

Your Mass and Your Life

In God's plan, it is not man who is the center of the universe; but Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. God created all things for Christ. For the sake of Christ Jesus in whom the Father already had "placed all His delight" and for he sake of Mary, His Mother, "full of grace," God decided to create man and the universe.

To this Son, in whom He is well pleased, friends were to be given—and so man was created. (The race of man represents the "friends of the Bridegroom" mentioned by our Lord in the Gospel.) To this Son whom He loves, the Father will give a house and garden—and so the universe was created. Man, created for Christ, is loved in Him. We thus form, as it were, a "wedding gift" from God the Father to Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom.

In Him, through Him, and for Him, we are pleasing to the heavenly Father. *Without Him we are nothing.* This last is very important for an understanding of the Mass. Our sacrifices are of value *only* through their being united with Christ's Sacrifice. Since all have issued from the heart of God solely to give pleasure to Jesus, all then are brothers. Creation itself is our kin. The universe and I, what are we, if not a delicate thought of the Father toward His Divine Son?

The creation, launched into existence by God's loving power, will forever have something unfinished about it, until that time when it shall return to the Source of its perfection; there to receive from that same Source its final perfection and beatitude. Thus the general plan of creation appears to us as an image and prolongation of the fecundity of the Most Blessed Trinity. The chronological order of the plan is as follows:

- (1) Creation of the heavens;
- (2) Preparation of the earth;
- (3) Creation of minerals, vegetation, and animals;
- (4) Creation of man.

King though he may be of that creation predating his own existence, man, however, is not creation's final goal.

Man—simple link in a chain that must go back to God—paves the way for the coming of the blessed Virgin Mary. Mary, God's jewel case, in which reposed He Who upholds all things, Jesus Christ! Christ is the center of the universe. He is before all things:

"He is before all creatures" (Co. 1:17)

"The firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15)

"In the beginning was the Word..." Jn 1:1)

"In Him...through Him...unto Him...all things!" (Col. 1:16, 17)

All things are through Him. "Without Him was made nothing that was made" (Jn 1:3). "Upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3).

All things are in Him. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4).

All things are unto Him. "Whom He hath appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Apoc. 22:13).

MAN'S RETURN

Man, having come from God, must return to God: his Final End. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God," cried St. Augustine, "and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee!"

The creation—a work of sheer mercy, a stooping of the Creator toward the creature—returns to God, chanting a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. A feather from a bird, a ray of light, a finely modulated voice, a drop of water falling to earth, a hastening ant, a seed sprouting from the earth, the stars that whirl in the firmament with never a collision; all are directed by God to that magnificent end for which He has ordained them—man's pleasure, Christ's happiness, and finally, the glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

THE BREAK IN THE HARMONY OF THE DIVINE PLAN—SIN

Alas, man is free to destroy God's harmonious plan! Everything is in equilibrium, because everything tends toward God. All things cohere, because all things are submissive to the Author of life and being. But this adhesion to God is effected in a free act of love. The freedom with which man is adorned, gives to the entire creation an incomparable majesty. God thus receives a praise that is spontaneous. This very freedom, however, exposes the one enjoying it to immense peril. Let man but once refuse to spread forth his hands in a gesture of oblation, and the whole order of things falls apart. But one day man, in a gesture of pride and egoism, rejected his priesthood. His role of mediator no longer satisfied him. Man "would be like God." Through his lips, Satan once more uttered his cry of rage, "I will not serve!"

By his refusal, man shattered the universe. For the universe rested on man as the arch on the keystone. The entire universe turned against man its betrayer. In chorus, it hurled back into the teeth of man the cry that man had dared to address to God, "I will not serve!"

First of all, man's own body revolted. Man, terror-stricken, suddenly beheld within himself the unleashing of sinful passions. Henceforth, seven fetters, which theology is later to designate by the title of "Capital Sins," will shackle his formerly free

impulses—Adam and Eve "perceive themselves to be naked."

Man is deeply stricken in the very harmony of his being: "I will multiply your sorrows and your conceptions; in sorrow shall you bring forth children."

