

SUNDAY MASS – WHY?

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PART ONE: SUNDAY MASS — WHY?

1. "The Ordinary Catholic"

Take the "ordinary Catholic". He is well worth considering, because he is really something quite extraordinary. The fact that his whole way of life is very ordinary, and a fundamental humility conceal the fact that he is a triumph of God's grace and his co-operation.

Such a man, although he would never express it so to himself, lives by a deep love of the person of Christ whom he knows through, and meets in His Church, His Body. People will say of him that he loves and serves the Church rather than Christ. He would be puzzled to see the point of the accusation, because he sees them as inseparable. He certainly lacks the one characteristic which, if proven, would add substance to the accusation— mere subservience.

He goes to Mass on Sunday. And people will say he does so out of fear of Hell. I have never yet met anyone who goes to Mass every Sunday simply out of fear of Hell; and I do not believe it is in normal human nature to continue to act in a particular way purely out of fear. True, the Church places on him a grave obligation to go to Mass on Sunday; but he accepts the obligation' only because fundamentally he wants to be in friendship with God, whose voice he hears in the Church's laws.

Why Does He "Go"?

Inconvenient as at times it may be, he is rather glad, on the whole, that the Church imposes an obligation; he has the humility that comes from a knowledge of one's own weakness. It is easier to obey a law than to follow a counsel, especially with regularity and perseverance. And regularity in his contact with God is what he wants—not just an occasional encounter.

He does not wait for any particular occasion when "he feels the need" or some impulse to go. He feels his need all the time; and when he feels the impulse to go (as he often does when reflecting even casually on the meaning of certain feast days) — well, he goes.

He, too, may feel close, even closest to God out-of-doors, in the bush, on the beach, considering the night sky. But the fact remains, he says to himself, that he cannot in those circumstances receive the Body of Christ; and only in a way which he feels as rather remote can he join in offering the Sacrifice. Besides, he has

the rather perverse instinct that people should get together when they worship God.

There is a Problem

In all this, however, there is a problem. The problem may exist because certain aspects of his Mass-going have not been properly formulated or expressed; but of its existence there is no doubt.

We have seen how Sunday Mass is perfectly logical to the "ordinary Catholic" frame of mind. But how does that frame of mind appear to someone who does not share it?

To One Who Questions

In general, to one who questions the validity of this frame of mind, it appears that the ordinary Catholic is too concerned, and wrongly so, with two things. The first is "obligation"; the second is "*personal* obligation". It appears to the questioner that the ordinary Catholic's very language betrays him: he speaks of the "Sunday obligation", and of "getting one's Mass in".

If the ordinary Catholic has his serenity, the one who questions has his point. And it is that point that this pamphlet is about.

2. The Mind of the Church

For a start, let us consider, with a minimum of comment, a few of the earliest documents the Church has produced documents in which we read her mind.

In the Sacred Scriptures themselves, we read how the first believers "met constantly — to hear the apostles teach, and to share in the common life, to break bread and to pray". (Acts 2: 42) and the Epistle to the *Hebrews* urges the believers and indirectly admonishes the slack:

We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others to love and to active goodness, not staying away from our meetings, as some do, but rather encouraging one another". (*Hebrews* 10: 24-25).

These assemblies were also the days for collecting for the poor and were held (not exclusively) on Sundays, the first day of the week. So we read in *I Corinthians* 16: 2; "Every Sunday, each of you is to put aside and keep by him a sum in proportion to his gains, so that there may be no collecting when I come".

Other Witness

Even while the Sacred Scriptures themselves were being created, other documents were being compiled. Ancient among these is one called "*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*" (the *Didache*) of the first century. In it we find the injunction:

"On the Lord's Day, come together, break bread, and hold Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure."

Even more interesting is its exhortation to the community at large:

Therefore, appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord."

The great Ignatius of Antioch, martyred c. 110 A.D., wrote to Polycarp of Smyrna, "Hold assemblies more frequently; summon the faithful to come to them". In his letter to the people of Ephesus he writes, "Not to attend the assembly is an act of pride and an act of self-excommunication".

