

EDITORIAL

THE new legislation for the ceremonies of Holy Week, to which attention is drawn in 'Extracts' in this issue, and which requires every Catholic to prepare in a new and deeper manner for the coming Easter, reminds us of the essential place the liturgy holds in the Christian life. The Holy See now states clearly the supremacy of liturgical prayer over private devotions, and in preparing for this Paschal ceremonial we should become more aware of the nature of the liturgy and its place in our Christian life.

One of the contributors to the present number of *THE LIFE* expounds the idea of the Mass as the central liturgical action and the source of spiritual life. But it should be noted that he takes for granted the primary meaning and function of the liturgy in concentrating on the effect it has upon the Christian. He is considering Christian worship as a channel of sanctification, as indeed it is, and a true participation in these new liturgical ceremonies at Easter will bring to the Church as a whole an abundance of grace and holiness. When, however, the beginner approaches the liturgy its supremacy over his own private devotions must be seen in the demand it makes on him to unite with the whole Mystical Body in giving himself entirely to God. Sacrifice is the keynote of liturgical ceremonial, the handing over of oneself to the worship of the Divine Majesty. Having given himself, the Christian moves on inevitably to Communion, to the reception of God's divine gifts. One of the distinctions between liturgy and popular or private devotions lies in this: 'devotions' are mainly concerned with the reception of graces, answers to prayer, the experience of God's love, whereas liturgy is worship and centred in the one act of Sacrifice offered by Christ and his Body on Calvary and on the altar.

The liturgy is the Mass and the extension of the Mass throughout the day and the year. And the Mass is Calvary leading on to the Resurrection and Communion. And while we are enabled to share in the one central act of worship on Calvary every day in the Holy Sacrifice there is one time in the year when the Church uses all her dramatic and artistic powers to reveal this act in its

most realizable form—in the ceremonies of Holy Week. It is the intention of the Holy See in the restoration of the Paschal liturgy to draw all the best in popular devotions back into this sacrificial act—and it should be remembered that most of these devotions have grown up in close contact with the liturgical year. In this way all that is best in the 'devotions' of the people is assured a place in the worship of the entire Church and is established in an act that is first of all one of self-giving, of offering praise and reparation to the Father through the one great redeeming action of the Son. An obvious example of this may be found in the renewal of baptismal promises now made during the Vigil of Easter. Hitherto this has been one of the high-lights of popular missions; but it has been found to be even more powerful and effective when placed in the baptismal ceremonial of the liturgy.

But we are counselled, urged, in fact commanded to learn the nature and meaning of the new rites which are imposed upon the Roman liturgy. It is therefore literally imperative for every Christian who follows the Roman rite to prepare for the coming Easter first of all in the spirit of sacrifice inspired by the generous following of the Lenten practices, but also in acquainting himself with the meaning of the ceremonial which now surrounds the annual commemoration of the sacrifice of our Lord upon Calvary. The instructions from the Holy See also seem to suggest that this preparation will be most effective if we bring to bear our own personal prayer and devotions upon the liturgy in which we are to participate. It is not a question of merely knowing what the priest is going to do on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday, nor yet simply having some inkling of what is meant by what the priest does. It is not a question of mere study and the exercise of the intellect. It is a question of centring our own personal worship and love of God in the greatest days in the year. We must approach Holy Week in a spirit of intellectual awareness, according to our capacities but also in a spirit of sacrifice, the liturgical spirit of self-giving in union with the whole Church. There are now two months remaining for this liturgical preparation.