

HOMILETICS

• D. TITHER, C.S.S.R.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (1 SEPT.)

**"Fit as to obtain what you promise, by making us love
"what you command" (collect)**

Good Catholic people come to Mass on Sundays and Holidays to worship God, their heavenly Father. They come to offer a gift to Him and the gift they offer is a most excellent one—the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Our Lord. Indeed, if they offer the Mass intelligently, they will offer to God not only the Body of Christ, but also themselves. Together with Christ they would offer to their heavenly Father their bodies and souls, their work, their trials, their anxieties, their everyday lives.

But is this the only reason why God our Father summons us to Mass on Sunday? Many seem to think it is. But the Church has told us quite clearly that it is not. We also come to Mass to listen to the Word of God.

It is a tremendous privilege to join Christ in offering sacrifice to God our Father—so tremendous that we might think listening to God's word is not very important. But the Second Vatican Council has told us clearly that it is important to listen to God's word at Mass. It is just as important as offering sacrifice to God. At Mass God speaks to us in the Epistle, the Gospel, the Sermon. We come to Mass to listen to Him. The Church tells us that these two things—listening to God's words and offering sacrifice to God form together one and the same act of worship.

St. Augustine said: "The word of the Lord is no less important than the Body of Christ." And St. John Vianney said that those who come too late to Mass miss some or even all of God's word in the scripture readings and sermon. If they do this deliberately, this is much the same as missing Mass altogether on Sunday. For when they miss Mass altogether they despise the sacrifice of the Lord. But if they come late, they despise God's word.

And God is present in His word, just as truly as He is present on the altar in the later part of the Mass. He is present in a different way in His word, but He is truly present.

We read in the Old Testament how God's people came together worship God at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read to them the Word of God. When he finished reading the people said: "All that the Lord has said we will heed and do." Then the people offered sacrifice to God and Moses took some of the blood of the victims. He sprinkled the blood on the Book containing God's Word and on the people. While so doing he said: "This is the blood of the Covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of His."

We are the new People of God—God's people in the new covenant. In the Mass we offer God in sacrifice not the blood of goats and calves but the Blood of Christ His Son. Before we offer this sacrifice, God speaks to us in the readings and sermon. This is His Word. Like the People of God in the Old Covenant we are supposed to listen intently to God's Word and respond: "All that the Lord has said we will heed and do." Then we offer to God the Body and Blood of Christ in sacrifice.

Faith comes to us by hearing especially by hearing the Word of God. The Holy Scripture that is read to us at Mass is the Word of God. God says in the Scripture: "Just as from the Heavens the rain comes down watering the earth and making it fertile, giving seed to him that sows and bread to him that eats, so shall be My Word that comes forth from My mouth." God's Word to us is something alive, says St. Paul; it is full of energy. Through His Word God really speaks to me.

God encourages us to read His word, but above all to listen to it when He speaks to us at Mass. The scripture readings and the sermon are really God's Word. Through them God is really speaking to us.

Therefore, we should reverence the Word of God that is read to us at each Mass. We should show our reverence first of all by being at Mass on time—by being in good time to hear the scripture readings and sermon. To come late deliberately not only distracts others who are trying to listen to God's Word, but shows that we don't care about God's Word. And this is irreverent. Secondly, when God speaks to you in the readings and the sermon, listen! Don't fumble with rosary beads, don't be saying your own private prayers—listen! God is really speaking to you. He has something to say to you! Listen to Him attentively!

God opened our ears at baptism to listen to His Word. We come to Mass not only to offer sacrifice to God—but equally to listen to His Word.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (SEPT. 8)

We've gathered here this morning to join Christ our Brother in offering to His Father and ours, the sacrifice of the Mass. The instinct to offer sacrifice a gift that tells of our dependence on God, is as old as the human race. Men have always and everywhere felt the need to offer a victim to God, to adore Him because He made us and we belong to Him, to make up for sin, to ask for favours, and especially to thank Him. The word 'palay' means **pa-alay**, the thank-offering at harvest time, of pre-Christian Filipinos to Bathala.

