

HOMILETICS

• D. Tither, C.S.S.R.

NEW YEAR'S DAY (JAN. 1)

"Sing to the Lord a new canticle, for he has done wonderful things." (Introit)

This year, 1969, will surely be remembered in history as one of the most eventful since the Redemption. Why? Because during 1969, we will see the liturgy of the Mass take its final form, its last adaptation. There will be no more changes — in our life-time at least.

Now you might well ask: "Why have all these changes taken place? What was wrong with the Mass as it was before?" The changes have taken place in order to make the Mass more meaningful in our lives, and to give our own lives more meaning. There was nothing "wrong" with the Mass; but over the centuries, the changes that came into the Mass caused it to have less impact on our everyday lives. We attended the Mass as mere spectators; we regarded the Mass as a burdensome obligation; our daily lives remained divorced from the Mass. But this is not as it should be. The Mass is an action in which we take a real part; it culminates in a banquet in which we all share. Moreover, the Mass overflows into every aspect of our daily lives. In fact, as St. Pius X expressed it: "The Mass is the primary and essential source of the true Christian spirit." In other words, there can be no true and authentic Christianity without an authentic Mass. No wonder all the Bishops of the world spent two whole months at the recent Vatican Council discussing the Mass. They were certainly aware of all the other world problems — peace, disarmament, the reunion of Christians, aid to poor countries. They knew that the world was in danger of destroying itself; but they also knew that the best way to prevent this disaster was to bring the Mass into the lives of all Christians.

Now you might say after attending the "new Mass" for some Sundays: "I don't feel any different. I don't think my life has any more meaning!" This may well be! The changes in the Mass will not affect us at all if we

just stay passive and unconcerned. We must be active—we must look for Christ in the Mass, we must seek Him. You remember how Our Lord was standing at the shore of the lake after His Resurrection. The Apostles who were out on the lake did not recognize Him—they did not realize it was the Risen Saviour. Then John suddenly recognized Him. "It is the Lord!" he excitedly said. And immediately they started towards Him. And it was then at the feet of Jesus that Peter was made the shepherd of Christ's flock—his life was given meaning. Like John and Peter, we must recognize Christ's presence in the Mass, we must seek Him out and we must listen to Him.

But how are we to do this? We must deepen our awareness that Christ is speaking to us in every word of the Mass, telling us His plans, and asking for our cooperation in carrying them out. Thus you will understand why one of the changes in the Mass is that the whole of the Bible will be read over a period of 3 years, and not just selected passages which were repeated every year. Naturally, hearing the whole of God's message, we will become more intimate with Christ, we will learn that He invites us to work with Himself, that we share in His own work for the betterment of mankind.

But even more so, we must deepen our awareness of the fact that Christ is present, not only on the altar and in the spoken word, but in the people around us. So we will begin to see one another through the eyes of Christ with a new meaning. That woman wearing the odd clothes, that tired-looking man there, those restless, lively children—they are not just people who happen to be at the same Mass as myself. They are my brothers and sisters in Christ, members of Christ as I am. They are my fellow-participants in a common action, and we all participate with Christ. Once this awareness of Christ's presence in others deepens, it must affect our lives, it must give more meaning and purpose to our daily lives. We will go from Mass more concerned about those that we meet around our homes and our places of work and recreation. We will see them as members of one family in which we have a task to fulfill in order to increase the growth of unity and love.

Remember that we are being called by Christ to a greater share in His life. And He is calling us as friends. "I will no longer call you servants, I will call you friends." He explained that a friend is introduced to the plans of his friend and that the real sign of friendship is being told what our friend has in mind, and being asked to cooperate in carrying it out. Taking a full part in Mass will let us in on God's designs for us and for everyone.

Thus we will begin to have a new view of life itself. The Mass will teach us that our Father has loved us so much that He sent His Son to make us sons in the Son, filled with His Holy Spirit, able to love Him

with Christ's own love; and called to work with Him and with one another to bring all men to share that love and that sonship.

I could not wish you a better New Year Greeting than this—that 1969 will see us growing closer to God and closer together as a family, through a more heartfelt awareness of the Mass in our daily lives.

HOLY NAME SUNDAY (JAN. 5)

"There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved." (Ep.)

Whenever we gather in Christ's Name to hear His Word and offer His Sacrifice, it's no longer 1969—the centuries have rolled back, and He is with us as truly as He was with His contemporaries. He is Jesus Christ yesterday, today and forever. He is gone from our sight, yes, but He is as truly with us now as then, as truly able to cure us and make us what we ought to be as in the early days of the Church.

