

THE MASS WE ALWAYS KNEW

The liturgical reform, which the II Vatican Council called for and which His Holiness Pope Paul VI is carrying through, includes simple, almost decorative elements, and solid basic ones. The way the latter are shaped and "laid down" is of "historic" importance for the Church.

One of the main elements in the revision of the rite of the Mass was laid down on March 7, 1965. The second dates from November 30, 1969. On the former occasion the Church as a whole, but simple and humble people more particularly, rediscovered the spoken language and a truer face of the Mass. It became more comprehensible both through its gestures and words. On this second occasion we find that the work of restoration is complete. We see more clearly than ever before with that care and wealth of meaning the Church has always surrounded and safeguarded that most precious commandment received from Jesus: "Do this in commemoration of me." That commemoration is the sacrifice of the altar, the celebration of the Supper of the Lord, the Mass.

A new epoch is beginning in the Church's life. It began with the words which Pope Paul uttered in the Audience of November 19 still echoing in our ears. It is not a new Mass, because nothing essential or genuinely traditional has been altered. In the new rite the Church can without any mistake hear the voice, listen to the words, and see the gestures, watch the "signs" which have been creating a halo of faith, of art, of glory around the Mass for twenty centuries. The voice of today is the voice of yesterday, the voice of always.

A penitential act

The work of reform has been nothing else than a delicate, attentive and respectful labour of "restoration" of the Mass.

Take the beginning of the rite as an example. The Mass used to begin with a psalm said at the foot of the altar in preparation for the "Confession," and that was followed by a number of prayers.

In a low Mass the rite went forward as a dialogue between the priest and the server. The whole congregation seldom responded. In a high or sung Mass, the rite became a dialogue between the celebrant and the ministers. The people remained silent and outside of it.

But should not the whole Christian community take part, devotedly and consciously; should it not go to meet Christ, receive him, be fed by him? If so, why exclude the assembly from that "purification" of spirit before beginning to celebrate that fascinating and tremendous mystery?

The act of penitence which begins the Mass will therefore from now on be always performed, in all Masses, by all present, priest and faithful. And by all together, because all constitute one single family. Each will acknowledge before God and his brethren that he sinned. Each will ask pardon, because we are all poor and little before the Lord, and have need of his mercy.

The Offertory

The "Offertory" is another example. Both the term and the concept are inaccurate. The real offering to God in the Mass is that of the Victim of the Cross, Christ. Christ offers himself to the Father through the sacerdotal ministry for the redemption of the world.

But is there no "offering?" Yes, in a way. There is a *symbolic* offering of the bread and the wine, the fruit of man's labour, that they may become Christ's Body and Blood. But, as regards the rite, nothing is offered. The material of the sacrifice is brought and laid upon the altar. We might therefore more accurately speak of the preparation and deposition of the gifts.

You do not feel convinced about this? Let us look at the description of the Mass in Justin's *Apology*, which belongs to the middle of the 2nd century. "On the Sunday," we read, "those living in town and country gather in a single place. The memorials of the Apostles and the

writing of the Prophets are read . . . Then, when the reader has finished, the president begins to speak, to admonish those present and exhort them to imitate the good lessons which they have just heard. Then we all rise to our feet and raise up prayers, and the bread and the wine and the water are brought; the president raises up prayers and thanksgiving as best he may and the people reply: Amen" (*Apology*, I. chap. 66)

A very simple, very meaningful act. The elements of the sacrifice are brought to the president and are placed on the table before the priest. This simple act was "enriched" during the following centuries. It was enlarged, stylized, dramaticized: the whole assembly went up to the priest with its offering. . . not just a few ministers of a few of the faithful. The faithful were no longer content to place them on the altar; they took to putting them in the priest's hands and at the same time uttering words of homage and augury: "Suscipe, pater; offerimus, pater. . ." Then they stated the intentions of the offerings: "In honorem SS. Trinitatis, in honorem SS. Petri et Pauli . . . pro negligentibus meis, pro peccatis meis, pro fidelibus defunctis, pro mundi salute."

The liturgical *Summae* of the middle ages are full of formulas, lists of intentions and prayers of this kind. St. Pius V drew some bounds, but left the pattern of the "offertory" as celebrated at Rome essentially unaltered.

New things are old

Even the least erudite of students knows that logic was not always respected in that jumble of formulas; nor was the essential always saved, the text always made comprehensible. The reformer therefore approaches it with a skilled hand, as a restorer approaches a venerable fresco. He gently removes the incrustations and "refreshes" the original. He will not hesitate to insert some fresh "piece" where devotion had too boldly applied formulas which were out of place and detrimental to the work as a whole.

