

## PASTORAL SECTION

### HOMILETICS

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SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY (Feb. 2)

**“With most of them God was not well pleased”. (Epistle.)**

St. Paul tells us in today's Epistle that the just people of God, the Israelites, failed to please God because they did not remember the lesson behind God's gifts. It would be tragic if the same were true of us, if we used God's benefits, the Mass and the Sacraments, without remembering the kernel of Christianity.

Suppose a student were told at the beginning of the school year that questions would be asked in the exams, how lucky he would consider himself, how sure he would be to study the answers thoroughly. Our position, regarding the essence of Christianity, is exactly that of such a fortunate student.

Our life is a testing, a time of trial. And at the end of it, an exam has to be taken. But, in His Infinite Mercy, God has told us that questions will be asked. “When you saw the hungry, did you give Me food? When I was naked, sick, in prison, did you serve Me? The works of mercy will be the subject matter of our exam. They will enable God to see if we truly loved Him by serving Him in our neighbor. “As often as you did it to one of these little ones, you did it to Me.” (Mt. 25). “By this shall all men know that you are My disciple, if you have love one for another.”

It must be said quite bluntly: either a Christian concerns himself in the plight of the poor, and with equal energy gives himself to the needs of each individual neighbor, or he is no follower of Christ. This is the lesson of the Gospel, and this will be the clear lesson of the upcoming end (for our lifetime) final form of Mass. It will be impossible, with the new form of Mass, to separate worship of God from service (for God's sake) of our fellow men.

The new Mass will give the offertory procession the prestige and the meaning it might have. It will be a feature of every Mass. It will make crystal clear that worship of God is impossible without concern for our brothers, especially the needy.

The greatest gift ever offered to God was Christ's sacrifice. It was the perfect gift to God, offered by the only Priest fully acceptable to Him. It was at the same time the greatest expression ever of love for mankind. "Greater love than this no man has that a man lay down his life for his friends."

From earliest time, Christians imitated this example in the offertory procession. They were well aware that the only perfect offering was Christ's. But they also knew that this gave them no permission to be passive. So, they brought gifts — not just bread and wine, but offerings for Church upkeep, and for the needs of the poor. As time went on and livelihoods became diversified, money took the place of these gifts. Admittedly, it's hard to see anything sacred in money. But, we must see the collection in this light — an offering to God and an expression of love towards our neighbor.

The collection is a religious act and should be seen as such. The whole meaning of this will be revealed in an offertory procession that will include our contribution, both money and gifts for the poor, along with the bread and wine to be consecrated. The gifts—food and drink representing our life and offering for the poor and church upkeep, will recall two important truths often forgotten today. First, that adoration of God is the primary purpose of creation. If we neglect this, the first and greatest commandment, anything we do for others is not Christian charity, it is not loving as Christ loved. If we ignore our Father, we'll never realize that we are brothers. The second truth brought home to us by a procession in which our offering for the poor is a part put this way by St. John: "This commandment we have from God, that he who loves God love also his brother."

The offertory procession will make visible the double aspect of charity—love of God and love of neighbor. Only love of God prepares us for true love of our neighbor. Each is not existent without the other. Taking an active part here, seeing our contribution for what it is — a cheerful act of worship—will make it impossible to think of Mass as something strictly between ourselves and God; it will result in a real concern for our less fortunate brothers.

In Communist East Germany, Catholic Schools and newspapers are burned! No teaching of religion is possible, Mass goers are discriminated against. It is only from the Mass that Christians can realize that is essential and fundamental. But, the people are tenaciously holding their faith. The offertory procession there has come to be of capital importance. Each Mass goer places

his own host in the ciborium and his offering (food, clothing or money) in their respective baskets before Mass begins. All stand to show their involvement as their host and their offerings are carried to the Altar. Says the braw: Bishop Spuelbech: "I consider the offertory procession a decisive act in the Mass...." We can look forward to it shortly, and please God, we also will learn from it that as is our Mass, so is our life, that unless we learn concern for others from the Mass, our offering is not just incompatible, it is meaningless.