Another such ancient document is "*The Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*", the *Didascalia*. Evidence of Church practice in the years 250-300 A.D. or earlier.

"Let him be faithful in coming to the assembly so that no one, by absenting himself, will diminish the Church, nor lessen by one member the Body of Christ . . . Do not despise yourselves by dispersing the Body of Christ."

It is quite clear that the Church expected her members to constant in attending the Sunday Eucharist, and pointed out that absentees were failing in their vocation as Christians. .

About 303 A.D. there was held at Elvira in Spain a council whose decrees on conduct are the earliest of their kind we have. This council decreed that anyone who missed the Sunday assembly three times was to be excommunicated for a shorter or longer period.

To leap forward then to Vatican II: the 'Decree on the Liturgy' makes frequent mention of days of *obligation*; and it is precisely because "the Christian faithful must meet together" on Sundays that the Sunday liturgy receives such attention, and that such efforts were made to make clear the whole point of that assembling.

Dominant Notes

Leaving until later the reasons for the choice of Sunday, and the symbolic and sign value of that day, look now at the dominant notes sounded in the above brief glimpse into the Church's mind.

They stand out clearly as assembly in fellowship, instruction with prayer and eucharistic celebration.

The notion of *assembly* is of key importance; and an understanding of it leads to a greater understanding of the nature of the other activities of Sunday; for these other activities are essentially activities not of individuals but of the assembly. Even the collection, as we saw above, is the offering of the assembly, not merely the sum total of individual contributions.

Assembly

One of the Psalms presents God as commanding: Assemble to me my holy ones who have made a covenant with me with sacrifice.

The notion of assembly or community, of God's calling and gathering as a people those who "were once no people", exists right at the beginning of salvation history.

"In Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit, from age to age you gather a people to yourself; so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name": so speaks the Christian liturgy. Note how glory to God springs from the sacrifice which itself is offered only when the assembly is gathered.

Our sacrifice is the Eucharist; and the Eucharist, as the Vatican Council teaches us, is not only the sign but also the cause of unity. It is to celebrate the Eucharist that the assembly comes together—the Eucharist draws them. And having drawn them together, the Eucharist makes them one, makes the assembly a unity. "Although many," says St. Paul, "we are one; for we eat one bread and drink one cup."

This is why Ignatius of Antioch, as we read above, says that the absentee "self-excommunicates" himself — he withdraws from the perfect moment of the unity of the Body of Christ which is the Church. This is why the Didascalia, as we read above, says that the absentee diminishes and disperses the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

Christ the Assembler

We understand the paramount importance of this idea of assembly if we consider two things: first, what the assembly is the vehicle of; and secondly, what the assembly is the sign of.

To do this, we must look at the role Christ played as the Assembler of God's people; for it is in Christ through the Holy Spirit that God, from age to age, assembles a people for himself.

Christ, St. Paul teaches, is the new and better Adam. In him, the whole human race receives a new head, a new start, as it were, a new source of unity. Sent by the Father, his task is to gather together God's people in unity. And that he is the sole Assembler of the people of God he himself makes quite clear when he says, "He who does not gather with me, scatters".

That is why he weeps over those who will not be gathered together by him: their loss is irretrievable—there is no other source of life and unity than himself, the only "way, truth and life".

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, still killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen

gathers her brood under her wings — and you would not! (Matthew 23: 37-39).

He himself is the new, true and only centre of unity and replaces the Temple: his own body replaces the Temple — and this is the nub of his clash with the chief priests, as we see at his trial.

A great number of our Lord's parables concern the new assembly of God, and a number of his actions have the value of acted parables: "The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them". (*Matthew 21: 14*).

Very important among the parables are those concerning the wedding feast. The invited, by refusing, proved unworthy; so the householder said to his servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, to the highways and hedges and bring in, even compel to come in, the poor and maimed and blind and lame, both good and bad, that my house may be filled". (*Matthew 22 and Luke 14*). All these categories of people were excluded from the ancient assembly — not by the will of God but by the legislation of men. So, too, were women and children — which explains why Christ was so tender towards them; and why the chief priests were so indignant that Christ permitted children to cry out in the Temple itself, "Hosanna to the Son of David".