Social discord now corresponds to inner imbalance. "You shall be under your husband's power, and he shall have dominion over you."

Looming up on the horizon, in addition to these "domestic squabbles" are quarrels between families, wars between city and city, between nation and nation, world war, revolution.

The animal kingdom, over which man formerly reigned, rises up in its turn. The earth itself refuses to cooperate with man. Only at the cost of a struggle, will man be able to wrest from it miserably a few meager fruits: "Cursed is the earth in your work. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you."

Man is broken, disoriented. Suffering is to be, henceforth, his earthly portion. "In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread....In sorrow shall you bring forth children."

Man created to be the friend of Christ, has gone astray in the disobedience of Adam. Humanity, separated from Christ, is without form or beauty. Will God remain deaf, insensible, to the cry of His distressed creature? Will He punish or pardon?

CHRIST'S INTERVENTION

At this tragic moment in the history of humanity when the Blessed Trinity could have, conceivably, left us in our state of hopeless misery, Jesus intervened: "Father, these men are for Me the sign and expression of Thy love. They are My children. They are Mine, for it was for My sake that you gave them life and being. Never will I abandon them! Since they are incapable of knowing My joy, I am determined to share their misery."

Christ was to have come in glory like the bridegroom whose arrival on the wedding day is joyously awaited by the wedding guests. Now His coming will take place under the reign of Sin; in a body capable of being crushed by suffering, with a heart that affliction will overwhelm, He will come to destroy sin, this "wall of separation" between God and man—between man and man. He will reconcile in His blood heaven and earth. He will unite the peoples.

THE INCARNATION

One day, in the long procession of men groping in the shadow of death, Christ appeared. To this poor, purblind

race of ours, He revealed the Father's wondrous plan. "The Father Himself loves you....He has not abandoned you....I am your Savior....I am Life."

THE REDEMPTION

It was bearing His Cross that He came—weighted down under the burden of our sins. He climbed Calvary's hill and reddened it with His blood. He was barbarously crucified on a Cross, and died between two thieves.

Let us look for a moment at our suffering Savior. Taking place before our horrified gaze is the drama that dominates the world. Christ was "made sin" for us, writes St. Paul.

On the high hill of Calvary, overlooking the world, a terrible struggle is taking place between Love and Hate—a struggle of unheard-of force. As a result of this fearsome combat, Hate dies in the blood of his immolated Victim. The last words of Christ are a shout of triumph: "Father, it is consummated."

Love has conquered Hate

Sin is now in full flight. A moment ago, an enormous tidal wave, made up of all the crimes of earth, had sought to engulf within its corrupt depths Him who offered Himself as the Life of the World. Now, Life descends victorious from Calvary, driving back Sin to its ultimate retrenchments. God's plan now unfolds in all its majesty—the return to the Father, to the Father's House.

How may we bring about this return? By following Christ the Way, in what is to be henceforth His sorrowful way. "If anyone wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me." Integrated into Christ by Baptism, I (and not somebody else) ought to die to self, and live the life of Christ. "Christ died for all; that they also who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him Who died for them, and rose again" (II Cor 5:15).

With St. Paul we should say, "Those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, I fill up in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church" (Col. 1:24).

If our good works, sacrifices, and sufferings are to count for eternity and be pleasing to God, it is necessary for us (as we have seen above) to be united to Christ. It is through Him, and with Him, and in Him that we become recipients of God's loving-kindness and mercy.

Our union with Christ, our integration into His Mystical Body, is effected by the sacraments. It is by Baptism that we are introduced into Christ's mystical family. It is through Baptism that we receive divine life; become adopted sons of God the Father; brothers of Jesus

Christ; temples of the Holy Spirit, and heirs of heaven!

heavenly life in a blessed eternity.

But how should we offer up—following our Lord's example—our adoration, thanksgivings, satisfactions, and petitions to God? How should we nourish the divine life within us?

