

Give me the lowest place: not that I dare  
 Ask for that lowest place; but Thou hast died  
 That I might live and share  
 The glory by Thy side.

Give me the lowest place; and if for me  
 That lowest place too high, make one more low  
 Where I may sit and see  
 My God, and love Thee so.



## THE MASS AND OUR DAILY LIVES

DENIS FORBES

**L**IVING, as many Catholics today are forced to do, in what might almost be called a pagan atmosphere, it is not perhaps surprising to find that some awkward paradoxes have grown to become quietly accepted. One such detail of Catholic life, which for many people goes unnoticed, is the fact that the sacrifice of the Mass has come to mean little or nothing in relation to our everyday lives. There is a terrifying separation between ourselves, our actions, and the source of all aid and strength, the Mass. For a large number of Catholics, Sunday is the only day of the week when they can hear Mass. For six other days they must live and work in machine-shops and offices where often Christian ideals are openly considered weak, insufficient and out-dated. Often Catholics must experience that sinking feeling when the conversation focuses on some one of their beliefs and they hear the comments and jibes of people who very often know little about what they are criticizing. At these times, most Catholics must feel the need for some source of strength and encouragement to help carry them through. Yet they will look usually to every other source except the one instituted for this very purpose—the Mass.

The effect of a highly mechanized and scientific economy upon the lives of ordinary working people is to dull and deaden their appreciation of the simple and therefore beautiful things God has given to the world. There is little time to spare for the appreciation

of our position relative to our Creator, little time to think upon his gifts and to thank him, in the one way he wishes us to thank him—in the Mass. The hectic unceasing rush of twentieth-century life has drugged one of man's fundamental instincts into a state of torpor. He is no longer capable of enjoying the pure emotion of 'wonder', an emotion felt when we see ourselves as totally dependent upon God for our every need. Only when this is realized are we able fully to appreciate the perfection and capacity which exists in God's gifts to his creatures. Again, it is in the Mass that we can find an opportunity to adjust the balance of our outlook. In the prayers and supplications of the Mass we find a return to some true sense of proportion in our lives. We can again feel awed and appreciate the power and majesty of God and wonder at the way in which he humbles himself each day upon our altars.

The force of what is called 'modern science' upon the minds of ordinary men and women has largely been to dissolve all recognition of such a thing as 'mystery'. Nothing remains 'mysterious' before the eye of science. We allow our outlook to be made narrow and cramped by the unceasing influence of scientific discovery. We tend to neglect the realm of existence which reaches beyond atoms and whirling planets and so we forget our roles as creatures designed in the image of God and destined for a life stretching for eternity before the face of our Father. In the Mass there is always the same insistence upon the importance of mystery. But we need not lose sight of our spiritual destiny because science bores holes into the mysterious universe. We have in the sacrifice of the Mass one mystery which no man can reduce or nullify by reasoning. We are compelled by the very fact of the Consecration to see beyond mere matter to the life of the Spirit.

Christ lived and taught among men and women who were farmers and fishermen, who claimed their source of existence from the land and the sea by the labour of their hands. He taught them the powerful truths of the nature of God and of the destiny of mankind in parables, drawn from the things those people were familiar with—the vine, the leaven in the bread, and the mustard-seed. His miracles too were not confined to healing those diseased and ill, but they included on occasion the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Today we are hemmed in by steel and bricks, our cornfields are made of concrete, our seas and rivers of tarmac. We live at a remove from the source of our basic needs. Our roots

are in soil and in water. 'By the fruits of their corn, wine and oil, they are multiplied', said the psalmist, David. The Mass, swinging constantly through the year, reminds us often of where our roots lie. The winds and the sky, the growth and fruits of the earth are all woven into the year. In the Mass, each season is picked out and magnified to give some pace and meaning to a life which could otherwise swamp and perhaps extinguish the spirit in man. The weary soul is born again at Christmas, suffers with Christ during Lent, to rise clean with the new green shoots of Spring and with Christ on Easter morning. These things are to give depth and comfort to our lives and to reassure us of our future.

When Christ instituted the Mass he was not innovating some new ritual which was to prove a consolation to mankind. He was completing something man had been trying imperfectly to do since the world began. He instituted a sacrifice which men could offer to God in supplication, in thanksgiving, to praise God and to show their dependence upon him for their sustenance. He gave mankind a sacrifice which was to fulfil these needs, a perfect sacrifice, the only acceptable offering to God, his own Son. Christ gave us the Mass, made valid for all time by his crucifixion, that we might have a safeguard, a stable constant source of grace, to enable us to overcome the influences of the world around us and merit a life of perfection with Christ. But we have lost this immediate relation between this sacrifice and our lives. We no longer directly depend upon crops sown by our own hands to form the basis of our livelihood. In our streamlined age we take it for granted that we should be able to find food and drink. What is immediate to us is the way we have to earn the means of procuring that food. We have not that same urge to plead and to sacrifice to God, the ruler of the seasons, that he might bless and protect our lives and our crops. We need not all become smallholders to enrich our lives with a deeper understanding of the Mass, but it is important that we should not take the necessities of this life too much for granted.

Christ took the bread and wine which were upon the table where he and his friends were enjoying the Jewish feast of the Passover, and he changed the substance of this food and drink into his own body and lifeblood. They became no longer bread and wine to nourish the bodies of his disciples but food to nourish their souls. When he commanded them to eat he meant them to

make this their most important meal, to enjoy it often, for it was to become not only a meal but part of a complete sacrifice. The meal, fulfilled in Christ's crucifixion, became the fulfilment of man's striving to unite himself with his God in the sacrifice he offered. Our every meal is, in a way, a sacramental where we join with our family or with friends to nourish ourselves. The Mass should also be seen in this way, for we should strive to unite ourselves with our fellow men in eating the Eucharist and finding our nourishment in Christ. A man can nourish his body with food and drink and nourish his soul in prayer, but only in the fulness of the Eucharist can he be wholly nourished.

The bread of the sacred host is made from the same corn as the bread we eat at our own tables. It is primarily a food, suited to man as a being made up of body and spirit. It is a food which, when taken together in the Mass, can become for each and every one of us a power to live and a source of energy and love.



## THE MYSTICAL LIFE OF ISAIAS: II

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**B**EFORE Sennacherib, that new and still more powerful king, the policy of Judah fluctuated between restless schemes for alliances, especially with Egypt, and the firm independence of all but the power of God which Isaias taught, and which ultimately prevailed. It was then that he saw with clarity the mystery of creation, and was enabled to vest with reality in his mind that which faith, without sight, imposes. He expresses it under the humble image of a potter making pots as he will; the analogy becomes a permanent tradition in the Scriptures. It has a triple significance. It shows the emergence into the certitudes of the reason of the fact of substance, the independence of one's existence of any but the divine Being. Substance is the immediate term of creation, upon which all else in the creature as being accident, depends mediately. It thus involves the dependence of the soul on God and its independence before men. This is the strength of the saint against the powerful of the world. It imposes, too, as a