After the Resurrection

Rising from the dead on the first day of the week, Christ our Lord appears to the assembled disciples. Initially, the disciples clung together out of habit and out of fear; but the coming of Christ into their midst changes all that. They become once more his assembly, and he commands them to remain an assembly.

It was at these assemblies on "the first day of the week" that Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures". (*Luke 24: 45*). It was then that he gave them his peace. (*John 20: 20*). It was then that he gave them the power to give peace — the power to reconcile man to God through the forgiveness of sins. (*John 20: 23*). It was then that he gave the Church her "mission" - to go out to men as he himself had been sent from God to men. (*John 20: 21 and Mark 16: 15*).

Our Lord made it clear to his apostles that they form a new assembly, gathered around the risen Christ, known now not in the flesh, but by faith — which is the point of his rebuke to Thomas because of his doubt. (*Luke 24: 30, John 21: 13*).

The point comes through with unmistakable clarity: it is only in and through the assembly that we receive understanding of the word of God, that we receive peace and reconciliation with God, that we celebrate the Eucharist, that we receive our mission in life.

This is what the Christian assembly is: absenteeism diminishes it. This is what the Christian assembly gives witness to the whole world. Absenteeism, and any sort of disunity, diminishes this witness to Christ and his power to reconcile men to God

and unite them among themselves. That is why to introduce division into the assembly has always been regarded by the Church as a most serious thing: it scandalizes, in the strict sense of making it morally impossible for the world to whom the assembly is sent as a sign to recognize it as a sign. Division and disunity in the assembly frustrates God's design.

Pentecost

The events of Pentecost Sunday deserve special consideration. By about the time of our Lord, the Jewish feast of Pentecost, originally a wheat-harvest festival, was beginning to be regarded as commemorating the giving of the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. (After the destruction of the Temple, this interpretation became dominant.)

On that day, the Church, in the persons of the Apostles and disciples who were assembled together at Christ's command not to leave the city, was anointed by the Holy Spirit and sent forth. Just so, Christ was sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit for his work: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore he has anointed me to preach the good tidings," Jesus read in the Synagogue, and added, "This day these words are fulfilled".

As with the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, so giving the Church her "mission" was signaled by wonders — a rushing wind, tongues of fire and the gift of tongues.

It is in and through the assembly that we receive the Holy Spirit.

The sign of man's disunity is replaced by a sign of new unity. The Church not only has the commission from Christ to teach all nations; she has the power to do so, and to be heard. She has this power, and her members with her, only because she is an assembly in Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

3. Sunday — The Lord's Day

Most of the events we have spoken of above, Christ's resurrection, his most significant appearances to his disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit, took place "on the first day of the week", on Sunday. By the time of the writing of the last book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse) Sunday was already known as "the Lord's Day"; and looked forward to *the* Day of the Lord, when Christ would come again in glory.

It was natural, therefore, that the first Christians would hold their assembly on the first day of the week: for in the assembly they looked for and found precisely those things which Christ had given on those other "first days of the week".

Originally, therefore, Sunday was not a day of rest, as was the Jewish sabbath. It was many centuries before the Church combined the two notions of celebrating the Resurrection of Christ and entering into the sabbath rest.

However, we can see how fitting a development that linking of the two is. The first day of the week is the dawn of a new creation; it is also called "the eighth day" - the day on which on earth we anticipate the "everlasting day" of the possession of God in heaven for all eternity.

Although of secondary importance, therefore, the observance of the Sunday as a day of rest has an important sign value, gives important witness to the world. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* reminds us that "we have here no lasting city, but we seek one that is to come". The observance of Sunday, "the eighth day", is a sign and witness that we already have one foot in heaven. The earthly week has seven days; we speak of the eighth day — and on it we suspend as much as possible, concerns which are rooted in this world, "which is passing away".

Moreover, by refraining from attention to our own affairs on that day we free ourselves for works of mercy and the apostolate: and these, too, are themselves sign and witness - sign and witness of union now, and of the eternal fellowship to come.

