

Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

XIX—THE MASS FULFILLS A FOUR-FOLD DUTY.

The Mass has a double blessing: not only does it bring about that intimate association with Christ detailed in the preceding chapter, but through it it enables us to fulfil certain essential duties towards God which we could not hope to fulfil by our own unaided powers. We have a fourfold duty—to give God glory and praise, to thank Him for His benefits, to make atonement to Him for our sins, and to win His graces for our needs. Merely to enumerate these is to show that we could never fulfil them if our weak efforts were not joined, as they are joined, to the infinite efforts of the Mass.

Our first duty is to give God glory and praise. The angels give this glory, but the rest of creation must give it too:

"Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise!"

In response to this command, every creature essays this duty: the heavens tell the glory of God, and the firmament declares the work of His hands; the animals and the song-birds, the yellow sunlight and the flowers in the grass, the shining stars and the invisible ether, all proclaim in one harmonious voice the praise of their Creator. Men also have attempted this in every generation since time began: they would raise up altars, sprinkle them with the blood of goats and oxen, and, consuming the victims with cleansing fire, would send their smoke and their savor to the throne of Divine Majesty. But what were all these when compared with the homage due to the Infinite Majesty? Vain were it for men to raise up altars and sprinkle them with the blood of finite victims, vain for Jubal to sweep his lyre, and Miriam to raise her tuneful voice in songs of praise. Only He could give adequate homage to God to Whom God had said: "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." In the Sacrifice of the Mass Christ unites Himself with us in performing this first and most necessary act of religion, so that creation is made to witness the most marvellous of all prodigies—man, because he is united to Christ, offering to God a homage that is human and yet infinite, man offering to God God Himself. This is why one Mass gives more glory to God than all the rest of creation: than the sun with its life and light, than the rolling ocean with its harmony, than the saints on earth with their hymns of praise, than the angels with their ceaseless adoration. The Mass offered with Christ pleases God's Majesty as nothing else can: "By Him, and with Him, and in Him, is to Thee, God the Father Almighty, in the unity of the Holy Ghost all honor and glory."

Our second duty is to thank God for His gifts and mercies. These are beyond number, and our poor thanks would be but a poor return; but we offer the Mass, and Heaven witnesses the supreme act of thanksgiving, the most perfect and pleasing that could be rendered to God. From the very beginning

the Mass has been called a Eucharistic Sacrifice, that is, a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving. Our Lord Himself gave it such a character on the first Holy Thursday, and in imitation of Him, the priest, before he proceeds to the consecration, sings a hymn of thanksgiving:

"It is truly meet and just, right and available to salvation, that we should always, and in all places, give thanks to Thee, O holy Lord Father Almighty, eternal God, through Christ our Lord."

It is through Christ the gifts of the Father have come to us, through Him and with Him our gratitude ascends.

Our third duty is to appease God's anger and atone for our sins against Him. We know what these sins have been. We, God's champions, sent to fight the battle of grace against Satan and his hordes, have so often proved recreant in the fight, have so often deserted the standard of the Cross and gone over to the black flag of Satan, so often repudiated our heritage of Heaven and our fellowship with light. We, who had angels for our kin and saints to encourage us, have stooped down to the level of the brute, making beasts our kindred; now we look up from our wretchedness only to behold an angry sky and the hand of outraged majesty lifted up against us, and, trembling for our fate, we seek by atonement to turn away that uplifted hand. But how can we atone? What power have we that can bear proportion to the Majesty we have flouted? The answer is found in the daily Mass, whose chief purpose is to make atonement for sin; we ascend the altar, take into our hands the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world, lift Him up before the gaze of the Heavenly Father, Who turns His eyes from men's enormities to look upon the bleeding wounds. Once more He sees the drops of blood falling upon poor sinners, and He holds back the arm of His vengeance, awaiting the repentance of sinful man.

Our fourth duty is to win from God every needful grace and blessing. How manifold our needs are we need not go far to seek. Well, a Catholic at Mass should never be afraid to ask for any grace, for the Mass is Christ making intercession for us. It is related in the Scriptures that when Isaac had received the fat kids from the hands of Jacob, he said: "Come near and kiss me, my son!" And as Jacob came near, a sweet fragrance arose from his garments, and Isaac compared him to a field full of sweet odors; and he blessed him and prayed that he might be filled with the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth. The Church, our Mother, fairer than Rachel, clothes us in the sweet-smelling garments of grace, and leading us to the altar bows down with us and whispers the holiest of all prayers, bearing a request which, unlimited though it is,

will not go unheard since it is the request of Christ also:—

"Humbly we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that Thou wouldst command these offerings to be borne by the hands of Thy holy angel to Thy altar on high, in sight of Thy Divine Majesty; in order that as many of us as by participation at this altar, shall have received the most sacred Body and Blood of Thy Son, may be filled with every celestial blessing and grace."

This blessing and this grace are better than the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth. To sum up—the Mass gives adequate glory, praise, thanksgiving to God; it makes the necessary atonement for sin, and purchases unlimited grace, and preserves in the midst of a corrupt world the sweet odor of the Lamb.

Should we not love the Holy Mass! Should we not so arrange our household affairs that some member of the family might assist at it daily in the name of the family, and gaze upon the five wounds from which all blessings flow! Let this member bring back to home a mystic vial filled with the precious Blood that is outpoured in the Mass, and mark the door post as a sign for the avenging angel to pass by and leave the home unharmed. Few homes are left unharmed to-day. Another angel will come in God's good time, the Angel of Death, to call those who are marked with the sign of faith, that they may rest in peace. They will go, but the Mass will still continue, and in its most sacred part the priest will say: "To these and to all that rest in Christ, grant, we beseech Thee, a place of refreshment, light, and peace. The prayer of the priest, because it is the prayer of Christ, will be heard for its reverence, the gates of Purgatory will fly open, and the happy souls will fly to the dear feet of the Lamb Who was slain to save them; and, resting there, they will cry: "Blessed are they who are called to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

EMPTY HANDS.

How can I go with empty hands
To meet my King;
These jewels rare, from many lands,
I cannot bring.

Oh, priceless Time, in pleasure spent,
I now deplore;
Oh, would my steps that I had bent
To Heaven's door.

I feel the chill of eventide,
The light so dim;
There's naught for me that does abide
To offer Him.

Yet cometh one, all sacredly,
That did affix
To empty hands, so tenderly,
The Crucifix.

All earthly gains, devoid of Thee,
Are bitter loss;
Oh, sweet the recompense, if we,
But clasp the Cross.

—M. E. BEATON.