St. Peter, asked by a cripple for an alms, said: "I have no silver or gold but what I have I will give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, arise and walk." And the cripple leaped up and ran about, giving glory to God. We have just heard Peter's explanation of the cure: "by the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth... this man stands before you cured." Acts 8:10.

The same Jesus Christ can cure our miseries, and He is with us now. Tell Him we are ready to be cured, and to adjust our lives in any way He commands. Ask Him to tell us what is His first demand of us, if our offering of Mass is to be connected with our lives. His answer will be the same as He gave to those among whom He lived: "Learn of Me that I am meek and humble of heart."

He will tell us to imitate His attitude to His Father and ours—His attitude of humble, submissive patience. He will tell us that we must make God the center of our thoughts as is a father to his child. No one says that this patience is the most important thing in christian living—charity is; but, loving God and our neighbor is impossible without this humble patient attitude of Christ. As St. Augustine says: "there is only one royal road—the road of Charity, but only the patiently humble walk on it."

Our joining Christ in offering Mass says, in action, that we belong to God, that all we have comes from God, that we are ready to do His Will. Now, a very practical test of the sincerity of our part in the offering, is our readiness to try and share Christ's attitude in all the trials and reverses of life.

Our Lord, if the expression is not irreverent, telescoped His life-long attitude of patience into His actual Sacrifice. With us, it is the reverse. We offer ourselves, all we do, and all we suffer, by God's direct will or indirect will or indirect permission, along with Christ, our Brother, at Mass. And then, we live that out during the rest of the week, till the next time we gather at Mass to join Christ once more in professing that we want to share His attitude.

At what part of Mass should we make this offering? Maybe some of you would say: at the offertory, along with the bread and wine. Many used to offer their trials as the little host beside the large one on the paten, as the drop of water mingled with the wine at the offertory. But, the ideal time to do this is at the consecration. In fact, very shortly, the offertory will be very much shortened. There will be a simple placing of the bread and wine on the altar, a ceremony lasting barely one minute. The time to join ourselves with Christ, offering our trials along with His sacrifice, and begging our mutual Father in His Name and for the love of Him, to give us His humble patient attitude, the time for this is at the climax of the Mass, the heart of the Mass, the Consecration.

Says St. Paul: "In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine, yet He did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are, He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross." (Phil. 2:5-8) This was how Christ's attitude to His Father worked out in practice—in accepting patiently, not just all that His Father directly willed but everything that His Father permitted to happen to Him.

This was the way Christ lived, this must be our way of life also. Be ready to accept all the trials of life, even those that God permits through the sinfulness of others—their trickery, their deceptions, their cruelty; as well as those that God directly wills, like sickness, bereavement, misfortune. This is living out our Mass; in fact, our offering of Mass is more or less a deliberate lie, more or less a mockery unless we are striving to have this patient attitude of Christ.

It will never be as hard for us as it was for Our Lord—He has gone ahead, carrying His cross, showing us the way. And what is the way? Joining in His sufferings, filling up what is wanting in His sufferings in His new Body, the Church, realizing that He suffers in us. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." Look to His example, and pray for His attitude. "Think diligently on what opposition Christ endured from sinners, that you be not weary, fainting in your mind." Heb. 12:2.

May Our Lady, Queen of Martyrs, and the best reflection of the patience of her Son, help us to live out our Mass in our daily lives.

HOLY FAMILY (Jan. 12)

"He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them."

Today the Church proposes to us the Nazareth as a Model for our homes. A nation, we all know, is as strong as its family life. Now, the proposal of the Church for renewing family life deserves serious thought. In fact, here and here alone, is the complete answer. It is nothing other than a deeper awareness, on the part of each member of a Christian family, of our share in Christ's Sacrifice.

You remember Fr. Peyton's Rosary Crusade some years ago. You remember the enormous crowd who gathered on the Luneta to hear his message: 'The family that prays together stays together.' This saying is truest and best realised in the highest form of worship, the noblest of prayers, our joining Christ our Brother in offering the Mass. The family whose members share in the Mass as they ought will have unity, harmony and peace. The family, where every member—father, mother and each child, knows how to participate in the offering of Mass and what that participation involves, will stay united on earth and be united forever in God's eternal Home.

We do not worship God in isolation. Consider Our Lord's most perfect act—His offering the sacrifice of His life. He hung upright on the Cross, the trunk of his Body pointing from earth to heaven. But His arms were outstretched, pointing from Himself to his fellow men. His cross was vertical and horizontal. He joined His love for His Father with love for us. He showed his obedience to His Father's Will, His love for His Father, by dying for us. He offered Himself to God by giving Himself to us.