By means of the Mass—the Sacrifice of the Mystical Body.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

The Mass is the means whereby we may become the prolongation of Christ.

Through the offering of ourselves with Christ
Through the consecration of ourselves through Christ

Through the communion in Christ
to the greater glory of the Blessed Trinity and the sanctification of our souls. The Mass reminds us at one and the same time of God's **Condescension** toward man, and of man's Ascension toward God! For the Mass sums up the twin mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, at the same time that it applies to us their fruits. Crib and Cross manifest to mankind God's love for *all*; whereas the Mass stresses His love for *the individual*.

One ought, then, to look on the Mass as the sum total of man's ascensions toward God, because it presupposes and completes them. The sinner derives from it abundant graces of conversion. The just man finds fervor in it—outstripping himself from one Consecration to another. *Through the Mass man offers to God praise that is worthy of Him.*

This, then, is the place that the Mass occupies in God's plan. Like Christ, it is at the center: as a sun to bring light and warmth, to transform and uplift all creation and bring it back to its Creator in a hymn of thanksgiving.

The Mass ought to occupy ALL the place in our lives. We ought to:

- Offer ourselves up, like Christ on the Cross.
- Consecrate ourselves, "transubstantiate" ourselves—dying to our life of sin; to live, henceforth, the life of Christ.
- Unite ourselves to Someone stronger than ourselves, communicating with Christ through reception of His Sacred Body, in order to identify ourselves ever more closely with Him, so that—our bodily members belonging more to Him than to us—we may be able to accomplish divine and supernatural works.
- Render—through Christ—perfect praise to the august Trinity.

Such should be the constant concern of our earthly existence, and the prelude to our

OFFERING CHRIST TO THE FATHER

We have seen that Christ is the center of religion and the universe. The creation, over which Christ reigns, is willed by God for His glory. We are beings created solely for the praise and glory of God.

How can such a frail creature as man offer acceptable praise to the Blessed Trinity? In this way. The Word of God was incarnated, became one of us, and to each one of us gave something of Himself in such a way that we are enabled through Him, with Him, and in Him, to fulfill our religious duties toward God, duties that may be summarized in two acts, as follows:

- 1.) Our continual offering of Jesus Christ to God the Father.
- 2.) Our offering of ourselves with Him and like Him in complete self-surrender and self-sacrifice, so as to become one with Jesus Christ.

For Christ alone can glorify God as He deserves. Christ, equal to the Father by His Godhead, lowered Himself to our level by the Incarnation. As man, Christ is able to bow before God and render Him true adoration in humility, submission, and obedience. As God, Christ offers His Father homage of infinite worth.

It is the Incarnation that empowers us to offer God to God in the Person of Jesus Christ. Hence, the grandeur and incomparable superiority of the Mass over all other acts of religion.

Why so many Masses? In order that the thought of offering Him up to God the Father may be continually present to our minds, Christ has willed to re-present the offering up of His Sacrifice.

But the Christ who thus offers Himself in the Mass is not just "Jesus, the Son of Mary," but the total Christ—Christ complete, entire. That is, all the members of the Mystical Body offer themselves with Christ, their Head. Hence, the active role we should play in the Mass.

Pope Pius XII recalled this truth in his encyclical on the Mystical Body (*Mystici Corporis*): "In it, the priest not only represents our Savior, but the entire Mystical Body; and each of the faithful in particular. The faithful, themselves, moreover, united to the priest in a common will and prayer, offer up to the Eternal Father the Immaculate Lamb brought down on the altar by the voice of the priest. They offer Him, by the hands of the same priest, as a most pleasing Victim of propitiation and praise, for the necessities of the whole Church. And just as the Divine Redeemer, dying on the Cross, offered Himself as Head of the human race, to the Eternal

Father; in the same way, in this 'clean oblation,' He not only offers Himself as Head of the Church to the Heavenly Father, but in Himself He also offers His mystical members; since all—even the most infirm and feeble—are contained in His loving heart."

In what does Christ's Sacrifice consist?