This was the case with the two prayers for the deposition of the offerings. Are these really new formulas? Not substantially. If we consult the *Didache*, which belongs to the first century, and reread the prayers in chapters 9 and 10, we already hear the sound of our own

Ordo Missae: "Blessed be thou, O Lord, God of the universe, from whose goodness we have received this bread (this wine), the fruit of the earth and of our labour. We present it to thee, so that it may become food of eternal life for us."

Fruit of the earth and of our labour: just as in the whole world today. Our shaken and weary world, the whole world of labour in this consumer society, this welfare state, struggling violently in breathless search for a human way of living, is brought into Christ's mystery by the Church, that all may be consummated "in one," and learn from Christ how human works are sanctifying and redemptive.

The "offertory" has been given back its real meaning. The new formulas will speak with as much sweetness and tenderness, but with greater spiritual incisiveness, if the celebrant has gone to the trouble of preparing the people, and takes care to recite the new formulas with as much piety as the old ones required, but with more calm, more meaningfulness, more priestly expressiveness. We may then say farewell without regret to the dear and venerable formulas. The Church now puts them back in her treasury of new and old ways of speaking to God.

The "sign" of peace

As regard that part of the Mass which comes before the Communion, scholars are agreed that in old rite it was a typical example of incomprehensible stratification of heterogeneous elements belonging to various periods. Duchesne, Batiffol, Callewaert, Capelle, Righetti, Jungmann — to mention only a few names — repeatedly proposed giving a logical order to the whole sector lying between the *Oratio dominica* and the communion. This has now been done. Account has been taken of tradition and of pastoral needs; guidance has been sought from masters of liturgical science, some of whom were personally involved in the work of shaping the new rite.

So, after the embolism of the *Pater*, there now comes an eschatological reference such as was formerly lacking in the Roman Missal. And the ancient acclamation, so dear to the early Christians: "For thine is the kingdom, the power and glory for ever and ever" (cf. *Didache* 9 & 10), has been replaced after the Our Father.

The "sign" of peace has now regained its full place. Its full spiritual significance ought to come back with it. After he has recited the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ..." aloud, the priest asks all to show peace to each other, because we cannot go peacefully to Jesus while we have something in our heart against our brethren. We ought therefore first be reconciled with our brother. If we have nothing against him, we can show our charity by the "sign" of peace: the sign that we are Christian.

How new this will seem to many people! How old it really is! How much in the spirit of the Gospel! Before meeting Christ in the host, every Christian meets him in the eyes and in the embrace of his neighbour!

The last great reform

It is for the Episcopal Conference to decide how the "kiss of peace" may be given. There have been a few experiments already here and there. With a little patience and progress in liturgical feeling, this *pretiosa margarita*, lost for centuries, but now found again, will be properly incorporated and understood by the faithful. It will give congregations a more intense and more lively sense of fraternal joy.

The Mass is therefore still the Mass of all the centuries that have gone before us: it is the Mass of always. There is no "Tridentine Mass" and no "Vatican Mass." The Church of today is the same Church as in the sixteenth century. The Holy Spirit guided the Church then as it does today. In his light the Fathers at Trent drew up and approved the Doctrine and the Canons of Session XXII, under Paul IV in 1562. Again in his light, the Fathers of the II Vatican Council gave approval to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of December 4, 1963, and Paul VI promulgated the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*, on Holy Thursday, "*In Cena Domini*," April 2, 1969. There has been no break no deviation, no change of substance. There is continuity and pastoral care for wise change.

Instructions

The *Ordo* is accompanied by an *Institutio generalis*, which sets out norms for the celebration of the rite. It too is the work of experts and

pastors chosen from "various parts of the world" (Liturgical Constitution, Art. 25), in conformity with what the Council desired.

The *Institutio* faithfully summarizes and applies the doctrinal principles and practical rules concerning the worship of the Eucharistic mystery, contained in the council's Constitution On the Sacred Liturgy (Dec. 4, 1963), in Pope Paul VI's Encyclical *Mysterium fidei* (Sept., 3, 1965), and in the Instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* (May 25, 1967).

Is it necessary to point out that the *Institutio* is not doctrinal or dogmatic document? It is a ritual and pastoral instruction, in which celebration of the several parts of the rite of the Mass is described, naturally not without some reference to doctrinal principles contained in the documents just mentioned. The rite issues from the doctrine and demonstrates it.

The *Institutio* therefore outlines the catechesis which ought to be imparted to the people, together with the principal norms for celebration of the Eucharist which will be needed by those who take part in one degree or another.

• A. Bugnini