What was true of Christ should be true of us. Like Him we should see no division between our offering of His Sacrifice and our concern for others, especially our own family. This is religion: "If any man has not care for his own, especially those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel."

Our Lord told us so clearly that we cannot do a favour for God unless we include our fellow-men and particularly our family. He protested vehemently against the so-called religious practices of those who left their parents in need for seemingly religious reasons. Mk. 7:II He assured us that such outward offering was hypocrisy and hateful to God.

Any offering of sacrifice to God must be accompanied by concern about others: If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there

before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother." Mt. 5:23. Any sacrifice that has no concern for others is rejected outright by God. We must have charity and charity begins at home.

It is God's plan and desire that men should be happy. We cannot serve Him better than by making His plan a reality, making His desire come true. When we learn from Christ's Sacrifice what religion really means, when we make our sharing in Mass the highlight of our family life, then we follow God's design and fulfil His command. "By this shall all man know that you are My disciples if you have love one for another."

Where selfishness reigns, there can be no happiness in marriage, no peace in the family, no willingness to help, no joy. We will learn unselfishness from Christ and His Sacrifice. We must not deceive ourselves that we can properly offer Mass unless we are striving for Christ's unselfishness towards all, especially those with whom we live, the members of our own family.

Our Mass cannot be divorced from our daily lives. We do not withdraw from life for a while to worship God in a Church. Our Mass cannot be something apart from our family life. Thinking to fulfill one's Sunday obligation without doing our utmost to have peace and harmony in our homes is sheer fancy and nonsense.

I am not exaggerating. True participation does not just consist in 'singing along, in standing or sitting or kneeling, but in expending all one's efforts to have peace in one's surroundings, especially one's home. For parents, this means firmness with understanding; for children, it means loving, honoring and respecting their parents because they take the place of God. It means being like Jesus at Nazareth. He spent three years teaching us the way to Heaven, He allotted 3 hours to His Passion, He spent 30 years teaching us by example the importance of obedience.

Learn this from participation in the Mass. No one may shirk this one source of Christian unselfishness, this sole fount of true Christian family life show me any happy Christian family, where husband and wife love each other as they did on their wedding day, where the children honour their parents and are united in genuine Christian love, and there you will have a family where each and every member knows how to connect the Mass with daily living.

May Jesus, Mary and Joseph be a source of inspiration for us, may our homes become homes of prayer like theirs; above all, may our gathering here each Sunday, listening to God's Word, offering ourselves to Him along with Christ, and joining in the Eucharistic banquet, be the well-spring of happy Christian family life.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (Jan. 19)

"Whatever He shall say to you, do it." (Gospel)

The word of God has a power beyond all our imaginings. Everything created was made by the word of God. God spoke, and the sea was filled with fish, the land with plants and animals. Man himself was created by the word of God. Jesus Christ demonstrated the power of the Word of God. With a single word, He cured the centurion's servant: "Say but the word and my servant shall be cured." Mt. 8:8. With a single word, He called the Apostles, converted the adulterous woman, changed sinners into saints. One single sentence from the Gospel converted St. Augustine, St. Anthony, and St. Francis, and their lives changed the course of history.

The power of the word of God has not been lost—it is still with us today, and especially in the Mass where we listen to God's word from the Bible. The Church appreciates fully this power of the word of God to enrich our lives, and that is why it has introduced new changes into the Mass. Up to the present we have had only selected passages from the Bible, and these were repeated year after year. But very shortly over a period of three years, we will be able to hear the whole of the Bible. Thus we will be given a greater appreciation of the mystery of God's salvation for us.

This is how the first part of the Mass will go. At the entrance of the priest we will sing a hymn to create an atmosphere of family unity. The priest will then greet us, and after mutual admission of sinfulness, the Kyrie or Gloria will be said (never both). After an invitation to pray and a pause for reflection, the Community Prayer is said. Immediately afterwards, the readings from the Bible will begin.

The first reading will be from the Old Testament to show us how careful and thorough was God's preparation for the coming of Christ. Then we will sing a psalm, reflecting on what God has said to us. The second reading will be from the New Testament and is intended to fill us with gratitude for all that God did and is doing for us in and through Christ. While we sing Alleluia after this second reading, a Gospel procession will form: candles will accompany the Book of the Gospels, and be held on either side while it is being proclaimed. We will rise to listen to Jesus Christ, the very Word of God. To remind us that it is Jesus Christ who is in the midst during this reading, the opening greeting will not be "The Lord be with you", but "The Lord is with you."