To Church on Sunday

What obliges us to go to Mass on Sunday, therefore, is not merely a precept of the Church. The Church makes the law precisely so that we will see our "obligation" not under that law, but as Christians. "Obligation" means the consequences of being a Christian, it means the way a Christian activates his Christianity. It is not a matter of "getting one's Mass in"; it is a matter of joining the Body of Christ there assembled to receive from God what he gives most palpably in and through the assembly.

There it is that "the Church constantly sanctifies herself" as Vatican II says, and, with herself, us — for, as St. Paul teaches, "you are the Body of Christ, and individually its members". And there it is that we are given a constant renewal of "mission" so that we are sent to serve the world of men as Christ was.

Vatican II

There is a chapter in Vatican II's Decree on the Liturgy which will well serve as a summary of all we have discussed.

By apostolic tradition, which took its origin from the very day of Christ's resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal Mystery every seventh day. With good reason, then, this day bears the name of the Lord's Day, or the Day of the Lord. On this day Christ's faithful are to come together into the one place, so that by hearing the word of God and taking so that taking part in the Eucharist they may call to mind the passion, the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, and may thank God "who has begotten us again to a life of hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Hence, the Lord's Day is the original feast-day, and it should be proposed to the faithful and taught to them in such a way that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work. This day . . . is the foundation and nucleus of the whole liturgical year. (*Chapter 5, paragraph 106*).

And again:

. . . when present at this Mystery of Faith . . . the faithful . . . should be instructed by God's word, be refreshed at the table of the Lord's body; they should give thanks to God; by offering the spotless Victim (not only through the hands of the priest but together with him) they should learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God, and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all. (*Chapter 2, paragraph 48*). . .

PART TWO: SUNDAY MASS — HOW?

Following the introduction of the new manner of celebrating mass, the most commonly voiced difficulty has concerned not being able "to say my prayers as I used to". The solution to this problem is not to withdraw into a private silence or into an edifice of private prayers — that is not what the Church wants of us at mass. The solution is to put new meaning into the old injunction "not to pray at mass but to pray the mass". But how?

Christ Will Come Again

Suppose we begin with one particular aspect of the new eucharistic prayers—an aspect more heavily underlined in them than was the case with the old Roman Canon, and possibly the difference most immediately noticed.

In the Creed we say:

He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and I look forward to the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

By this we mean that *Christ will return* "at the end of the ages", at "the consummation of the world" just as he first came "in the fullness of time".

The *result of his return* will be "judgment"—not in the sense of a decision at law, but in the sense of an open manifestation of each man's condition and lot. And depending on whether or not he is found "in Christ", each man will rise either to everlasting life or to everlasting damnation—what St. John calls "the second death".

This dynamic aspect of the Christian faith, its forward-looking nature, is greatly emphasised in the new eucharistic prayers. And so it should be, since it is the ground of the virtue of hope, a virtue more than ever needed in our troubled world.

Two Comings

A Christian's life revolves around the effort to achieve a deep sense of three things (1) to capture in our minds and hearts a sense of what life is without Christ; (2) to nourish in our wills a great love of Christ who has given us true life; (3) and a great hunger for him to come yet again into our lives and alter them as significantly as his coming into the world changed the condition and lot and destiny of all mankind.

At the same time, there is another coming of Christ to which we must look forward and for which we must prepare—his coming in glory and majesty. Then he will bring to completion the work of our redemption which he began on earth so long ago.

Only then will we be fully redeemed, when we are "made like him in glory"; when "he will re-fashion our lowly form in the likeness of his own glorified humanity"; when we shall see him "face to face"; when we shall "rest and see and see and love and love and praise".

While we are "in the flesh", in this mortal life, we cannot enjoy that "perfect liberty of the sons of God", for "the flesh wages war against the spirit and the law of sin is still in our members". Ours is still a fallen though redeemed human nature.

Indeed, the whole of creation is, as St. Paul tells us, groaning in travail until it also is set free by the coming of Christ again, when "he will restore all things in himself and hand over to his heavenly Father an everlasting kingdom" of peace and harmony and love.

