

THE LAYMAN AND THE MASS

GROWING side by side with the world-wide movement of Catholic Action there is the ever-spreading liturgical revival. They are but two aspects of the one fact—the mutual co-operation of the faithful among themselves and with their pastors; and they differ in that Catholic Action, of its very nature, includes the liturgical movement. Catholic Action includes corporate activity both *ad intra* and *ad extra*: the sanctification of individuals and the defence and advance of Christianity in a semi-pagan world.

To push on the external manifestation of Catholic Action without paying due attention to the preliminary of personal sanctity is to make bricks without straw: *Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum, in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam*. Furthermore, the interior life must be looked to, to provide inspiration and strength as the cause progresses. There is one outstanding practice of the faithful which gives them a perennial 'unity without uniformity,' namely the fundamental act of public external worship of God, as expressed in the sacrifice of the Mass. For, as Fr. Pepler puts it: 'when we speak of the liturgy, we mean primarily the Mass; and the Mass becomes the essential link of Christian unity.' 'Attendance at this ceremony has been imposed as an obligation of membership, so that theoretically the whole Catholic world is present at least once a week. This is the main symbol of the catholicity of the Church.'

The Pope has urged time and again that Catholic Action is an apostolate. It procures not only the personal sanctification of him who participates in it (although this is the foundation), but that also of others. The hierarchy alone *exercises* the apostolate—the faithful *participate* in it. This participation is explained by the fact that in baptism they acquire a kind of priesthood, a spiritual or 'internal' priesthood (of which the Catechism of the Council of Trent

¹ 'Human Unity,' *Clergy Review*, November, 1934; pp. 362 and 363.

speaks), which is founded on the words of St. Peter.² As the Angelic Doctor puts it:³ 'It is clear that the sacramental character is specially the character of Christ, to whose character the faithful are likened by reason of the sacramental characters, which are nothing else than certain participations of Christ's priesthood flowing from Christ himself. And again:⁴ Every sacrament makes a man a participator in Christ's priesthood, from the fact that it confers on him some effect thereof. Finally, Pius XI has said of Catholic Action: *A sacerdotali munere haud longius abest.*

The supreme act of the priests of God's Church is to offer sacrifice—to celebrate Mass. It therefore follows that the supreme act of the faithful is to participate in this act of sacrifice, offering it *by* and *through* the priest. Moreover, it would seem to be a duty, 'because everyone is bound to use the grace entrusted to him, when opportunity serves, according to 2 Cor. vi, 1: We exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain.'⁵

Now it is obvious from the rubrics of the Missal that the laity are not expected merely to attend Mass. True it is that 'passive' presence is sufficient to fulfil the obligation, but for the *bene esse* there is needed 'active' presence.

'Passive' presence means being present in so far as we stand for the two gospels, stand and genuflect with the priest during the Creed, and for the rest of the time kneel with perhaps but little advertence to what is being done at the altar. The rubrics envisage the fact of the people replying to the priest, for they speak of 'those who are present,' responding in contradistinction to the minister or ministers. This, then, is what we would call 'active' presence at Mass. This practice is becoming increasingly common, especially on the Continent; *e.g.*, it has been a

² I Peter ii, 5 and 9.

³ *Summa Theol.* III, 63, a. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, a. 6, ad 1.

⁵ *Op. cit.* III, 82, a. 9.

source of great edification at recent Pax Romana congresses. There is no doubt of its lawfulness, for the Sacred Congregation of Rites, when questioned on the matter, allowed that it was; although they pointed out that it was not always expedient because of the inconvenience that could easily arise.⁶ Accordingly they decided that in cases where the faithful were to reply in *all* parts of the Mass, to which the server is accustomed to respond, the permission of the Ordinary is necessary.⁷

This active participation by the laity in the sacrifice of the Mass has been given the name of *Missa dialogata*. It will easily be seen that this is the first step towards liturgy for the masses—not everyone can sing Plain Chant (*pace* the experts), but anyone who is not dumb can say: *Et cum spiritu tuo*. People are always far more interested in anything if they are given a part to play—here is the means of arousing and holding the interest of many people, to whom the obligation has become a matter of routine; a means of turning what some may regard as a burden into a pleasure.

There are not lacking texts in the *Summa Theologica* to support and explain this practice; *e.g.*, 'There are other words which the priest, acting as in the person of God, begins and the people take up; to show that the things they denote have come to the people through Divine revelation, such as faith and heavenly glory; and therefore the priest intones the Creed and the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.'⁸

The Archbishop of Rouen, in commending the use of the *Missa dialogata*, gives a good description of what it is in practice. He says: 'We authorize our priests to organize it only when they are sure that it will be done correctly—*i.e.*, with uniform and regular pronunciation of *all* the Latin words, and with careful attention to the words of the

⁶ S.C.R., n. 4375, ad 1, August 4th, 1922.

⁷ Interpreted in *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, Jan.-Feb., 1934, p. 121.

⁸ *Summa Theol.*, III, 83, a. 4 ad 6.

priest, so as not to delay him. All this will suppose careful preparation, and co-operation with the priest at the altar. There are two kinds of ' dialogues,' the maximum and the minimum. The former includes the ordinary responses made by the Mass server; the latter includes over and above these, the Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, as well as the Confiteor and Domine non sum dignus, which precede the people's Communion. We authorize these two methods.'⁹

To the objection that this is an innovation, we can make the same reply as does Mgr. Civardi to those who say that Catholic Action is an innovation, namely that its form may be new, but its substance is certainly not, as it has existed from Apostolic times. The Church says to the laity: *Ascende superius, amice*; and the priest supplements this with his exhortation: *Orate fratres*. The response: *Suscipiat Dominus sacrificium de manibus tuis ad laudem et gloriam nominis sui, ad utilitatem quoque nostram, totiusque Ecclesiae suae sanctae*, acknowledges at once the subjection of the faithful to the hierarchy and the intimate union of priest and people. In the Mass, then, is to be found the most glorious expression of unity of action on the part of all members of the Church; surely an earnest of their united and victorious advance towards the peace of Christ in the reign of Christ.

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⁹ *Ephemerides Liturgicae*, Maio-Junio, 1934, p. 354.