But as we have said so often before, the words of Christ will not affect our lives unless we listen with deep faith and attention. There are many things that Christ wants to tell us personally, but if we do not listen, if we

keep coming late or stand outside and talk during the sermon—then our lives will remain barren and fruitless. We will fail to understand our purpose in life. You are shocked if a priest drops a host during communion.—you even gasp. Would to God we had the same reaction when we see people coming late for Mass or talking during the readings and sermon. We could all certainly take a lesson from Our Lady in the Gospel today. She had a great faith in the words of her son. That is why she told the servants: "Whatever he shall say to you, do it." May she teach us to listen with undivided attention and a really open heart. Once we do this, our faith will increase, and whatever Christ wants us to do, we will do it.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (JAN. 26)

"Only say the word and my servant shall be healed." (Gospel)

These two miracles; the healing of the leper and the centurion's servant, were both worked immediately after the sermon on the Mount. Miracles were worked as proofs of Our Lord's Divinity, and as a sign of the work that He came to do — the curing of our defects. This He does through His words, confirmed by His miracles. "Believe," He said, "for the sake of the works."

The faith that this pagan centurion had in the power of Our Lord's should make us Christians examine our attitude towards God's words. Do we realize it's the living effective word of God that we hear in the first half of Mass? We can not indeed see Him, no more than we see Him in the Host, but He is just as truly there. His word will change us, our minds will be convinced, our hearts touched, the whole course of our life will be altered and we will be new men. Provided, of course, that we have faith.

If God's word does in fact have little influence in our lives, the reason for this is not in the word surely, but in our failure to respond to it in trusting faith. God addresses us, speaks to us heart to heart; our answer must be a living acceptance. "Faith comes by hearing," listening with a readiness to obey, to the very words of God.

In the Bible God's word is regarded as something living, as a person almost, a messenger. You remember how Esau sold his birthright to his brother, Jacob, for a bowl of food. Then, when the time came for Isaac to hand on his blessing, Jacob deceived the blind old man into thinking he was Esau, and got his elder brother's blessing. When Esau arrived, the blessing could not be recalled. It could not be undone. Nothing whatever could be done about it. Isaac was the "other self" of God. The word of God is Himself acting effectively on us, if we place no obstacle. "Is not my word like

fire, says the Lord, like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?" Jer. 23:29. We admit this power each time we come to join Christ in offering the Mass. We repeat the words of the centurion: "Only say the word and my soul shall be healed." "By the word of the Lord the heavens were established." Ps 2.6. It is the very same word we hear at Mass.

The word of God is light: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Ps. 118.1:5. It is nourishment. As our Lord told the devil, we live on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Mt 4.4.

This word, so living and effectual, more penetrating than the two-edged sword, Heb. 4.12. will never pass. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." Lk 21.33. We must be attentive, we must sit up and take notice.

It is God Who speaks, and it is today that He speaks to us, His people gathered at His call. "Behold now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." The readings at Mass, shortly to be even closer to our lives, are for now—they do not transport us back 2000 years—they are not a record of past events, they are of today and about God's plan for us today. "Jesus Christ yesterday, today, the same forever."

We are introduced to this "today" by opening ourselves to the Word we hear, but planting It in our hearts as the solution to our problems and needs. For some time now we have been hearing this Word in our language, shortly we will have It in the best form, God speaking through His Law and His Prophets, then through the Apostles who first presided at Mass, and whom the church makes present when she repeats the good news, the all-encouraging news they proclaimed. And the climax will be the living presence of Christ Who sent the Apostles, Who comes right into our midst in the Gospel.

Catholic Faith has always treated the Book of the Gospels as the living presence of Our Lord. In every General Council of the Church, the Book of the Gospels has always presided over the Council meetings. St. Cyrill says of the Council of Ephesus: "The Council gave Christ membership in and presidency over the Council. For the venerable Gospel was placed on a holy throne."

The day is not far distant when the Gospel Book will be enthroned permanently in every church and honored like the Blessed Sacrament. For the Lord is as truly there, although in a different way. We are horrified at a sacrilege against the Blessed Sacrament. We should be equally horrified by those who refused to honor God's Word by not listening to it, or by listening but closing their hearts. "He that is of God," said Jesus, "listens to God's words." He then said to those without reverence for Scripture: "You hear them not, because you are not of God."

May we, like Mary, keep all these words in our hearts. May we, like her, be blessed in hearing the word of God and keeping it.