The Day of the Lord

To this great day, the Day of the Lord, every mass looks forward. How?

The mass is not merely a memorial service of the Lord's Supper and Death. It *is* that, of course: we do what we do "in memory of him". *But* he, in whose memory we do it, is "he who was, who is, and who is to come".

Memorial

Consequently, the mass recalls not only what he was—"crucified for our sins"; not only what he is—"risen, and still with us"; but also what he is still to be—"come in glory to judge". The mass looks backward to the last supper and to Calvary; it is sited in the present—it is our daily bread; but it also looks forward to our final consummation in glory.

Presence

The consecration makes present to us not only him who hung on the cross between heaven and earth, not only him who, risen from the dead, has ascended above the heavens and makes intercession for us at the Father's right hand, but also makes present to us now him who is to come.

The mass is not only memorial, backward-looking, it is also eschatological, forward-looking. As is the Christian faith itself, that old-fashioned verse is profoundly true:

Christ of the Virgin's womb

Christ of the Supper room

Christ of the empty tomb

Christ of the day of doom

In this white Host.

The Acclamation

The words the Church has chosen for the memorial acclamation after the consecration serve to underline this. It reminds us forcibly that when we assist at mass we are doing something we shall cease doing "when he comes", for its purpose is to make present to us him and his power until he comes again in very person.

Participation

To participate in the mass fully, therefore, it is not enough to stand in spirit beneath the cross, or to come hungering and thirsting for our daily bread and drink—though these things are great.

We must come, also, standing in spirit already in that last day when Christ will come in glory, full of joy at the prospect and nearness of his coming, ready to welcome him, full of hope — that is, full of confidence that his coming ushers in the epoch of everlasting life.

Hence, the early Church in her liturgy used the acclamation with which the New Testament concluded: "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus".

Daily Living

Here, too, we join our daily lives to the mass, for the apostle tells us that a life well-lived hastens the coming of the Lord.

In the new mass, there have been made many efforts to reawaken in us this sense of the coming of Christ. In the new eucharistic prayers, following the recall of the passion and resurrection of Christ, there has been inserted a looking forward to his

coming" and looking forward with joyful anticipation to his coming in glory, we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread, this saving cup".

Again, the acclamations after the consecration strike this same note—"Christ will come again", "we show forth his death until he come", "Lord Jesus, come in glory".

The new embolism after the Our Father notes how we "wait in joyful hope for the coming of our saviour" — and the people add the ancient acclamation which looks forward to the eternal kingdom.

Again, to the "Behold the Lamb of God" there has been added that sentence from the Apocalypse, "Happy are they who have been invited to the supper of the Lamb".

Hope, serenity and confidence are greatly needed by us in these days. To assist at mass with a concentration of our attention on this aspect of it cannot fail to refresh and encourage.

At Mass

Whenever words indicative of the coming of Christ occur, our heart-felt response should be, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus". And we should try to find in ourselves a real belief that he is indeed coming — both to restore us and to judge us. Our lives which are a preparation for our restoration and for our judgment should also be a hastening of the coming of the Lord.

And this should give us both hope and joy to sustain us in our daily effort to be good, and to sustain us in our daily effort to be good, and to sustain us in our labours and prayers on behalf of a world which can only cause us to despair unless we see behind the evil deeds of men a providence which is "strongly and sweetly" leading all things to their appointed end — an end who is also their beginning — in Christ.

Christ's Power to Save

So far we have bent our minds to a consideration of one aspect of Christ's redemptive activity — his return in glory. And we saw how this part of our Faith is embodied in the mass and how it is emphasised in the mass texts. We saw the response of faith and charity it calls for from us — "Amen Come, Lord Jesus".

Now we will attempt to generalise that' particular consideration; and see, as globally as we can, the liturgy as the means by which we come into contact with the redemptive activity of Christ through a personal response of faith and charity.

Work of Our Redemption

The work of our redemption which Christ began on earth he will consummate and bring to perfection when he returns in glory at the end of time. That is to say,

although our redemption is a supernatural thing, still, it is achieved in men, in this world and in time.

