

Isaias.¹³ This is the angel, the messenger of great counsel, who will put in round those who fear him and pull them out. So don't be afraid of being overlooked. Wherever you are, fearing the Lord, this angel knows about you, and will put in round you and pull you out.

And now he wants to speak openly about that mysterious, that sacramental riddle, in which he was being carried in his own hands. 'Taste and see that the Lord is lovely.' The psalm is opening itself out, isn't it, and showing what that steady craziness means, that sane madness, that sober drunkenness which that other David indulged in when he was telling them of a sign, a pattern of something or other, and when they said to him in the character of king Achis: 'How can it be?'; the time our Lord was saying: 'Unless a man eats my flesh and drinks my blood he will not have life in himself'.¹⁴ And they who were dominated by king Achis, that is by error and ignorance, what did they say? 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' If you don't know how, taste and see that the Lord is lovely. And if you still don't understand, you are king Achis, and David will change his features and leave you, and send you away and go off.

To be concluded

¹³ Isaias ix, 6.
¹⁴ John vi, 53.



COMMENT

I. THE MASS AS A DRAMA

AS A LAYMAN who is worried about the place of the Church in the life of the laity I write this open letter to all priests, begging their understanding of my seeming impertinence and requesting their blessing for myself and my family. Today, more than ever, it is necessary that we laymen attend Mass frequently. Yet few of us do. What is the reason? Is it because the Mass is said in Latin, as some have stated? Is it

really necessary that we use English in our Mass? Will this alone suffice to bring the layman to daily Mass?

I suggest an experiment: find any average layman and suggest to him that he is, in his imagination, present in Jerusalem on that fateful Friday; that a sacrifice is about to be consummated; that this sacrifice has more significance for him and the whole human race than can be understood this side of eternity. Then ask him if he would choose to be absent. Yet it is this same sacrifice that is offered each day, and he does choose to be absent. Why? Perhaps he does not see the Mass as a sacrifice.

Of course, he has been told all about the Mass as a sacrifice, of its importance to him, of its importance to his fellow members of the Mystical Body, of its one-ness with Calvary, of much more. All this he knows. But all this he does not see.

The Mass, to be really seen as *the* sacrifice, must be a drama as well. May I cite a few particulars?

Prior to the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest says 'Ecce Agnus Dei'. I can imagine how John the Baptist spoke those words. I know how some priests mumble them. The contrast is distressing. Some even half-hide the Lamb of God with their body as they turn from the tabernacle toward the people. How can we behold? That 'ECCE!' should ring. The hands holding the Sacred Species and the Ciborium should be outstretched, as a soldier presenting arms—for a full ten seconds—before 'Ecce! Agnus Dei!' is voiced. Then Latin, English, or gibberish, we would all understand that we were to look, to reflect, to adore. The priest says 'ecce' but his actions betray his words. If the beholding is so unimportant, then is it wrong to conclude that communicating might be of little value? We are led by our shepherds. Lead us, then!

Consider the Amen at the end of the Canon, after the so-called minor elevation. It is true that custom prevents the congregation from reciting this response. But it is still the most important single word, for the layman, in the whole Mass. I have served some priests who go from 'Per omnia saecula saeculorum' to 'Oremus. Praeceptis . . .' as though it were one word. How can I, in such circumstances, realize that the movement when I am to make my own act of sacrifice is at hand, nay past? If the language is changed to English and the same procedure followed, what

good will it do? Might it not be well, while we still use the Latin, to make a significant pause here? Could we train our representatives at the altar, the servers, to say this 'Amen' forthrightly, with a sense of having agreed to give all to the Father, by, with, and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Ghost? And could the priest wait, please, until they have said 'Amen' before continuing? Why all the rush?

The rubrics of the Mass provide many opportunities (more than my knowledge can suggest) for the priest to show by his bodily actions and his manner of speaking that we are indeed present at a sacrifice, that it is the same sacrifice offered on Calvary, that it is efficacious for us to be here. Then we can begin, here and now, to know why we should attend Mass frequently.

Some of us have been moved by grace to attend daily Mass, often (I am not included here) with great hardship, in inclement weather, against the antagonism of near relatives, and so on. But apparently there are many many others who have not yet received this grace. I suggest, humbly and respectfully, that a little attention to the drama of the Mass will move yet more of us to come to Mass. We do need to understand why the Mass is so important; I plead for instruction of the faithful during the Mass by means of the due performance of its dramatic words and acts. If we really understood, who can tell the results?

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2. EVENING MASS IN A VERMONT VILLAGE

OURS IS A small mission parish in Vermont. This is the first year that we have had evening Mass once a week during Lent. Tonight the members of our church family will be gathering for the third evening. We will come to offer ourselves with thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father in union with his Son, our Lord.

There will be mud and slush on the cars that are driven in from outlying areas 'off the black top'. In the congregation there will be men who have spent the day working in mines, bakeries, factories, offices. A number will have observed the necessary fast of three hours previous to Mass so that they may receive