

children. In this Paschal blessing there is no distinction of rich and poor; all are equally ready to welcome the clergy. Indeed on such a day the native Roman wants the priest to bless even the stock in the shops, and I have sometimes seen the priest on such occasions loudly but respectfully invited by the Catholic proprietor of a billiard saloon to enter and bless his stock-in-trade. It is all part of the tradition of Catholicism in social life, a tradition whose usages persist even though, as sometimes happens, in individual cases the practice of Catholicism is laid aside. Certainly during many years' residence in Rome I have never known of a case where the priest visiting the houses on Holy Saturday has been received with anything but courtesy and respect; even if perchance he should seek admission to the home of a non-Christian he is never rudely turned away but is courteously informed that the residents are not *cristiani*. Needless to say, it is a very heavy day for the priests. Each parish gets external assistance for the work. I know one parish which is usually looked after by a pastor and three assistants; on Holy Saturday the auxiliary-priests number generally between twenty and thirty. But it is absolutely necessary from the practical aspect of parochial life, for the ordinary Roman would almost as soon deny his faith outright as permit the pastor to disregard his claim to have his goods and chattels together with all his household blessed on the Saturday in Holy Week.

Another very distinctive Roman custom, which indeed has left its mark in the Roman Missal, is what is known here as the custom of the Lenten stations. The history of these Roman stations is bound up with the liturgical history of Lent itself. Just as the special prayers, which were accustomed by the Early Christians on the night of Holy Saturday in devout vigil for the Feast of the Lord's Resurrection, became in course of time a contributory factor towards the substitution of the Christian Sunday for the Sabbath of the Synagogue, so also the two weekly fast days of Wednesday and Friday come down to us from Apostolic times as the foundation of the Lenten liturgy. The clearest, but not the earliest, indication of the Stations is to be found in the writings of Tertullian, who wrote between the second and third centuries; he was born at Carthage in or about the year 160 and he died either in the 'twenties or 'thirties of the subsequent century. In his writings the *Statio* is used to imply special fast-days in which the Christian rose early, in which he had definite prayers for the three liturgical divisions of the day known as Terce, Sext, and None, and in the evening of which Holy Mass was offered. It may be remarked, by way of parenthesis, that Terce was the period from six o'clock in the morning till nine, Sext the period from nine o'clock till twelve, and None the period from twelve o'clock till three in the afternoon. Roughly speaking, the station-days according to Tertullian were always Wednesdays and Fridays and were the days on which by special fastings and prayers the early Christians prepared for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It would seem that these special liturgical preparations go back even farther than his day and indeed they are to be traced even to Apostolic times. Tertullian's list of customs observed by Apostolic tradition is famous: the baptismal renunciations with which we are familiar at missions, the strict fasting in preparation for receiving Holy Communion, offerings of Masses for the dead on their anniversaries, the absence of all fasting on the Lord's Day, the anxiety as to the falling to the ground of any particle of the Blessed Eucharist, the Christian habit of continually making the sign of the Cross throughout the ordinary day, all these and many more such customs associated with the practice of our Faith may be traced through Tertullian back to those who heard the actual words of the Divine Master as He walked the ways of men in the days of His Flesh.

The idea of a Lenten period of penance in preparation for Easter finds its earliest origin in regulation concerning the Catechumens or candidates for reception into the Church. In the early days of Christianity at Rome the aspirants for enrolment in the ranks of the Christians were baptised on the night preceding the feast of the Saviour's Resurrection; for this baptism Catechumens prepared themselves by several days' of prayer and fasting. At first the rule at Rome was that such a preparatory period of penance and prayer lasted one week. In the middle of the third century this period was lengthened to three weeks,

the reason of the change being not quite clear to students of the history of liturgy. Finally the fact that Our Saviour fasted forty days' in the desert determined that Christian sentiment that found its expression at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, when it was decreed that Lent should be a period of forty days' penance. From that date there developed the notion of Lent that dominated the Christian world for many centuries, the notion in accordance with which those forty days became a time in which none but the most essential affairs were attended to and in which the courts and theatres and places of recreation were all closed that men might be free to give themselves to that period of penitential preparation for the spiritual re-birth that should come to every Christian with the liturgical commemoration of the resurrection of the Lord.

Our own day has witnessed far-reaching mitigations in the matter of the Lenten fast. However it is not without interest to remark that the rigid Lent that we were taught by our parents or grandparents in Ireland was very mild compared with the fasts observed by the early Christians here in Rome. The fast, as I have already observed, was held on the station-days. On those days the Christian rose very early, attended to his ordinary occupations throughout the day, but did not break his fast till after sunset. Towards the end of None, that is to say towards three o'clock in the afternoon, as many as possible of the clergy and the laity repaired to a Basilica adjacent to what was known as a station-church and there awaited the arrival of the Pope and his ministers who brought the sacred vessels for the Holy Sacrifice. During this period of waiting as well as during the subsequent prayers the faithful remained standing (*stantes*); whence, as is seen in the modern French word *stationner*, to stand, the whole ceremony eventually obtained in popular usage the name *station*. When the Pope arrived the whole body of clergy and faithful, chanting the Litanies, moved off in the direction of the particular church where it was intended to offer the Mass. This church varied from day to day but it was always, or nearly always, the tomb of a martyr. In every case the Holy Sacrifice closed the day of prayer; and sometimes now when I am coming home across the city at eventide I think of how long ago the whole Christian family here in Rome used to offer their station-days as days of prayer and mortification and were rewarded at the close of their penitential day by the Body and Blood of Him Who is Eternal Life. The evening Mass is said no more, but the stations remain; and even to the present day it is the custom that all should stand during the chanting of the Litanies and the saying of the station prayers.

The discipline of the Catechumens prescribed that in the beginning of Lent the names of the candidates for Baptism should be given to the Bishop. This was usually done on the first Sunday in Lent, and at the station on the following Wednesday afternoon the candidates were examined as to character and knowledge. Those who were judged worthy were drawn up in two lines in the station-church before the altar, the men and boys on one side, and the women and girls on the other. A priest passed down the lines and with the imposition of his hands on their heads recited a short form of exorcism whereby unclean spirits were driven forth from them. He also placed a little salt on the lips of each candidate. After this the Catechumens withdrew from the church but were recalled after the reading of the first prayer of the Mass; they knelt before the altar while their sponsors, at the word *Signate illos*, marked the sign of the Cross on their foreheads. This ceremony finished the first scrutiny for the aspirants for admission into the Church, and they were thereupon dismissed. Towards the end of the Mass the Bishop made known to the faithful the date of the next scrutiny; which, by the way, had a special name—*in aurium aperitio*—because on that second day the ears of the Catechumens were opened for the first time to the hearing of the Gospels. The persistence of this day's ceremonies is seen in the actual rite of Baptism in the Church to-day, when the priest touches the ears of the child with his thumb moistened with saliva, as he says the ritual words *Epheta, quod est adaperire*, etc. The second day's examination of the Catechumens ended with the reading of the Credo. Finally they received the Sacrament of Baptism on the night of the vigil of the Feast of the Resurrection. But the baptismal ceremonies were not finished even on Easter