Continuation

Through her sacraments, her gospel, and, above all, through her eucharistic liturgy, the Church makes present to men, accessible to men, the power of Christ's redemptive activity from the beginning of it to the end of it, from the supper room to the Parousia, the return of Christ.

The eucharistic liturgy does this in two ways: first, because it is an "anamnesis"—that is, an *effective commemoration*, not *merely a memorial*. On Anzac Day we remember those who died for us: but our remembering them does not bring them back to us, nor does it bring back into the world their heroism.

However, the liturgical commemoration of the mysteries of Christ is an effective commemoration: that is, the power of the mysteries of Christ to save is present.

Power Present

Just as in Christ "there was the power of God to save", just as "God was in him, reconciling the world to himself", so the power of Christ is present in the mysteries of Christ.

Again, the eucharistic liturgy makes present to us Christ himself — "who was, and is, and is to come". He *was* crucified for us, he is ever-living to make intercession for us, he *is to come* in glory.

These things the liturgy embodies in and manifests through action and word. To these actions and words we respond through faith and charity — and so we bring into our lives their saving power, which is the power of Christ to save.

Christ's redemptive activity in the historical order, made present to us, together with himself, in the sacramental order, and awaiting from us only a response of faith and charity to become dynamically effective in us.

Awareness of Christ

We must not, then, if we are to participate in the liturgy with real spiritual profit, become too absorbed in the purely sacramental order, too absorbed purely in what is being done and said.

We must be aware of the presence and power of Christ. And we must have an eye to ourselves to see that our gears are not disengaged, to see that we are not merely experiencing and savouring emotions and feelings. For its vitality, the liturgy depends on our bringing to it a life of *personal* prayer.

That is what the lives of the saints show — a true life of personal prayer is always centred on and nourished by the liturgy; just as to the liturgy they brought their offering of a life of personal prayer.

At mass, then, behind what is being done and said, we must try to be aware of Christ himself "who was, who is, and who is to come".

Awareness of Ourselves

And while we do this, we must observe ourselves and see just how active our faith and charity is (or whether we are only "feeling") for it is by faith and charity that we unite our lives to the power to save which is present in the mysteries of Christ. Remember that ancient hymn —

I bind this day to me forever, *By power of Faith*, Christ's Incarnation, His baptism in the Jordan River, His death on Cross for my salvation, His bursting from the spiced tomb, His riding up the heavenly way, His coming on the day of doom, I bind unto myself this day.

The Pauses

A pause of half a minute or so after a Scripture reading of a few seconds before a prayer can hardly be designed for a discursive meditation. But they can be used for an act of the presence of Christ, for an act of faith in the words just heard or an act of love towards the person to whom we are about to pray.

They can be used, that is, to check on ourselves and the vitality of our faith and charity we are bringing to the liturgy. For without them the liturgy will be, for us, mere formalism, an empty ritual.

Acting and Doing

It might almost seem that we are putting in a plea for non-participation in the liturgy, suggesting we ignore what is going on and being done and think only of Christ and ourselves.

We are not doing that; but we suggest that we cannot really participate in what is done unless we are aware of the presence and power of Christ which it is the liturgy's business to make present to us.

We suggest that acting and doing is not of much profit to us unless it is done with a living faith and charity.

Foundation of Participation

The Church is a worshipping community and liturgy is a community activity. But here we are concentrating on the *personal* aspects of participation, so now let us consider some of that acting and doing — and this as regards each of us personally.

Man . . .

There can be considered to be in man's nature a duality of soul and body, of spirit and flesh—both in need of redemption.

His Fall . . . His Redemption

Just as in the fall there was a duality of death — "death" to the soul through its loss of divine life, death in the body as the sign and seal of the soul's death; so, in our redemption, then is a duality of restoration to life — the soul restored to live again with the divine life, the body destined to immortality as the sign and seal of the newness of life the soul enjoys.

In the sacrifice which redeemed us there is also this duality Christ on the cross wins our redemption by the completeness of his submission in intellect and will to the mind and will of the Father.

And he manifests, gives sign of and seals this internal sacrifice of his own will by that external sacrifice, his blood shedding and death. The extremity of such a death manifests the utterness of his submission to God.