Until Christ came, there was no sacrifice worthy of God, not even the elaborate system of sacrifices He had revealed to His chosen people. The Prophet Malachias made that clear. He said, in God's Name, to the Jewish priests: "I have no pleasure in you, and I will not receive a gift from your hand." Then he foretold the Mass, the sacrifice we are offering now. "For from the rising of the sun till the going down, My Name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice and there is offered to My Name a clean oblation."

Then Christ came, the one Priest really acceptable to His Father, the one Victim truly worthy of Him. His offering was His life-time of obedience, summed up in His Passion, and God's acceptance of it in His glorification.

Now, He'd come for all men and all times. So, the night before He died, at His Last Supper, He left us the Mass to re-enact, re-present that sacrifice, recalling all He'd done, making it available here and now, and foretelling its final application when He returns to lead us Home to the Father.

On Calvary. He was alone--in the Mass all of us, His brothers and sisters, are associated with Him. It is the whole Christ, Head and members, who offers the Mass. Nothing is more important for us than to realize this that we are co-offerers of the sacrifice.

What do we do when we offer sacrifice. We say something by an action, and what we say is that we recognize the majesty and supreme dominion of God, our total dependence on Him. We say that we belong to God, not just now at the time of Mass, but throughout the whole week, till we gather again next Sunday, to renew our offering. The Mass is a summing up of our life, a reminder, week by week, that our whole life is meant to be a life dedicated with Christ to God--that all we do, all we suffer is to be offered to God with Christ.

Our Lord compressed all He did and suffered into His final offering--with us, the process is reversed. We are meant to unfold in our lives, from

one Mass to the next, what we said to God by the action of offering Mass. "The Mass is ended, go in peace," does not mean: "Hurry off, and forget all about sacrifice till next Sunday;" it means: "Go, and put into practice what you have said to God by offering Mass." Let your every action, till your next Mass, be such a dying to self and a living to God in Christ, as to be a fitting renewal of what you've just done."

If we understood it rightly, our joining in the offering of Mass is more or less a mockery, more or less a deliberate lie, unless we are trying to live like Christ, to have His attitude to His Father, to love His approach to money, power and pleasure.

This is why the Church wants us to join in the offering of Mass, at least every Sunday, and if possible, whenever we can, on weekdays. Because ever so many things conspire to try and force us to live, not like Christ, denying ourselves, but like Adam, giving in to our evil tendencies.

The Mass is not just a reminder of how we should live, it gives us the strength to carry out the program. This is particularly true when we achieve communion with Christ, and with one another in Christ, at every Mass. It's the food for the journey.

A sailor had received Viaticum and said: "I'm now ready for the journey. Nothing to be feared of now. The pilot is on board."

May Our Lady—it's her birthday today, help us to put meaning into our Mass, and let the Mass put meaning unto our lives.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (SEPT. 15)

"Through Him, with Him, in Him, is to You, O Almighty, Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory, for ever and ever." Amen. — (Canon.)

Today, instead of a formal sermon, let's start with a quiz. Here's a question. Why are we here at Mass? Whom, among the three Divine Persons, did we principally intend to honour when we came to the Church today? I know you won't shout your answer in Church, so we'll have a show of hands. Hands up those who think it is principally the Holy Spirit whom we honour at Mass... The Son, the Second Person?... None, eh? Wonderful, excellent, you're all correct. It is God the Father whom we principally honour and adore at Mass. We come to unite ourselves with Christ our Brother, who will come on the altar, in honouring our mutual Father, and that in a bond created by the Holy Spirit.

This should sound familiar. The conclusion of the prayers at Mass: "We ask this O Father through Jesus Christ, Your Son and Our Lord, Who is living and ruling with You in the bond of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

God's plan for returning us to Himself is summed up here. We come from the Father—He made us and put us in the world—we're on our way back to the Father, through the Son, in that unity, with one another and with the Holy Trinity Itself, brought about by the Holy Spirit. Listen to what St. Paul says of this Divine Plan: "The Father destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, as a plan to unite all things in Him. In Him we were sealed with the Holy Spirit, he is the guarantee of our inheritance until we take possession of it." The Trinity is not just an abstract truth we believe about God—it is a way of life—to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

You must have noticed that the prayers at Mass are directed to God the Father. The Offertory, the Canon, the Communion part of the Mass all begin by addressing God the Father. The Community prayer, prayer over the gifts and the thanksgiving prayer after the sacred Meal are almost all addressed to the Father. The Preface, even the very consecration, the remembrance of all Our Lord did, all are addressed to the Father. And at the culmination of the Canon, when the Body and Blood of Christ are raised up, the accompanying prayer sums up the purpose of Mass. Through Him... glory forever and ever." Our Amen here should be the most enthusiastic of all our responses at Mass. St. Jerome tells us that the Christians of his time shouted it so energetically that their voices reverberated round the churches like thunder. If we say 'Amen' we say we approve.

