

THE HOLY EUCHARIST IN THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

THE PURPOSE OF THE EUCHARIST

The Holy Eucharist or Mass is often called the Lord's Supper. It is that, but it has become More than that. Under his guidance and inspiration it has been expanded from its simple beginnings so as to serve an ever-widening circle of humanity,

It has always been the central act of Catholic worship. Designed to help those who take part therein, it is intended also to serve the surrounding world, and it summons the congregation together with the Angel Host to intelligent and energetic participation in this work.

In our conception, worship has a three-fold aspect and purpose. It is firstly the offering of 'worship' -that is, praise and honor- to almighty God. Secondly, it is intended to help the worshippers. And thirdly -and most important of all -it is intended to help the surrounding world at large, through the instrumentality of the worshippers, by pouring out upon it a great flood of spiritual power. We may safely say that God Himself does not need our praise and certainly would not appreciate anything in the nature of adulation from those who might be expected to know better. We feel and know, on the other hand, that it is good

for us to lift up our hearts in praise and aspiration and to strive to unify ourselves more completely with the divine will. But we may go further and say with all reverence that God does make use of our co-operation and in His plan counts on that intelligent and energetic cooperation more and more as man grows into spiritual maturity. The Liberal Catholic Church aims at making its members strong and efficient workers in His service. It tries to help them to realize the divine light in themselves -the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, but which too often is veiled and hidden by ignorance and wrongdoing- and then to see that light in the heart of others and to help them to unveil its divine splendor.

CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP

It is intended that the public worship should be 'congregational' in character. The 'priesthood of the laity' is no empty phrase, and expression should be given to the truth which it embodies. With the use of a liturgy in the language of the people there is no reason why the laity should not take an active part in much of the rite and follow step by step what is taking place at altar.

THE PREPARATION

The liturgy of the Holy Eucharist opens with the asperges or sprinkling with consecrated water, whose purpose is to

prepare the building, to purify and steady the thought and feeling of the people and to invoke the presence of an Angel to assist in the worship. The use of incense assists in the work of purification. Then follows the preparation, consisting largely of ascription of praise to almighty God, intended to attune the worshippers to high and holy things. This is greatly helped by the confession and absolution. The collect, epistle, gospel and creed draw out especially the thought of the people, whereas the preceding sections have largely worked upon their devotion.

THE OFFERING

At the offertorium another phase of the liturgy is introduced. The bread and wine are now offered in the service of God as first-fruits of the earth and tokens of our worldly offerings. A little later, in the prayer, 'We lay before thee, O Lord,' these elements are offered as a symbol of the sacrifice of ourselves to God's service. Very shortly, in the prayer of consecration, they will be offered as a channel for Christ's blessing and at yet a later stage as His most sacred Body and Blood, to be used by us as an aid to unite ourselves with His will. Then comes the splendid appeal to the congregation to lift up their hearts and, in company with the nine orders of Angels whose presence here is invoked, to give thanks to almighty God -the sursum corda and preface, followed by the sanctus.

THE DIVINE RESPONSE

We have now entered upon the canon, as it has been called since ancient times, the most important section. At the beginning of the prayer of consecration the celebrant proceeds to enumerate the special purposes or intentions for which the sacrifice is to be offered. Now come the words of consecration, the solemn act by which the bread and wine in their natural substance become the Body and Blood of Christ. It may help us to understand this great mystery if we realize that our own bodies are vehicles or expressions of our consciousness, of the indwelling spirit; so that bread and wine which nourish our bodies become here the special expression or manifestation of Jesus Christ, the channel of His blessing for the nourishing of our souls.

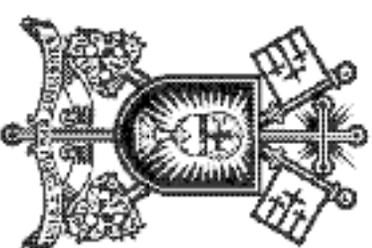
THE COMMUNION

All who are present must inevitably be uplifted by the radiation of His holy power and those who receive Holy Communion are brought by this blessed privilege into close and intimate union with our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Each communicant, enshrining within himself/herself for the time being the veritable presence of the Christ Life, can and should be a radiant sun and a blessing to all he/she goes forth into the world. Rightly do we regard this service as the supreme act of Christian worship and offer thanks to Him who gave it.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD

All the love and devotion which have so freely been poured out during the service and the infinite abundance of spiritual power which has been called down from on high in response, are gathered together by the directing Angel and shed abroad upon the world along with the benediction given by the celebrant. Through the ceremony of the Holy Eucharist, each time it is celebrated, there passes forth into the world a wave of peace and strength, the effect of which can hardly be overrated; and this, which is indeed the primary object of the service, is achieved at every celebration, whether the priest be alone in his private oratory or ministering to a vast congregation in some, magnificent cathedral. Therefore it offers to us an unequalled opportunity of becoming laborers together with God, of doing His true and laudable service by acting as channels of His wondrous power.

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