

LESSON TWENTY-FOURTH.

ON THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

262 Q. When and where are the bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Christ?

A. The bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ at the consecration in the Mass.

263 Q. What is the Mass?

A. The Mass is the unbloody sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ.

THE Holy Sacrifice is called Mass probably from the words the priest says at the end when he turns to the people and says, "Ite Missa est;" that is, when he tells them the Holy Sacrifice is over.

* 264 Q. What is a sacrifice?

A. A sacrifice is the offering of an object by a priest to God alone, and the consuming of it to acknowledge that He is the Creator and Lord of all things.

"Sacrifice." From the very earliest history of man we find people—for example, Abel, Noe, etc.—offering up sacrifice to God; that is, taking something and offering it to God, and then destroying it to show that they believed God to be the Master of life and death, and the Supreme Lord of all things. These offerings were sometimes plants or fruits, but most frequently animals.

When men lost the knowledge of the true God and began to worship idols of wood and stone, they began or continued to offer sacrifice to these false gods. Very often, too, they sacrificed human beings to please, as they imagined, these gods. They believed there was a god for everything—a god for the ocean, a god for thunder, a god for wind, for war, etc.;

and when anything happened that frightened or injured the people, they believed that some of these gods were offended, and offered up sacrifice to pacify them. They had a temple in Rome called the Pantheon, or temple of all the gods, and here they kept the idols of all the gods they could think of or know. At Athens, they were afraid of neglecting any god to whom they might thus give offence, and so they had an altar for the unknown god. When St. Paul came to preach, he saw this altar to the unknown god, and told them that was the God he came to preach about (Acts of the Apostles xvii.). He preached to them the existence of the true God, and showed them that there is only one God and not many gods.

They did not have these idols of wood and stone in their temples for the same reason that we have images in our churches, because they believed that the idols were really gods, and offered sacrifice to them, whereas we know that our images are the works of men. Near the city of Jerusalem there was a great idol named Molech, to which parents offered their infants in sacrifice. We know, too, from the history of this country that the Indians used to send a beautiful young girl in a white canoe over the falls of Niagara every year, as a sacrifice offered to the god of the falls. Even yet human sacrifices are offered up on savage islands. Sometimes certain animals were selected to be heathen gods. The people who worship idols, animals, or other things of that kind as gods are called pagans, idolaters, or heathens.

The Israelites, who worshipped the true God and offered Him sacrifice, because He made known to them by revelation that they should do so, had four kinds of sacrifice. They offered one for sin, another in thanksgiving for benefits received, another as an act of worship, and another to beg God's blessing. It is just for these four ends or objects we offer up the one Christian sacrifice of the holy Mass. In the beginning the head of the family offered sacrifice,—as Noe did when he came out of the ark,—but after God gave His laws to Moses He appointed priests to offer up the sacrifices. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first priest appointed, and after

him his descendants were priests. When Our Lord came and instituted a new sacrifice He established the priesthood of the New Law, and appointed His own priests, namely, the apostles, with St. Peter as their chief, and after them their lawfully appointed successors, the bishops of the world, with the Pope as their chief. The sacrifices of the Old Law were figures of the sacrifice of the New Law, and were to cease at its institution; and when the ancient sacrifices ceased the ancient priesthood was at an end.

265 Q. Is the Mass the same sacrifice as that of the cross?

A. The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross.

But how is the Mass a sacrifice? It is a sacrifice because at the Mass the body and blood of Our Lord are offered to His heavenly Father at the consecration, and afterwards consumed by the priest. In offering up the body and blood of Our Lord the bread and wine are consecrated separately, and kept separate on the altar at Mass to signify their separation at Our Lord's death in the sacrifice of the cross, when His sacred blood flowed from His body. The Holy Eucharist is also a sacrament, because it has the three things necessary to constitute a sacrament; namely, (1) The outward sign—that is, the appearance of bread and wine. (2) The inward grace; for it is Jesus Christ Himself, the Author and Dispenser of all graces. (3) It was instituted by Our Lord.

The Holy Eucharist is therefore both a sacrifice and a sacrament. It is a sacrifice when offered at Mass, and a sacrament when we receive it and when it is reserved in the tabernacle.

*** 266 Q.** How is the Mass the same sacrifice as that of the cross?

A. The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross because the offering and the priest are the same—Christ Our Blessed Lord: and the ends for which the sacrifice of the Mass is offered are the same as those of the sacrifice of the cross.

On the cross the offering was the body and blood of Our Lord; the one who offered it was Our Lord; the reason for which He offered it was that He might atone for sin; the one to whom He offered it was His heavenly Father. Now, at Mass it is the same. The object offered is Our Lord's body and blood, the one offering is Our Lord Himself, through the priest; it is offered for sin, and it is offered to the heavenly Father. All things are the same, except that the blood of Our Lord is not shed, and Our Lord does not die again.

* 267 Q. What are the ends for which the sacrifice of the cross was offered?

A. The ends for which the sacrifice of the cross was offered were: first, to honor and glorify God; second, to thank Him for all the graces bestowed on the whole world; third, to satisfy God's justice for the sins of men; fourth, to obtain all graces and blessings.