1.) Our Lord's Sacrifice consists in His complete self-renunciation—an immolation that began with the first instant of His earthly existence and terminated on Calvary's Cross.

2.) Our Lord's Sacrifice consists above all in the preferring of God's will to His own: a preference shown by His oblation, which persists eternally. This perfect love of Christ for His Father was stabilized by His death and will abide throughout eternity.

Death fixes us in the dispositions we have at the moment of dying. Our degree of charity at death will mark our degree of glory for eternity. The set of our hearts at death remains as the final disposition of our wills. Our Lord, at the moment of His death on the Cross, attained (so to speak) the climax of His love for His Father. And it is precisely these sublime dispositions of our Lord toward His Father at the moment of His death that are made actual in the Mass. Now do you see why the Mass is of such great value?

Is the Mass the same as Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross, or is it a different Sacrifice?

It is the same Sacrifice. Christ offered Himself once for all. "...We are sanctified by the oblation of the Body of Jesus Christ once" (Heb. 10:10).

To understand this, we have only to go back to the concept of oblation, renunciation, and choice. The renunciation is summarized by Christ's death accepted once and for all. On Calvary, this act of renunciation was made once, and it passed.

But above all, our Lord's Sacrifice consists in this constant desire for His Father's will in preference to His own; and this preference remains eternally fixed in heaven. Suffering passes—the fact of having suffered remains.

It is the same thing for us when we renounce anything. The act of self-denial is, like all acts, temporary; but the disposition of the will to deny itself for a greater good remains just so long as we do not take it back. Death fixes us forever in the dispositions in which it finds us. Christ's Sacrifice persists in heaven, because the legacy of His life made on the Cross has never been cancelled. That which He gave was given for all time....Christ's immolation is eternal. St. John, in his vision of heaven, sees Jesus as "a Lamb standing upright, yet slain (as I thought) in sacrifice" (Apoc. 5:6) [Knox].

This is understandable. *The purpose of our Lord's Sacrifice having been to glorify God, the act whereby He glorifies Him must, of necessity, be eternal.*

When the priest brings Christ down upon the altar, he renders Him present such as He is in heaven; and He is in heaven with the same loving dispositions that He had on Calvary at the moment of His death.

The Mass is, therefore, not a new Sacrifice by Christ; but the same Sacrifice actualized in the present. "We know that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more" (Rom. 6:9).

The Mass is thus the perpetual prolongation of the Sacrifice made on the Cross. Consequently, every Mass is the one immolation of Christ repeated in the Act of Oblation. By the same act of the will, Jesus offers at the Last Supper His death in the future; on Calvary His death in the present; in heaven and on the altar His death in the past.

This special presence of Christ on the altar is peculiar to the Mass and demonstrates its grandeur.

When we celebrate the other mysteries of Christ's life, we merely commemorate them. There is no real renewal of the mystery on the day devoted to it. At Christmas, the Church recalls to our minds the Savior's birth, but this birth does not really take place—is not actualized in the present. On Ascension Thursday, our Lord does not renew His ascent into heaven. It is quite otherwise for the Mass. It is no simple symbolic representation, for the same Sacrifice that Christ accomplished on the cross is made truly present in an un-bloody manner on the altar.

Does the Mass differ in any way from the Sacrifice of the Cross?

1.) EXTERNALLY

We have seen that on the Cross, Christ expressed inner adoration toward His Father, by loving Him more than the thing most precious to Him—His own life. We find the same interior adoration in the Mass, since Christ's preferential love for His Father persists eternally.

The difference appears in the outward expression of Christ's inner sentiments. On the Cross, Christ manifests His love for His Father by His death in a bloody manner. In the Mass, Christ offers Himself to His Father in a non-bloody manner.

What sign, then, in the Mass gives outward expression to Christ's inner adoration? For the Mass, like the Sacraments, has a visible sign that signifies and actualizes the Sacrifice. This sign is the separate Consecration of the bread and wine, representing the separation of our Lord's body and blood on the Cross. The active Consecration—that is, not yet accomplished,

but in process of accomplishment—effectively signifies Christ's Sacrifice; since it renders present on the altar the same Sacrifice as that of Calvary.