This is not to say that we should not adore Christ. He is God, just as much as the Father. But He took a Body by which we contact the God head. This is what is emphasized at Mass—we unite ourselves with Him, in His humanity, in adoring our mutual Father.

"In the bond of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ. It was the Holy Spirit who acted in Christ. It was He who led Jesus into the desert, and filled Him with courage on the Cross. When the Church was born from the side of the Risen Lord, the Holy Spirit become its soul, its source of life.

Not just to the living Church, but to each of us living in the Church, did the Holy Spirit come. It was in water and the Holy Spirit that we were reborn to the Divine Life. Our bodies became His living temples. He

gave us the power to live God's life in a human way. He is the ecstasy of love between the Father and the Son, so, for all that He is equal to the Father and the Son, we mention His Name last. But, in the sharing of God's life with us, He was the First Person to be given. It is through Him that we come to know the Father and the Son more and more, it is He who makes us like Christ, if we place no obstacle.

We're reminded of all this at Mass. Don't just believe it with your minds, feel it, realize it. Our offering of the Mass to the Father, with the Son, in the Holy Spirit, is a further step in our pilgrimage. We're not standing still, we're on the march. It's something vital, something dynamic, something we, God's Family do together, as we proceed back to Our Father, along with the Son, in the bond created by the Holy Spirit.

Today we recall the 7 sorrows of Mary. Ask her to obtain for us her faith in the Mass, the heart and soul of our religion.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (SEPT. 22)

"Then He took the man by the hand, and sent him away healed." (Gospel)

We see Our Lord here in a typical gesture—healing a sick man. All His life, Jesus had great sympathy for the sick and the dying—he worked many of His miracles for them.

So much did He desire that this consolation should be available after His death, that He instituted a special Sacrament for the seriously ill. St. James tells us of this Sacrament. "Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him," (Jas. 5.14-15)

This Sacrament is for all who, through sickness or a wound, or old age, are in danger of death. Its purpose is to give divine consolation when it's needed most, in the stress and anxiety of death. For this last struggle, Our Lord has left us this special Sacrament—the Sacrament of the sick. Here the hand of Our Lord, just as we saw Him in today's Gospel, comforts the sick person, giving him what no human person can give—divine consolation.

So, if any one you know has a dangerous illness—say altapresion, or T.B., or cancer, call a priest. Don't postpone this till the person is actually

dying. Call the priest early, even if the danger is only remote. Then the sick person will profit in full from three sacraments, Confession, Viaticum and the Anointing of the sick, the limbering-up for the last journey.

It is sad to see people delaying this Sacrament from a quite false idea that the patient will be scared or discouraged. There is great glee in Hell over such misguided notions—not only is the sick person deprived of the spiritual benefits of the Sacrament, maybe the last chance of recovery. How many sick, given up by the Doctors as hopeless, have got suddenly and completely well after this Sacrament, specially when the priest was called in good time. So far from discouraging the patient, Christ in this Sacrament eases the burden of restlessness and distress, a new spirit of strength comes, and often a complete cure. What a horrible fallacy to think that the healing hand of Christ could cause dismay. The very opposite is true. How heartlessly cruel, how utterly failing in love to the sick person! You deprive him of the very thing he needs most—consolation. You keep Christ, the Divine Consoler the very best Healer, away from him.

For the love of God, when you know anyone seriously ill, call the priest immediately. Even if a person appears already dead, call a priest anyway. So wonderful is this Sacrament that even if a man is unconscious, his sins will be forgiven if he'd been sorry for them. So, specially in the case of an accident or sudden death, it's still possible for the Sacrament to have this effect, since there's no certainty as to the time of actual death.