### SEXAGESIMA (Feb. 9)

Distribution of roles at Mass means involvement in Apostolate. Many experts are trying to find the most important or significant statement of the Recent Council. One sentence is so sweeping and so striking that it deserves our attention. Indeed, it is so strong that it *demand*s our attention. It concerns the updating of the Mass, soon to be introduced in its final form. The Council said that "this is the source from which *all power for renewal flows*." Let's consider an aspect of the New Mass—the dividing up of roles, the assigning to each participant of his proper function.

Over the years we've grown used to a quite abnormal situation, where the priest at the Altar fulfilled functions that belonged rather to a layman, like reading the Scripture lessons; or to the whole congregation, where he recited parts that ought to be sung by everyone, for instance, the Introit, Gradual, and Alleluia, the Offertory verse, the Communion antiphon. Sometimes, he even did things proper to a server, like pouring the water over his own fingers at the Lavabo.

Maybe, as a result of seeing the priest as a sort of jack-of-all-trades, we unconsciously got the impression that all the Church's work, including the Apostolate, was the function of the priest alone. Inactive at Mass, we adopted an inactive attitude on all Church fronts. "Leave it to the priest" became our unspoken Motto. To remove this disastrous impression, recent reforms have reassigned some roles where they belong. So we now pray some responses, and sing some hymns. We've grown more or less used to hearing parts of the Mass read or sung by others, while the presiding priest listens, along with the congregation. Perhaps we've come to realize that where the priest does do everything at Mass, this is by way of an altogether special exception, and is anything but ideal.

With the new Mass, or Normative Mass, all that will go forever. Instead of the priest reading the Introit after preparatory prayers, (something like leaving a room in order to enter again and welcome yourself) Mass will begin with all of us singing an entrance hymn. Likewise, the readings from

the Old and New Testaments will be assigned to a layman, with Celebrant and people listening. Instead of a Gradual read by an individual, some verses from the book of Psalms (the very prayer book used by Our Lord and His Mother) will be sung by all of us. Community singing also for the Alleluia before the Gospel, and accompanying the Offertory Procession. And at Communion time, our union with Our Lord and one another in Our Lord will be emphasized by community singing during communion and not by the reading of a verse after Communion is over. If we are at birthday party, no one would think of reciting "Happy Birthday" to you. It's meant to be sung, so we sing it.

The results of this sharing of roles will be many. We'll become aware of the fact that we are a family, the Family of God—that Mass is a family celebration in which each has a part. Those assisting in the sanctuary (and their role will include preparing the chalice, mixing the wine and water, and purifying the vessels after Communion) will free the priest from minor duties which should not really be his. The importance of what he *does* do officially—the praying of the Community Prayers in the name of all, and the Canon, will be highlighted. There's a lot more to this than just relieving the monotony, or recapturing attention, by a change of voice.

The honor of serving God in this special way quickly and surely brings servers of Christ nearer to God: If anyone serves Me, My Father will honor him. (John 12.24). Deeper involvement in works of zeal will naturally follow. How many priests admit that their thoughts were first attracted to the priesthood when they served Mass.

We can look forward to this happening to all of us, not just readers and servers, once the public and social nature of Mass is so clearly emphasized that can't be missed. And that day is just round the corner! There'll be a challenge, yes, we'll have to shake off the last vestiges of any past attitude we might have had that Mass is the priest's business.

Then we'll realize something of vital importance, something that's being stressed since the Council as may be never before in the Church's history,—the role of the layman. Our share, as baptized and confirmed Christians, in the Priesthood of Christ, is not just something we exercise at Mass—our participation in Christ's sacrifice is only one expression of it. We are priests all the time—we share in the whole of His mediation, in all aspects of His concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of others.

We carry Him from Mass to places where a priest (in Mass vestments or without) could never go, where an ordained priest could never have the impact we can have. We carry Him to our daily occupations, we radiate Him to those with whom we work, we carry Him to our places of recreation, christ-

ianizing them, sanctifying them. It would be unthinkable that we regard this as the exclusive work of the priest, especially when we come to see that each of us has our own proper function at Mass.

If we learn this (and we surely will) then the fire that Christ came on earth to kindle will blaze and spread, and our service of God in Mass will overflow into selfless service of Christ in our fellow-men.