Note that the Real Presence of Christ in the tabernacle is not, properly speaking, a sacrifice; since the exterior sign—the Consecration—is lacking. Where the exterior element is lacking, there can be no sacrifice.

2.) BY THE MODE OF OFFERING

Two things are needed to make a sacrifice: (a) Renunciation or immolation; (b) preference, choice, oblation or offering.

Now on the Cross, as in the Mass, it is the same Victim that is immolated—our Lord. A difference exists, however, in the method or mode of oblation. In the Mass, it is still our Lord who offers Himself as He did on Calvary, but through the ministry of His priests.

Nevertheless, the priest is merely Christ's representative. There is only one priest—Jesus Christ. But our Blessed Lord, in His great mercy, and in order to make us participate still more intimately in His Sacrifice, has self-imposed the condition whereby He cannot offer Himself on the altar without His priests. Thus, on the Cross, Christ offers Himself by Himself in our name. In the Mass, it is the priest who, in the name of all the people, offers Christ exteriorly. For interiorly, it is always Christ who offers.

3.) AS TO TIME AND PLACE

The Sacrifice of the Cross occurred at a given moment in a given spot on the earth. Christ offered His death in the present. In the Mass, Christ offers Himself throughout the whole universe, exactly as the prophet Malachias had prophesied, and at each moment of the day and night. He offers His death as an accomplished historical fact.

To whom is the Sacrifice of the Mass offered?

To God alone.

Why to God alone?

- (a) Because the Mass is an act of adoration;
- (b) because the dignity of Christ, Victim and Sacrificer, is infinite, hence His offering can be addressed only to God;
- (c) because an offering made to a creature would be idolatrous, since the end of sacrifice is to acknowledge God's pre-eminence and kingship over all creation.

Nevertheless, the Sacrifice of the Mass may be offered in honor of the angels and saints:

- (a) To thank God for the wonderful way in which He has rewarded their virtue;
- (b) to ask graces from God through their intercession or patronage;
- (c) to celebrate their virtues and their triumphs;
- (d) to stir us up to imitate them.

The custom of offering the Mass in honor of the saints is a very ancient one. In the early days of the Church, it was customary to gather round the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversaries of their deaths and have Mass celebrated to honor their memory.

For whom may Mass be celebrated? God always receives infinite praise from the Mass, even should the celebrant be unworthy of his high office; for it is Christ, who—in the Mass, as once on Calvary—is both Priest and Victim. The Mass is offered to God alone; but for the advantage, profit, utility, and benefit of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The beneficiaries of the Mass are thus the members of the Mystical Body. The Mass includes the "Memento of the Living" and the "Memento of the Dead." We shall find there indicated the persons for whom Mass may be celebrated.

1.) The living. These are the members of Christ's Mystical Body still on earth: consequently, each one of us. Incidentally, a beautiful prayer formula for offering prayer for dying sinners is the following: "My God, I offer you all the Masses that are being celebrated today for those sinners who are in their agony now and are to die today. May the precious Blood of Jesus obtain mercy for them!"

2.) The dead. In other words, the souls in purgatory. Charity demands that those members of the Mystical Body who have access to Christ's oblation, should not forget those members no longer able to offer the Holy Sacrifice. It devolves on us to see that the Church Suffering is not deprived of its greatest good: the Mass, which applies to it Christ's merits. If we would have Christians still on earth think of us, when we in our turn shall be in purgatory; let us not forget the departed, who implore our prayers and Masses!

The merit of a charitable work depends on three factors: (1) The value of the work in question; (2) the effort involved; (3) the amount of charity with which the work is accomplished.

No work of mercy surpasses in value the gift of a Mass. If the cup of cold-water is rewarded, of how much greater merit is Christ's infinite oblation applied to a human soul! No other offering or riches is comparable. If material or spiritual aid to a neighbor in need, draws down upon us Heaven's blessings, how much more meritorious still, the offering to a suffering member of the Mystical Body of the very immolation of Christ!

