

THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE LITURGY

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GOD is Love: that is his name, that is his life, and God known must be God loved, God worshipped. 'O taste and see how good the Lord is.' The mind awakens to goodness and the will moves to possess it. God first loved us: that is what his goodness means. And our answer is to love him in return. For love is to be expressed. It is not a notion to be cherished, a choice in reserve; rather is it a life and all of a life, imperative and lasting.

Man is made for God: made to worship him, therefore, to give him the praise and acknowledgment his goodness demands. That is what religion is for: giving God what is his due, not adequately indeed, as though man on his own might ever match the infinite love of Love himself. But man gives what he can, and he gives far beyond his mere capacity as man to give, since his praise, now, as redeemed, made capable of sharing in the life of God through grace, is the praise which the Church forever gives to God. For the prayer and praise of the Christian are the work of Christ, who became man that man might come to God, who eternally offers to his Father through the Church—he the Head and we the members—the total sacrifice of himself, eternally renewed and re-presented, the furthest point of love.

For the Liturgy is not 'a' prayer. It is *the* prayer of the Church; the prayer of Christ and all his members. And in every phase it is a declaring of the love of God and of man's response to love. Just as no moment of our Lord's life on earth was without its redemptive meaning—the hidden years in Nazareth as truly as the years of preaching and miracles and death and resurrection—so no word of the Liturgy is ever divorced from the context of the love of God. Thus there is no specific devotion to the love of God, as though one might separate love from the single mystery of our redemption. Such a devotion as that to the Sacred Heart indeed is a concrete realisation of what that love must mean, 'that Heart which has never ceased to burn with love of us (is) a haven of rest for the devout, and for the peni-

tent an open doorway to salvation' (Preface of the Sacred Heart). But this is only to underline a truth that is everywhere declared in the Liturgy. From Annunciation to Ascension, from the feast of St Peter to the feast of Blessed Pius X, the record is always the same; and the Liturgy exists to reflect its infinite realisation and all is rooted in the salvific love of Christ our Lord.

'Greater love than this no man hath that a man lay down his life for his friends.' The ultimate expression of love is sacrifice, the willing gift of oneself to God: and the sacrifice of Calvary, universal in its effect, infinite in its worth, is the centre of Christian worship as it is the foundation of Christian faith and hope and love. For this sacrifice, this final proof of the point to which God's pity comes, is not a heroic gesture merely: a wonder of the past, to be remembered, to be an inspiration and a proof of love recalled. It happened: there was a time that you can mark in a calendar, there was a place that you can find on a map. It happens still, for the Mass is the whole mystery of our redemption recapitulated and made present wherever and whenever it is offered. This happening is the greatest act of religion, and the virtue of religion is implemented by love. The Mass is the love of God made manifest in all times and places, for it is the one and the same sacrifice of our redemption, adding nothing to what was once and for all achieved on Calvary yet making it forever present, sacramentally renewed in a mode in which man himself can share.

And this is the Church's work above all else: the daily offering of the sacrifice that is the sacrifice of Christ, the perennial work of love achieved in a rite with words to be uttered and actions to be performed which are declaratory of a mystery of whose meaning is love. The signs which proclaim the meaning, the bread and wine which truly become the Body and Blood they signify, are the signs of love: a life given and a life shared, a body broken and blood shed, death and the ending of death. And so it is that the pattern of Christian life is grounded in the ultimate work of God's love: and Christian worship, no less, finds here its foundation.

To speak of love is at once to speak of unity; division is

the work of hate. The Eucharist is, St Thomas insists, the sacrament of the Church's unity; it is the consummation to which all the other sacraments lead. 'We who are many are one bread and one body, all who partake of one bread and one chalice' (I Cor. 10, 17). The unity achieved by the sacrifice of Christ is for ever achieved in its sacramental re-enactment, and it is this that the Liturgy declares. The people of God, one in faith and hope and charity, are one in Christ—*per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso*.

Within the liturgical cycle it is the paschal mystery that most specially speaks of the love of God, for here—in the events that Holy Week and Easter recall—the final proof of love is revealed. And the liturgy of Maundy Thursday, with its double theme of the Last Supper and the Washing of the Feet, might be said to express most deeply the single truth which underlies all other liturgical worship. If love means unity, it means humility as well, and the legacy of Christ to his disciples is 'A new commandment . . . that you love one another, as I have loved you'. And this love is made known in deeds: a sacrifice which does not count the cost, a symbolic humbling which once for all establishes the meaning of charity. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*. 'Where charity and love are, there is God. When, therefore, we are gathered in unity, let us never be divided in mind. Let quarrels and contentions cease, and let Christ our God dwell in the midst of us. Where charity and love are, there is God.' The words sung at the *Mandatum* echo the words of the Mass, and the Eucharist each day repeats the truth which Maundy Thursday bring out in all its fullness.

It is a misfortune that liturgical prayer has come so often to mean a special 'sort' of prayer. Truly seen it is the prayer of Christ, continually offered to the Father, and its theme is never other than that of love. God loves us, and there is only one answer to love; its return. Thus there is in the Mass, and indeed in all prayer, this double level: God's love revealed, and man's loving return. It is the work of the liturgy—using words, signs and gestures, matching man's capacity, engaging what he himself has to give—to direct that return, so that it is total and generous, with the totality of Christ's own love. For it is Christ himself who prays

when the Church prays: it is his sacrifice that is offered when the Mass is offered, and the single member of his Mystical Body is no longer the isolated worshipper, with no words that can be adequate to express a love so far beyond his reach. He has his own gift to make, it is true; incorporation in the Body of Christ does not mean an end to the work of the will. But the dimensions are altogether changed now. The love of God is no longer an idea in the mind: it is a reality made available and closer than hand or heart. It has been achieved in the supreme act of love which the liturgy reflects in all its splendour. And it is more than reflected: it is made for man's sharing, for such is the effect of redemption and grace. *Audemus dicere*: we can dare, now, to utter the words of Christ.

'I am the vine, you are the branches', and the living tree spreads over the whole world, and there is no one who is an alien or a stranger any more. Lifted up, Christ has drawn all men to himself, and the liturgical prayer and praise of the Church is but the sequel to that prophecy fulfilled.



THE LOVE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES

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SUPERNATURAL charity, 'is the love which refers all things to God above all things, even man himself'. *Caritas* or Agape is essentially a grace. From the New Testament we learn that God's 'design was and is to animate man with his own love that man, in and through God's love or grace, should have a kind of equality of friendship, such that he could know God as God knows himself, and love God as God loves himself in the Blessed Trinity'.¹

St Paul's preaching of love was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Gentiles mere folly. This is a love which abandons all thought of self, and becomes lost in its object. Its very opposite is that type of self-interest which makes people use others for their own ends, or to gloat over their

¹ *The Mind and Heart of Love*, Martin D'Arcy, S.J.; pp. 77, 79.