

EDITORIAL

MUCH controversy goes on over the debatable question of vernacular in the Mass and there is a growing body of opinion, more marked perhaps among the laity than among the clergy, that the introduction of at least a considerable measure of it is a reform both desirable and overdue. The supreme authority of the Church is evidently keenly solicitous in the matter of liturgical reform, as is evidenced by the approval extended to recent Liturgical Congresses, notably that of Assisi last year, and also by changes of great moment in the liturgy of Holy Week and in the laws governing the fast before Communion. Yet is this matter of vernacular in the Roman Mass the steps ekatn hitherto by authority have been of a very limited nature, and in the eyes of some disappointingly conservative.

We are publishing this month a number of COMMENTS and a POINT OF VIEW which serve to illustrate, and in one case to call in question, the central thesis of an article by Fr Conrad Pepler, O.P., *Latin is still practical*, which appeared in our June number. The thesis of this article was that the Mass is a Mystery; it is *the* Mystery of our Redemption, one and the same sacrifice as that of Calvary. It is therefore, before all else, something *we do* and something that God does; not something we say and that God says to us. The liturgy must needs use words and language, but its language is subsidiary to what it does, and the heart of its mystery lies not in the words but in the sacramental action, in the showing of the Lord's death till he come.

It is the penetration into and realization of this mystery of our Redemption by the grace of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the essential element in the part played by God's People in the offering of the Mass. In this offering the words are integral to the action because by them the meaning that the Church, under divine guidance, gives its action and puts upon the lips of priest and people, is made manifest. And it is the meaning that must be entered into and penetrated; the actual words will effect this only in accordance with the capacity of each individual to transmute them into meaning; and even then, until we gain the vision

of God, we shall never wholly penetrate into and make our own the fullness of that meaning.

It is unfortunately true that to a very grievous extent many of our Catholic people have lost the sense of the meaning of the Mass and of the profundity of its mystery. This has been due, not so much to the unintelligibility of the Latin language, as to the fact that owing to a variety of historical circumstances, of which a dead language is only one, the people have been cut off from active participation in and connection with what is being done at the altar when Mass is offered. It is no doubt true, and it is a fact that partisans of the liturgical movement are apt to overlook, that in the past the average well-instructed Catholic united himself silently but actively in the offering of Mass by the use of the rosary or *The Garden of the Soul*, and that today he does so by an increased use of the missal. But it is unfortunately also true that the level of instructed religious practice is, on the average, much lower than it formerly was, and that there are today many thousands present in our churches who are ignorant of the elements of their religion, and in particular of the meaning of the sacrifice they are there to offer.

In this way a tendency has grown among them to regard the Mass as something done by the priest on their behalf but without their active assistance. They themselves, meanwhile, are occupied to a greater or lesser extent with prayers and devotions which, though doubtless remotely connected with what the priest is about, are far from that close and corporate co-operation with him which the liturgy itself envisages and which leads to intimate union with Christ in his sacrifice. For the less devout and assiduous it is an easy step from this to regard the Mass, somewhat superstitiously, as a kind of incantation to secure the beneficent effect of which bodily presence and a minimum of attention will suffice. So the profound sense of the mystery of Redemption enshrined in the Holy Sacrifice not seldom becomes impoverished, and in some cases is almost wholly lost sight of.

For this reason it is a putting of the cart before the horse, to say the least of it, to imagine that a mere change of language would in any way help to restore or strengthen this deep sense of the Mass as the mystery of Redemption. The language of the Sacred Mysteries translated into the vernacular would have as

little meaning for those who have wholly or partially lost this sense as does the incomprehensible Latin. What is needed is a recovery of the sense of Worship and Adoration. If we interpret the intention of the Church in the liturgical reforms lately initiated and urged upon us we shall see that it is precisely this that is their primary aim. The object of the new Holy Week and Easter rites is to induce in the faithful a deeper insight into the meaning of the mystery of Redemption by a closer and more actual participation in the drama of Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

The same is true of the liturgical celebration of the Sunday Mass in our parish churches. The Holy See, since the days of St Pius X, has been urging upon the faithful with increasing insistence their duty to pray the Mass, to familiarize themselves with the integral parts of the liturgical action, and at least the general sense of the words that accompany each part, and to follow the actions of the priest and make the offering *with* him. It is not difficult, even for the most unlettered to do this and to learn the meaning of the simple dialogues, the *Dominus vobiscum*, *Sursum Corda*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*, and even to grasp the import of the *Gloria* and *Credo*. And this active participation will effect a sense of unity and community which will enable all by God's grace to penetrate into and make their own the meaning of what they are about.

This penetration into the mystery of what Christ our Lord has wrought for us upon Calvary and what in his risen and ascended life he does for us in the sacramental life of his Mystical Body of which the Mass is centre and source, will produce in us a heightened sense of sin. A heightened sense of sin will prove to us more and more completely our utter dependence on God's providence, and a vivid realization of our utter dependence upon God will bring us truly to our knees in humble worship and adoration.

There is, as Fr Conrad Pepler pointed out in his article, a true place for vernacular in the Mass. It is in that part of the liturgy which is instructional; in the lessons, epistles and gospels. Holy Scripture, as we have been at pains to emphasize in the last two numbers of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, embodies the revelation of God's plan to save mankind from the results of human sin. It

sets out this plan of salvation as it was announced by the original apostolic preaching, the proclamation of which it is the office of the Church to continue unceasingly. The Scriptures therefore have a claim to be read in English in their liturgical place in the Mass. They might also be admitted to a place as an integral part of services subsidiary to the Mass, on lines similar to the Breviary lessons. They should be expounded, too, by systematic preaching, in such a way that all the faithful may have the opportunity of hearing and understanding them; for they and they alone are the source from which, under the guidance of God's Church, the Word of salvation is drawn.

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The annual Conference of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* will be held at Spode House, September 25th to 28th. The theme of the Conference is *BIBLE AND WORSHIP*, the connection between Scripture and Liturgy; and the need for a deeper understanding of the scriptural foundations of the Liturgy, upon which can be built up a living community worship, drawing its inspiration from the Word of God and penetrating the whole of life.

The speakers will deal with particular applications of this theme as follows: George Ineson (of the Taena community) on *LITURGY IN THE LAY COMMUNITY*; Mrs A. H. Armstrong on *BIBLE, LITURGY AND FAMILY*; Mrs Nicolette Gray on *READING THE BIBLE*; Fr Edmund Hill, O.P., on *THE PSALMS IN DAILY LIFE*; Fr Gabriel Reidy, O.F.M., on *THE BREVIARY AND THE LAITY*.

Those wishing to attend the Conference should apply to the Warden, Spode House, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs. (Tel. Armitage 331) who will give information about means of travel. The fee for the Conference is £2 7s. 6d., of which a deposit of 10s. should be sent in advance as booking fee.