His Activity

Whatever man does has this double aspect. What is done "in the flesh" both promotes activity in the spirit and is a proclamation of what has transpired in the spirit. To shake someone's hand can not only manifest friendship but can also create a friendly feeling.

Now, the mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, renewed in the post-resurrection, sacramental order. By its effective commemoration of the mysteries of Christ, and by making present the glorified Christ, we have renewed for us that internal sacrifice of Christ; and in the double consecration there is made sacramentally manifest for us the completeness of Christ's submission, first shown by the death on the cross.

Inwardly

Our participation in the mass, therefore, must equally be two-fold internal and external. We participate internally when we obey the Apostle's injunction:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: being made man he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even to death on a cross. Wherefore has God exalted him so that he has become a life-giving spirit to all who obey him."

That is to say, we enter into the mass when, in imitation of Christ, and through his grace, we submit ourselves utterly to God — in mind, through faith, in will through charity.

Outwardly

Like the handshake above, the purpose of our external participation is two-fold. It is not only that an attentive and responsive following of the prayers and actions of the liturgy promote a more attentive and responsive activity of mind and heart through faith and charity; it is also a manifestation of, a witness to the assembly and to the world at large — a witness to them of that spiritual activity which is transpiring within us.

Communion

This is best seen perhaps in the high point of liturgical participation communion in the Eucharist. This communion does not only promote our union with Christ and, through him, with God the Trinity; communion in the Eucharist is also a sign to the assembly and to the world at large that we are in communion with Christ's mystical body on earth, the Church.

Summary

To sum all this in a series of statements:

1. Participation in the liturgy is both exterior and interior.
2. External participation consists in words and actions, in saying and doing and hearing.
3. Internal participation consists in uniting our mind heart to Christ's activity by our faith and charity.
4. We do well to see in our exterior participation a parallel with the external, visible passion and death of Our Lord; and in our interior participation, a parallel with the interior passion and sacrifice of Christ — the utter immolation of his own will to God.
5. External participation is of great importance since it embodies, manifests and actually promotes our interior participation.

And so at Mass

Our efforts are to be directed, of course, to the harmonising of both aspects of our participation, for participation is one undivided thing, just as a man is one undivided thing.

One consequence of the very nature of participation in liturgy is that it is not good enough to attend mass withdrawn into a personal silence, a private edifice of purely personal prayer.

To make the responses clearly, accurately, reverently and heartily; to stand, sit, or kneel, appreciating the spirit which each means to promote and manifest; to attend to the readings and prayers — that is, to listen with the heart as well as to hear with the ears; to care equally for gusto and decorum — all these things, according to our ability, are gauges of our participation.

The Great Amen

Finally, we will briefly consider how the liturgy can be the high point of our exercise of the Christian priesthood which we possess by virtue of our Baptism into Christ.

The Apocalypse calls Christ the Amen, the Witness, the Lamb; and invests him also with a priestly and a royal dignity, so that he is also Priest and King. Made one with Christ, the Christian too becomes all these things.

Just as Christ is the great Amen to the Father's will, so we too must say our "amen" to the will of God if we would be as Christ.

Just as Christ is the Witness to God, so we too are to be witnesses to Christ.

Consider this point of witness: It means in language and in fact martyrdom. It means being ready to be a "sign of contradiction" as Christ was and as his cross was "to the Jews a stumbling block, to the Gentiles mere folly". It is only to the believer that it is the power and wisdom of God.

Christian Witness

So with the Christian: to those who seek, as the Jews sought, a worldly Messiah, we who proclaim Christ and his Cross are a scandal; to the Gentiles who seek a philosophy, we who proclaim Christ and his Cross are mere fools.

We take our stand on our Lord's words: "Do not wonder that the world hates you". Chief among what we learn is, as St. Paul says, "I know nothing but Christ and him crucified".

By baptism we are witnesses to Christ, we share in his "prophetic" role. And we must have no illusions about what this means. "They have stoned the prophets and killed those who were sent to them".