Do all members of the Mystical Body have an equal share in the fruits of the Mass? It is customary to distinguish four fruits of the Mass:

- 1.) A ***general*** destined for all members of the Mystical Body.

- 2.) A *special* fruit designed for all those assisting at the Sacrifice with suitable dispositions.
- 3.) A *functional* fruit directed toward those persons for whose intentions the Mass is being offered.
- 4.) A *personal* fruit designated for the priest celebrating the Holy Sacrifice.

Be it noted, however, that whatever may be our title for sharing in the fruits of the Mass, the profit we derive from the Mass will depend on the dispositions with which we hear it.

OFFERING MYSELF WITH CHRIST

What is the source of our obligation to offer ourselves in the Mass with Christ? We have seen that the Mass is Christ's Sacrifice, that is, the Sacrifice of Calvary made present on the altar.

Now Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross was not an individual, but a social sacrifice. It was as Head of the Mystical Body that Christ consented to die. In offering and immolating Himself on the Cross, He included us in His Sacrifice. Christ was obedient to His Father in His own name, and in ours. Our Lord had a right to include, to integrate us into His Sacrifice; because we belong to Him, we are His members. He could require, therefore, that we should be obedient to His Father, as He Himself was obedient.

On our Lord's side, the Sacrifice is *complete, of infinite merit*. On our side, it is *incomplete, finite, limited in its application*.

We carry out this offering, this submission, or this immolation, with the passage of time; and also to the degree in which we do not draw back from immolating ourselves with Christ.

We understand better now St. Paul's words: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His Body, which is the Church" (Col. 1:24). Christ's sufferings are complete in the order of satisfaction and merit, but not in the order of application.

On *our* side, the Sacrifice of the whole Christ is incomplete. It will terminate with the death of the last member of the Mystical Body, who adds the last thing lacking to the Passion of Christ.

Consequently, our obligation to offer ourselves with Christ in the Mass comes from our membership in Christ's Mystical Body, into which we were introduced by Baptism.

"It is not surprising," writes Pope Pius XII in *Mediator Dei*, "that Christians should be raised to this dignity. For by the bath of Baptism, Christians are made members of the Body of Christ the Priest; and by the 'character'

which is, as it were, graven on their souls, are ordered to divine worship. They thus participate according to their condition in the priesthood of Christ Himself."

A non-baptized person may be bodily present at Mass, and may even follow the ceremonies intelligently. Yet, in the full meaning of the term, he does not "assist" at Mass; for he who truly assists has to be offered with Christ. Now to be offered with Christ, one must first have been incorporated into Christ—be the prolongation of His life. Hence, the baptismal character comprises a union with Christ, a likeness by reason of which we share in His priesthood. And by virtue of our integration into Christ, we are enabled to be offered with Him; and to share in the offering of His immolation, in His Sacrifice.

Not only is it permissible for us to be offered with Christ, but we are under obligation to offer ourselves with Him—under pain of mutilating the total Christ! For the head alone is not the total Christ. In order for the Mystical Body to be complete, both head and members are needed. This is the whole Christ, as He was offered up to God on Calvary—as He is offered each day on our altars.

What are the three principal parts of the Mass? The three principal parts are: (1) the Offertory or oblation; (2) the Consecration or immolation; (3) the Communion or reception.

These three parts belong together and are the indispensable elements of every sacrifice. Every Mass demands an offering, a relinquishment, a renunciation. Every offering calls for a consecration, an immolation, a choice. Every consecration presupposes a communion—love calls for love, sacrifice for reception.

What is meant by this expression: "The Mass must be lived"?

Christ included us in His Sacrifice by offering us together with Himself to the Father. The Mass is the means the Church has at her disposal for offering supreme homage to the Blessed Trinity.

The Mass is not Christ's Sacrifice alone, but that of the whole Mystical Body as well. If we are content to offer up our Lord's sufferings, there is no sacrifice on our part, but a petition ("Dear God, here are the sufferings of your Divine Son. In return, please grant me such and such a favor!")