### QUINQUAGESIMA (Feb. 16)

#### **"The greatest of these is love." (Epistle)**

I have mentioned several times the adoption of the Mass that we can expect before the end of 1969. Today let's consider the new formulas of main prayer of the Mass. These are with us here, it's only a matter of awaiting the translation. As you know, there are now 3 versions of this prayer, besides the old one which has been unchanged for 1500 years. The first change made in all that time was made by Pope John XXIII when he inserted the name of St. Joseph in the list of Saints. In fact we called it the *Canon* or unchangeable part. A better name would be *Anaphora*, or *Table prayer*.

As we know, the Mass is a sacrificial meal—not to satisfy our appetite, but a banquet, a family celebration. We are quite familiar with such banquets—to honor newlyweds or jubilarians, or a departing friend. The important thing is not the eating that may take up only a short time at a banquet. What really matters, what makes a banquet, is the expression of love for the one honoured, the speeches made, the songs sung, the drinking of toast to one another's health. These determine the very character of a banquet.

Yes, the words spoken or the type of songs sung tells what the banquet is for. The menu could very well be the same, but we'll soon discover just by listening what the occasion celebrated is. If, for instance, a speech begins: "Honoured guest, on the eve of your departure, we wish you well" — we know it is a farewell banquet. And, so on, whether the banquet marks an anniversary, a jubilee, a wedding, the 9th day after a death.

At the heart of Mass, we do what Jesus did at the Last Supper. The occasion was a ritual banquet of remembrance — recalling God's wonderful dealings with His people. Jesus took bread, said over it a table prayer of thanks and praise to His Father, divided and distributed the bread, said: "Take this and eat it, this is my Body which shall be delivered for you," and added "Do this for a remembrance of Me." He did the same with the wine.

The anaphora, or table prayer at Mass, does all these things. It begins at the preface with a summons to thanksgiving. "Lift up your hearts, Let us thank the Lord our God. When you hear the new prefaces, you will be thrilled, because they include many aspects of God's goodness, many motives for thanksgiving. This is the precise reason for new formulas — no single one could possibly give all the aspects of Redemption. Then the narration of what Jesus did at the Last Supper, which includes the Consecration. This is, of course, infinitely more than a mere narration. This is a *sacrament*, and effects what it re-enacts. Then, with Christ's sacrifice re-presented, we recall all God did and is doing, and will do for us in and through Christ. The breaking of the Host and actual eating happens after the Tableprayer. The conclusion of the Anaphora is the little elevation which we all enthusiastically answer Amen.

At a banquet, clapping, applause and acclamations are a regular feature. Until now, it was only by joining in the Sanctus and the concluding Amen that we expressed our share in the table prayer said in the name of us all. In the new Anaphoras, there will be more joining in. For instance, after the Consecration, priest and people will together sing this. "Your death, O Lord, we commemorate. Amen. Your glory as our Risen Lord now we celebrate. Amen. Your return as Lord in glory together we await. Amen." The lively and beautiful melody will be a real expression of joy, the joy of Easter. The Lord is here, we've found Him again. And after joining our offering with His, and finally achieving Communion with Him, will go like Magdalene, to announce Him to others, to serve Him unselfishly in others.

This particularly is emphasized by the new formulas for the Table-prayer. For instance, this petition: Make us who are nourished by the Body of Your Son and filled with the Holy Spirit become one body and one spirit—Christ. This petition is to be emphasized by an acclamation from us and these reminders that we receive the body of Christ to become the Body of Christ are most timely. All we are one body, all who partake of one bread.

Church and civil rulers have both declared that this year should be a year of social awareness. If we don't get it from the Mass, we'll never get it. And it's Christianity. This is My Commandment; by this shall all men know that you are My disciples. . . . If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (Jn. 3:17) From the Mass, more so now than ever since it's spelled out so clearly in the very heart of the Mass, at a part of the table-prayer where we will applaud, we will learn, like Christ, "to have compassion on the crowd" (Mt. 8:2) To show our love, "not by having phrases on our lips, but the rest of action."

No wonder that Pope Paul ended his encyclical on the great Social Problem telling us that union with the Sacrifice of our Saviour will build up an awareness that we must be one in genuine Christian love and concern, if we're to survive.