Christ's words, "Blessed are you when men persecute you for justice sake", have not been made void with time. He tells us, "They have hated me, they will hate you"; and St. Paul assures us that "All who would live piously in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution".

Again, Christ himself made his drawing all things to himself dependent on his being lifted up in crucifixion. Unless we do the same, unless we are lifted up, we shall draw no one to Christ. We shall not even be following in his footsteps, for, as St. Peter says, "he suffered, giving you an example". And Christ himself says: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me".

The Mass and Witness

The mass is the renewal of Christ's being lifted up; it is the renewal of his taking up his Cross; it is the renewal of his complete Amen to his Father's will; it is the renewal of the uttermost of his witness to the love of God for men.

How can it be other than the focus and centre of a Christian's life — of the Christian who shares Christ's priesthood and role of Witness. And because we share his priesthood we also share his victimhood.

Victim

We too are the lambs of God, immolated for the sins of the world. Every Christian in Christ is both Priest and Victim; the offering he made is self-immolation. Our participation in the mass is not genuine unless it is truly a self-immolation.

We can do nothing more apostolic than enter to the fullest in the sacrifice of the mass—for it is the renewal of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, by which redemption was won for all men.

We are never more fully a priest than when we are offering the Victim which Christ himself offered—himself and ourselves in him, and with him and through him.

We are never more fully victims, the lambs of God, than when we are offering ourselves completely to God in union with the divine Victim of the altar, the Lamb of God: offering our mind and our understanding through faith, immolating our wills and our hearts to his love through charity.

Priest

In two ways the mass is our sacrifice: we truly offer the Body and Blood of Christ—he is our sacrifice, our offering; it is also the offering of ourselves—we *are* our sacrifice.

You are the grain of God, and Christ the Bread;
You are the grapes of God, and Christ the Wine;
You are the limbs of Christ, and He your Head;
You are the christs of God, in Christ divine.

Great Example

Saint Ignatius of Antioch on his way to martyrdom, to his bearing witness to Christ among the beasts of the Roman amphitheatre, uttered those splendid words which so vividly connect our witness to our mass:

I am the grain of Christ: let me be ground by the teeth of beasts that I may be made pure bread.

And so at Mass

The mass provides us with many occasions for uniting ourselves with our Head in an action in which we are, with him, priest and victim.

There is the bringing of the gifts to the altar and the offering of them to the Father. And what is a gift but a symbol of the desire we have to give ourselves? It is lifted up to God and given back for the use of man. So too the Christian is one who, lifted up to God in mind and heart, spends himself for his fellow men.

There is the reminder to pray for the acceptance by the Father of *our* sacrifice: the sacrifice of Christ he has accepted — his raising him from the dead manifests this and the mass is "that pure oblation which cannot be sullied by any unworthiness or malice in those who offer it"; but our sacrifice, the sacrifice of ourselves, we must ensure is acceptable to God.

There is the reminder, before we receive communion, that we are entering into, union with the Lamb of God that was slain on behalf of the world.

Our "Amen"

On all these occasions, we must be alert and ready to respond in the depths of our being with a great "amen", full of faith and-charity, as Christ is himself the Amen.

Earlier on in these considerations, we said how a life of personal prayer is a necessary part of what we must bring to the mass, and how a right use of the liturgy will nourish best our personal prayer. The same is true of Christian penance.

Daily Living Again

Prayer consists primarily in the will to be united with God and in taking steps to achieve that union. Penance consists primarily in a willingness to be a victim, together with Christ the Lamb of God, for our own sins and the sins of the world.

Hence, penance is not something we can take or leave alone: it is an essential part of our victimhood, and interior and exterior, must be practised according to our capacity.

In one of the eucharistic prayers, the words before the Consecration are, "a death he *freely* accepted". That is to say, the exterior sacrifice of Christ, his sufferings and bloodshed and death were by him willed — they were voluntary.

St. Augustine remarks that the afflictions of this life are the Passion of Christ in us, a willing bearing of them makes us like to Christ in his Passion.

We must accept at the hands of God what he has known from all eternity would befall us. A closer imitation of Christ is achieved when we add to that voluntary penance, as Christ "freely" accepted death.