The Saviour gave us the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." All of us want a happy and holy death. All of us would like to receive this Sacrament ourselves. We can take out insurance in the matter. Let's have great charity for the sick and the dying. Let's not allow anyone near and dear to us to die without this divine consolation. And then we may confidently hope that we'll have Christ's comfort when we need it most, when not all the doctors or all the medicines in the world will be able to help us.

Recently a priest approached an old man, given up as helpless by the doctors. He asked would the old man like the Sacrament of the sick. The children and grandchildren were opposed—they had some fantastic idea that the Sacrament meant death. The old man, fortunately, disagreed with them, and placed his trust in the Holy Oils, as his best chance for recovery. Recover he did, quickly and completely, to the amazement of doctors.

Heart of Jesus, once in agony, have pity on the dying. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (SEPT. 29)

MARRIAGE, A SHARE IN THE CREATIVE ACT

“Conduct yourselves in a manner befitting the vocation you have received from God.” (Epistle.)

The vocation mentioned in today's Epistle is the general call to all of us, baptized into one Body by the Holy Spirit to live as Christians, humble and kind. But, the word vocation also means the state of life in which God means us to live our Christian lives.

When Our Saviour praised the sacrifice of those who renounced the good of marriage for the sake of something even better, He added that this was not for all, but only for those with a special vocation for it. Not all are called to be priests or nuns. The vocation of the majority He said, is marriage. Let us take a quick look at that vocation. It's marriage that gives us families, it's families that make a nation.

A nation is as strong and as good as its individual families. If family life is healthy, a nation is healthy and vigorous. But, where home life declines, a country is headed for disaster and ruin.

Marriage is most sacred, because it is from God. The Bible tells us how, right from the beginning, God planned marriage. “It is not good that the man is alone, I will make him a helper like himself.” (Gen. 2.18) The climax of the account of creation tells how the first people were made male and female. “Male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1.27)

God created out of love. He graciously included men and women to continue His creative work, to share His creative powers. “Increase and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” Gen. 1.28. Here we see the dignity of marriage when a couple become God's partners, co-creators as it were with God, in producing new life, that will become at Baptism a participation in the very life of God. “Let marriage,” says God, “be held in honour by all.” (Heb. 13.4)

God could have chosen other ways of propagating the human race. We could all have been created simultaneously. But God, by His own decision depends on men and women coming together before new life begins. It is His plan that men and women should be drawn to one another in order to cooperate with Him in giving life to new citizens for Heaven.

When Christ came. He raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament. It is unique among Sacraments in that the partners are themselves the ones who administer it to one another. The priest's presence is essential, as the Church's official witness. But the partners, by their consent, administer it

to one another. And everything they do throughout their lives together, as partners and as parents, is done in Christ and is holy. There is no question of married Christians making their marriage holy. If they correspond with the grace of the Sacrament, every aspect of their life together make them holy, sanctifies them.

When we realize this, we see clearly what a monstrous crime sinful birth control is. When a man and wife, loving one another deeply and unselfishly, realize that the purpose of their mutual love is to cooperate in the creative love of God, the very idea of thwarting this, standing in the way of God's plan, is horrible.

The salvation of a Christian man and woman, made one in Christ, comes from their living out every day and in every way their vocation, partners with God in begetting and bringing up children for God. "Take this child and bring it up for Me. And in the end, I will repay you."

It would be sad indeed if married Christians come to imagine that their love of God, their Christian lives, had nothing to do with their married love, their responsibility for their children, or the daily burdens and joys of family life. The exact opposite is the truth. Marriage is a Sacrament, it is the precise way to holiness for the married. Yes, marriage in all its aspects is a sacramental, a holy, a sanctifying way of life.

Dear married Christians, it was God who first brought you together, it was He who implanted the attraction you felt for one another, it was He Who joined you in a union, a partnership with Himself, that makes you one till death. "Now they are not two, but one. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

Yes, it was God who made you His partners, in bringing new lives into the world, and providing future citizens of Heaven. It is He who sanctifies you through this wonderful cooperation with Him in the act of creation.

Ask the Blessed Mother, who was with Christ at the marriage in Cana, that your marriage also, in all its trials and problems, in all the self-sacrifice it calls for, be recorded in Heaven in those words: "There was a marriage. And the Mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited to the marriage."