

exemplified in *Rosary Meditations* (Anon. T.O.S.D. Burns & Oates). There we are given models of meditations:

- (a) For peace. Each of the fifteen mysteries is related to the theme of peace.
- (b) For faith, hope, charity. The same is done with each of these theological virtues.
- (c) So too with the liturgical seasons, from Advent to Trinity Sunday, etc.
- (d) For a good death.

The other method is used when each mystery is considered *in itself* or intrinsically. We then have read or considered the biblical narrative very closely, and are striving to arrive at an ever more profound exegesis and savouring of the narrative. This 'way' is that of the true exegete or lover of the things of God who brings out of the treasury of the faith 'new things and old,' and, as a way, it is always fruitful in its results.

Still, whether we adopt the first or the second way, or yet another, God will perfect that work of grace which he himself has begun in us, and can fill us with a joy beyond all our deserts, for 'with joy you will draw waters from the Saviour's fountains'.



THE HOLY SOULS

DOMINIC SIRE, O.P.

WORSHIP is the outcome of living faith, the expression of a sincere conviction in some external and visible form. There is innate in every society and individual the urge to communicate and share conviction. Good naturally spreads itself in companionship. The Church is a society both human and divine; divine in its origin and support and human in its composition. It gives effect to this urge in two main streams, the liturgy and private devotion. As a society its worship is found in the liturgy, but the individual members of that society express themselves in a variety of private devotions. These two streams are nevertheless vitally connected. The liturgy of its very nature and because it is the official and common worship of the body politic remains somewhat static and is carefully prescribed and ruled by laws. It has even a common and universal language, at

least for the Latin Church. Private devotion—if it be authentic—is but the extension of the liturgy. It will necessarily have much that belongs to the individual needs and characteristics of a nation or civilization, yet it breathes the same spirit and expresses the same fundamental truths. Both have the same dogmatic and theological roots. As a result the teaching and customs of the Church can be gleaned from the liturgical and devotional practice of the Church especially where these have been constant for many generations.

It would be impossible in one short article to deal with the liturgy as a whole or the constant devotional life of the Church. The historical aspect will not even be considered, but two points will be taken and these very closely allied to one another.

The Church's main act of worship is to be found in the timeless and infinite sacrifice of the Mass. This is ultimately the essential and radical act of worship from which all else stems. It is the act of redemption whereby we have had the gates of Heaven opened afresh to us. Calvary and the Mass are one and the same sacrifice, and it is from Calvary that the whole life of grace, the sacramental life, flows. And this act continues daily on our altars in response to the command, 'Do this for a commemoration of me'. This is indeed the pearl of great price, the inestimable jewel, and we find it set in the mounting of the Divine Office. This again is a universal act of prayer and praise solemnized, it is true, by the monks, religious and priests, but nevertheless shared by the whole Church for it is the Church's prayer. The monk solemnly chanting the Church's daily prayer, the priest reciting his Breviary, is praying for and with the whole Church, and every member of that Church has his share in this daily song of praise. Its very purpose is to uphold the central sacrifice of the Mass and to surround it with the solemnity it deserves.

Here then we may look for an expression of the Church's teaching, and here we shall find a constant refrain. In that part of the Mass which remains unalterable, day by day we pray for 'thy servants and handmaids here present' offering the sacrifice; we recall the apostles, the early martyrs and saints, the rulers of God's people and Church today. We recall thereby the universality of the Church in both time and place. But we pray also and equally for 'thy servants and handmaids who have gone before us and sleep in the sleep of peace'. We are reminded forcefully of their need and right to our prayers, and in particular of the efficacy of

the saving sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood. Purgatory as a doctrine is taken for granted, and with it the fact of the existence of the Holy Souls detained and awaiting their final happiness. These souls are safe, it is true, but are not yet enjoying the eternal vision of God. We are reminded that this sacrifice is truly ours by God's infinite mercy and goodness, and that we can and should offer it for their benefit and to relieve them from their torments. When on special occasions the Requiem is offered it is not infrequently ushered in by the solemn recitation of the Office of the Dead. In the daily recitation of the Office usually said in sections, each section is terminated by a phrase known to every Catholic: 'May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.' The whole doctrine of Purgatory and the teaching concerning the Holy Souls is thus taken for granted in these great acts of worship, and they are permeated with its spirit. No less do we find this same spirit underlying private devotion or non-liturgical practice. Most forms of morning and night prayers, grace before and after meals include the refrain of the Divine Office: 'May the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.'

In this land of ours we find up and down the country the remains of chantry chapels whose very purpose was prayer for the souls of the departed and in particular their founders. A college still stands at Oxford, the very foundation of which and whose name proclaims the Holy Souls and the age-old traditions and beliefs of the Church at least in this country.

The Reformation, in breaking with the ancient Church, had logically to set aside its ancient customs. The cold comfort of Calvin removed for ever the word 'hope' from the vocabulary of his followers and reduced the supernatural virtues to two if not one. Luther made good works a futile waste of time, which made charity look small and made nonsense of the great words of St Paul to the Corinthians. Both of necessity had to cast aside the doctrine of Purgatory and all devotion to the Holy Souls, since such teaching was bound up with the theology of the Mass which was swept away with the debris of all other good works. Hope through the Blood of Christ and his Sacrifice was the very marrow of the liturgy and the devotion of the faithful. The Holy Souls vanished into a pit of despair in consequence. Life was robbed of all its moral significance. God was no longer a merciful

and loving Father but just a capricious tyrant with little regard for justice or mercy.

Yet had not Christ said, 'All power is given to me in Heaven and on earth', and again, 'As the Father hath sent me so do I send you'? Because he will be with us all days, so this very same power has been handed down to the Church. The Father had sent him and even so he has sent us to teach and instruct all nations. This almighty power he gave us when through his mercy and goodness he gave the infinite sacrifice of his only-begotten Son. This power is the power of saving. To set all this aside together with its all too obvious implications is to spurn God's teaching. The reformers might well have been called the deformers.

Devotion to the Holy Souls and the doctrine of Purgatory are writ large on every Christian monument and in every page of the history of the Church. They are part of the Church's tradition and fabric and these the Church has faithfully and jealously preserved against all opposition. The Sacrifice of the Mass and the Divine Office are the prayers of all—past, present and to come. This is and always has been the teaching of the Church and it is our bounden duty to give it place and effect in our lives. What the Church works we also must work. It is only by our belief in Purgatory and our devotion to the Holy Souls that we bring reality to our belief expressed in the Apostles' Creed when we say that we believe in the Communion of Saints. Only by our active participation in the Mass and constant remembrance of the Holy Souls do we preach the constant teaching of the Church and our belief in God's mercy. The priest can never offer his Mass or recite his Breviary but he is reminded of this teaching, and he must remember at the same time that he is but the unworthy minister of God's people. He does not pray alone; he prays with and for the whole Church in every age. The faithful, too, must be conscious of their participation in this mystical body and all its sacrifices. What better way than a constant and real devotion to the Holy Souls? 'Lord, that we might better understand the power that is ours through the merits of Jesus Christ.'



In the OCTOBER number of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT a special supplement of book reviews will be included.