### SUNDAY OF LENT (Feb. 23)

Lent is a Community Preparation for Easter.

Lent is with us again, and with it the realization that we are preparing to celebrate the great mysteries of our Redemption — the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Many people, thanks be to God, take Lent seriously. Many realize that it is the time for preparation. Many recognize that this is a time of repentance and self-denial. So, you will find many at weekday Mass. You will find many more who are anxious to approach Christ in the Sacrament of Repentance to be ready when Holy Week and Easter come. Many will think lovingly of the Passion of Our Saviour. They will make the Stations of the Cross each day.

An air of expectancy is about, everyone is preparing for something most important. Please God, many of you will be here each day, to learn from the readings of Lent just what we're preparing for.

In the early Church, Lent was a time of preparation for Baptism. Candidates for baptism were baptized at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night. And so, for the early Christians, during these 40 days there was a great sense of anticipation. Baptism would see new members added to the Body of Christ. They were to be welcomed into the Church. People who had been taking long instructions in the Christian Faith eagerly intensified their preparation as the day of days—the day of their Baptism—drew nearer. They anticipated it, and their friends also. At the Easter Vigil, they would become Children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ and their already baptized friends—the most important event in their lives.

Today we see something like this in the preparation cursillistas make for the entrance of their sponsored candidate into a cursillo. They look forward to the day when the candidate can enjoy the happiness they enjoyed in the Cursillo. They prepare for his entry by penance, securing the penances of others. Other cursillistas are invited to do penance for the candidate. The whole thing has a community aspect to it, becomes a family affair. It is like the preparation for the arrival of a new member in a family.

Nowadays, we are not preparing for baptism, but for the renewal of our baptismal promises on Holy Saturday Night. We are looking forward, not in welcoming new members, but to a solemn renewal of our own mem-

bership. And we do this preparation not in isolation, but as a community. We prepare ourselves, and we do our preparation with a view to helping others, that others might find it easier to live up to their Baptism.

We must, during Lent, intensify our consciousness of unity, each with the others. On Holy Saturday Night, as children of our common wonderful Father, as brothers and sisters, we'll stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, and publicly renew our baptismal vows. Not just ourselves in selfish isolation, but together with the other members of God's Family. It's to be a family affair, prepared for by the Family.

Each one of us needs the assistance of others. Not just the support of the good example and encouragement of others, but the vital support of their being one with us, living branches in the Vine which is Christ.

Sin is much more than breaking rules, even God's rules. Sin is an intensely dreadful tragedy, a disaster, a catastrophe. It is a man's deliberately cutting himself off from the God Who loves him, and a deliberately turning his back on the Christian family in which he found life and love. Sin does not just harm the sinner, it harms the whole Christian Family. Each Christian has his own part in the Church. He counts on support from the rest of God's family, and they likewise count on him. Baptism united us in Christ. A serious sin, no matter how secret, ruptures this unity, and the whole family is weakened and injured by the departure of a rebellious member. The Sacrament of Repentance, the renewal of baptism, must be seen in this light—we only appreciate forgiveness fully when we realize that it involves reconciliation with God, yes, but also with one another, the members of God's family. So, our repentance like all our lenten activity, is a community event, no matter how private and individual it seems.

The ideal way of keeping lent in this Christian community way is to gather round the Altar daily, or as often as our duties allow. It is here that the unity in Christ which began in Baptism, is brought to perfection. It was at the first Mass that Jesus used the image of the Vine and branches, with the same life flowing through the whole plant.

Humanity is tending towards unity. As civilization grows, distances dwindle, we'll soon be "one global village." Our Lord's Prayer that they may be one is actually being answered not just in unity between countries but in the sincere efforts of all that Christians be re-united, one fold under one Shepherd.

To quote the Vatican Council: "Man is a social being, and can neither live nor develop his gifts alone." Together then, let's make our Mass, our Community worship, a real reminder that we are called in one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all. Then will our Lent be what it ought to be, and its culmination on Holy Saturday night will be a real step on the pilgrimage we're making, with Christ as Leader of the Pilgrimage, back to our Father's Home.