If the Mass is to become my Mass, my sacrifice offered to God, if I am to offer the Blessed Trinity my portion of thanksgiving and praise, I must live the way Christ lived; in the same dispositions of denial of self and of placing God first, of obedience, of daily immolation. My sacrifice must be added to His!

It is only when we offer our sacrifices to God in union with Christ's Sacrifice that they become as gold, just as the tiny drop of water that falls into the chalice becomes wine! It is "through Him" and "in Him" that our sacrifices acquire all their value. Hence, the extreme importance of centering our lives on the Mass.

Our Sacrifice, our Mass, is in *two* parts:

- 1.) The ritual offering in union with that of Christ in His name. I offer myself *completely*, and in advance, for the hours that lie ahead.
- 2.) The second action—too often forgotten—is as important as the first. This consists in the carrying out of the offering, throughout the course of the day, in the midst of the series of actions that make up its warp and woof. This is what is known as "living my Mass."

Everything does not end with the *Ite, missa est* (the Mass has ended.) On the contrary, it is then that everything begins. For when a person has offered himself, *all* himself, with Christ, how is it possible for him to think, speak, and act as do those who have never offered themselves?

Remember! God gives Himself to the one giving himself, and God is not pleased with half gifts! God never lets Himself be outdone in generosity. That is why, after giving ourselves to God through Christ, our Mass is completed by Communion, which gives God to us through Christ.

What preparation should I bring to my Mass? The celebration of a Mass is not just something that can be improvised on the spot, especially when one considers that the Mass is the greatest event in world history. A proper preparation should be threefold:

- 1.) Doctrinal preparation. By means of reading, of listening to God's Word, and of study groups. Such preparation for Mass is most important and fruitful, because it shows us the prime value of the Mass and compels us to study the great dogmas of our Faith, for which the Mass serves as a rallying-point: The Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption, grace and glory.

If *many* souls fail to progress, if instead of going forward, they continually go backward, it should be recognized that the principal cause of their spiritual anemia is to be found in their total or partial ignorance of the Mass—center of their lives. Let us rise up against this ignorance and apathy. Let us study these great truths and then share with others the knowledge that we acquire.

- 2.) ***Liturgical preparation.*** The ceremonial of the Mass is of singular help in the understanding of the doctrine. The Church has multiplied the number of liturgical ceremonies so as to present, under a simple form of imagery, the fundamental theology of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

- 3.) ***Ascetic preparation.*** Of the three preparations, the ascetic (or that of the heart and will) is the most important. It should be the constant concern of my life. Its purpose is to conform me more and more to Christ. The more I am a victim, the more will my Mass profit me and my neighbor. For Christ, the Mass is the Sacrifice of utter self-abasement and self surrender. We are members of Christ.

PURPOSE OF THE HOLY MASS

The end of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the salvation of mankind. As this end was attained fully and completely and for all times by the suffering of Christ, the purpose of the Holy Mass must be quite different from the purpose of the sacrifice on the cross. The Mass is an application of the merits of His death on the cross to us sinners. From this it follows that in a fuller way and with a more sublime signification than the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the Holy Mass is to be considered as:

- 1.) An offering of **adoration** and, recognition of the Supreme Majesty: Jesus Christ adores God as fully as He deserves. In the Mass, we honor God by God Himself, namely by Jesus Christ.
- 2.) An offering of **thanksgiving** to God, the origin of all blessings. Here also Jesus takes our place and He thanks the Creator with infinite perfection for all His heavenly and earthly blessings. By Jesus alone can we entirely fulfill our duty of thankfulness towards God.
- 3.) An offering of atonement for forgiveness of daily sins and of temporal punishments due for mortal sins that are already forgiven. The Holy Mass makes mercy possible where there is sufficient sorrow for deadly sins.
- 4.) An offering of **impetration** or prayer. It is Jesus Who is praying for us in the Sacrifice, Jesus Whose prayers are always heard.