* 268 Q. Is there any difference between the sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice of the Mass?

A. Yes; the manner in which the sacrifice is offered is different. On the cross Christ really shed His blood and was really slain; in the Mass there is no real shedding of blood nor real death, because Christ can die no more; but the sacrifice of the Mass, through the separate consecration of the bread and the wine, represents His death on the cross.

269 Q. How should we assist at Mass?

A. We should assist at Mass with great interior recollection and piety and with every outward mark of respect and devotion.

If you were admitted into the presence of a king or of the Holy Father you would be careful not to show any indifference or disrespect in his presence. You would not be guilty of looking around or of talking idly to those near you. Your eyes would be constantly fixed on the great person present. So should you be at Mass, for there you are admitted into the presence of the King of kings, our

divine Lord. Your whole attention, therefore, should be reverently given to Him, and to no other. How displeasing it must be to Him to have some in His presence who care so little for Him and who insult Him without thought or regard! If we acted in the presence of any prince as we sometimes act in the presence of Our Lord on the altar, we should be turned out of his house, with orders not to come again. But Our Lord suffers all patiently and meekly, though He will not allow any of this disrespect to go unpunished in this world or in the next. Knowing this, some holy persons offer up their prayers and holy Communions in reparation for these insults, and try to atone for all the insults offered to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. They have united in a holy society for this purpose, called the Apostleship of Prayer, or League of the Sacred Heart, now established in many parishes. If you do not belong to such a society, you should make such an offering yourself privately.

In the Old Law the people brought to the temple whatever they wished the priests to offer up for them—sometimes a lamb, sometimes a dove, sometimes fruit, etc. The offering or sacrifice was theirs, and they offered it up by the hands of the priests. In the early ages of the Church the Christians brought to the priests the bread and wine to be consecrated and offered up at Mass. Now as the bread and wine used at the Mass must be of a particular kind, namely, wheaten bread and wine of the grape, there was some danger of the people not bringing the proper kind: so instead of the people bringing these things themselves, the priests began to buy them, and the people gave him money for his own support; and thus you have the origin of offering money to the priest for celebrating Mass for your intention. The money is not to pay for the Mass, because you could not buy any sacred thing without committing sin. The priest may use the money also for the candles burned, the vestments and sacred vessels, etc., used at the Mass. To buy a holy thing for money is the sin of simony,—so called after Simon, a magician, who tried to bribe the apostles to give him Confirmation when he was un-

worthy of it. To buy religious articles before they are blessed is not simony, nor even after they are blessed, if you pay only for the material of which they are made; but if you tried to buy the blessing, it would be simony. When the holy Mass is offered, the fruits or benefits of it are divided into four classes. The first benefit comes to the priest who celebrates the Mass; the second, to the one for whom he offers the Mass; the third benefit to those who are present at it; and the fourth to all the faithful throughout the world.

* 270 Q. Which is the best manner of hearing Mass?

A. The best manner of hearing Mass is to offer it to God with the priest for the same purpose for which it is said, to meditate on Christ's sufferings and death, and to go to holy Communion.

That is, to offer it up for whatever intention the priest is offering it—for the dead, for the conversion of sinners, for the good of others, etc.; but especially for the four ends of which I have already spoken—to worship God, thank Him, etc. “Christ's death,” of which it reminds us. “Holy Communion,” if we are in a state of grace, and have prepared to receive Communion.

You should go to holy Communion as often as your confessor will allow you, and you should try every day to make yourself more worthy of that great sacrament. Think of it! To receive your God and Saviour into your soul, and to be united with Him, as the word *communion* means! The early Christians used to go to Communion very frequently. The Church requires us to go to holy Communion at least once a year, but we should not be satisfied with doing merely what is necessary to avoid mortal sin. Do we try to keep away from persons we love? Then if we really love Our Lord should we not desire to receive Him? All good Catholics should go to holy Communion at least once a month, if possible. Persons wishing to lead truly holy lives should go to Communion every week, if their confessor thinks them worthy and will allow them to go.

When we cannot go really to Communion we can merit God's grace by making a spiritual Communion. What is a spiritual Communion? It is an earnest desire to receive Communion. You prepare yourself as if you were really going to Communion; you try to imagine yourself going up, receiving the Blessed Sacrament, and returning to your place. Then you thank God for all His blessings to you as you would have done had you received. This is an act of devotion, and one very pleasing to God, as many holy writers tell us.

I cannot leave this lesson on the Holy Eucharist without telling you something of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, now so universally practised and so closely connected with the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. The Church grants many indulgences, and Our Lord Himself promises many rewards to those who honor the Sacred Heart. But what do we mean by the Sacred Heart? We mean the real natural heart of Our Lord, to which His divinity is united as it is to His whole body. But why do we adore this real, natural heart of Our Lord? We adore it because love is said to be in the heart, and we wish to return Our Lord love and gratitude for the great love He has shown to us in dying for us, and in instituting the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, by which He can remain with us in His sacred humanity. When Our Lord appeared to Blessed Margaret Mary He said: "Behold this Heart, that has loved men so ardently, and is so little loved in return." The first Friday of every month and the whole month of June are dedicated to the Sacred Heart.