—a mother, a sister, a wife, or a father, a brother, a husband—than one less near. It is worse to wrong one who loves us than one who does not care. But who is nearer to each of us than God? Parents beget and nurture us. But God creates and conserves us. Husband and wife share each other's lives. But the soul and God share life eternal. Who loves us more than God, Who is love itself, Who alone can love from an infinity of love, and so can love each one of us not a whit the less because He loves so many more besides? Nor is God's love for each of us something wholly different from human love. How could it be? For where does human love come from? whence the ardor of its self-surrender? whence the strength of its fidelity? whence its overpowering joy, and, when not befouled, its calm, enduring happiness? All that these are, are what they are, because they come from God, because they are, so to speak, a sample of Him and a sign of what

He is. Man was made in the image and likeness of God, to show forth the goodness of God, to return the love of God. Sin is the refusal to return that love, and it is the greatest evil because it refuses just the best that man can do.

Yet all our striving yields but a poor understanding of the evil of sin; and, understanding it so poorly, we can not repair it. To understand sin, one must be God; to repair it, one must be man. Our Lord is both God and Man—God to understand sin, Man to repair it. Such is our faith. Such is the true meaning of Calvary.

Sacrifice

To merely human judgment the passion and death of Our Lord is the symbol of human suffering caused by human wrong; it is the drama of human vice and the consummation of human virtue. But to faith it is the chief act of religious worship, the act of sacrifice. Common to all sacrifices is that they are outward signs, acts more charged with meaning than the outward acts of themselves possess. Behind the sacrifice, effecting it, giving it its excess of meaning, there is the sacrificial spirit. It is a spirit of adoration, not merely "lost, all lost, in wonder at the God Thou art," not merely overcome with awe in the presence of Infinite Majesty, but more simply and more solidly recognizing His supreme dominion and surrendering to Him all that one is with all one's heart and all one's soul and all one's mind and all one's strength. It is a spirit of propitiation, not only knowing what God is and giving Him His due, but also knowing what sin is and desiring to repair it. It is a spirit of thanksgiving to the un failing source of all the good things we can desire or possess, but especially a spirit of loving thanksgiving for the greatest of gifts, the gift of Himself, which has been begun in us by sanctifying grace and is to be completed in the intimacy of the beatific vision. It is a spirit of impetration: a spirit that shouted in the blind beggars outside Jericho, "Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy on us;" a spirit that bowed in the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy . . . Say but the word;" a spirit whose gentle murmur reached highest heaven with the prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Such was the spirit of Jesus on Calvary. But "put ye on Christ Jesus." We, too, have heads and hearts and members, mind and will and sensibility. Whose are they? Are they our own for us to do with them just as we please? That is the way of rebellion and of ruin, a broad and easy way with a hopeless end. Are they just seemingly ours, and really a trust confided us by God? That is the way of the Cross. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." It is a strait and narrow way, but there is a joyous

rainbow of resurrection at its end. We should, we must, put on Christ Jesus, put on His sacrificial spirit of adoration, propitiation, thanksgiving, and impetration. But putting Him on is much more a matter of God's grace than of our willing; and even our willing is first of all a willing to pray for God's grace, to pray that our minds be illumined to truth, to pray that our hearts of stone be converted into hearts of flesh, to pray that our reluctant members be steadfast in the way of God. Great and sudden changes wrought by grace would set grace in conflict with the slow and gradual processes of nature. But pray first to pray constantly; pray constantly to know as Jesus knows, to love as He loves, to do as He did. That is a prayer that draws out of us the old Adam, to mold us, mostly unaware, day by day, ever more in the loveliness of Christ our Lord.

The Mass

Not only are we to put on the sacrificial spirit of Our Lord, but also we are to take part in His offering of His Sacrifice. The Body that was given for us on Calvary, the Blood that was shed for us there, are present on our daily altars. The same High Priest that offered His Body and His Blood on Calvary still offers them, a clean oblation, at the continuous break of sunrise, as spinning earth ever greets new day. The Sacrifice of the Cross was bloody; the Sacrifice of the Mass, unbloody; the Sacrifice of the Cross we did not witness; but in the Sacrifice of the Mass we partake. One may come as the faithful and beloved St. John with Our Lady by his side. One may come as the reluctant thief in honest acknowledgment of one's sins. One may come as the repentant Magdalen who knelt weeping at the foot of the Cross. But what matters is not how one comes, but whether one puts on, prays to put on, the sacrificial spirit of Our Lord, to offer with Him His Sacrifice for the redemption of mankind and the mystery of the glory of God.

Can then "from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass be drawn the power to save human society?" One must make no mistake. One is not to think that human society is going to have its endless cultural, social, political, economic problems solved by some miraculous series of miracles. If problems are to be solved, they will be solved by men who have taken the time and the trouble to have discovered their nature, who possess the talent to think out solutions, who are gifted with the judgment necessary to proceed from abstract theory to concrete policy. As a workman does not ask an employer, so no man should ask God, to do for man what man is to do for himself. But it remains that man without the grace of God can not begin to do for himself what he ought to do. Distrust, envy, hatred divide different sections of labor; they divide labor, management, ownership; they divide opposed political factions, distinct cultural or racial groups, separate nations. Families perish in the quicksand of lust;

children grow up without homes; schools breed materialists, and universities train revolutionaries; newspapers, magazines, books, exploit the disorientation of minds and the weakness of characters for the lofty aim of increasing their sales. In this Babel objectives have to be pared down to minima, if they are to be even proposed; they have to be further reduced, if they are to be accepted; and the performance of what is accepted is a good deal less than the promise. So we muddle from crisis to crisis, to be tumbled from catastrophe to cataclasm. Why? Because our glorious Western civilization is on the verge of intellectual and moral bankruptcy. Once more we must learn to love one the other. Once more we must learn that life on earth is endurable, only if first we seek the kingdom of God. Once more we must learn to believe God as little children, to be able to think as objective and honest men. It is on this prior and deeper level that the Sacrifice of the Mass is the source of the power to save human society. Those who believe and hope and love do so in virtue of the Sacrifice of Calvary applied to the needs of the hour by the Sacrifice of the Mass. If their faith and hope and charity are to be intensified to the point where they become effective in human affairs; if their numbers are to be increased to the point where such effectiveness is operative on a sufficiently broad scale; that will be because in greater numbers and more intensely men put on the sacrificial spirit of Our Lord and with Him offer in the Mass the world-redeeming Sacrifice of the Cross.

HELP NEEDED

We have been doing all we can to send help to the destitute of Europe through the Jesuit Fathers in various countries. Thousands upon thousands of people are suffering in extreme want of the very necessities of life.

We ask our readers to help us in this work of practical charity for the love of Christ our Lord.

Used clothing of all kinds—suits, coats, dresses, underwear, shoes—tinned foods—help toward shipping charges—urgently needed and gratefully received in His name.

Contributions of help may be sent to:

REV. J. I. BERGIN, S.J.

2 Dale Avenue

Toronto 5, Ont.

or to

REV. C. HINPHY, S.J.

403 Wellington Street West

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