

The Catholic Way Of Worship

By Fflorens Roch.

Australian Catholic Truth Society No.1248a (1956)

1. ESSENTIALS.

EVERYONE, every Catholic, whether they were born into the Catholic Church or whether they found their own way there later in life, should be able to give an account of the Faith that is in them.

Our Faith is to each one of us the most precious thing we have. It means the relationship of our own soul to God, and nothing in the world matters as much as that. So we cannot be vague about it. We must know definitely what we believe, why we believe it, and how we are to practise it. From this comes our special "way of worship."

We Catholics believe that God made us, and that we owe to Him every moment of our lives — without Him we are nothing.

God made us because He loved us from all Eternity, and He wanted us, His creatures, to love Him and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next world.

He wished to have our love freely given to Him, and so when He made us He gave us the gift of Free Will, that means He has given each man and woman a will that may choose God or may turn away from Him. The Bible, which is the inspired word of God, tells us that in the beginning, man disobeyed God; in other words, man turned away from God — he sinned.

But God still loved His human creatures. He loved them so much that He would wash away that sin and the sins that followed it. But only God Himself could repair a sin against God. Out of His love, therefore, God Himself became Man, in order that He might suffer and die for us. And 'God made Man' is called Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

Now the whole basis of the Faith of the Catholic Church is the fact that Christ our Lord was God — not a prophet or an extra good man; not a man possessing divine qualities, or becoming what is called "God-like" in some special way — not that, but God Himself. For in God there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And like Saint Peter, we too hold and declare that He whom we call Our Lord is indeed, "Christ the Son of the living God" (Saint Matthew 16:16).

Moreover, we know that, as Christ was God, every word He spoke was the word of God; every command that He gave to His Apostles carried with it the power to fulfil that command, the power which only God could give.

The Divinity of Our Lord is then the foundation of our Faith. It is this which gives the full meaning to the sacrifice of Calvary; that is, to the fact that Christ our Lord, out of His love, shed His blood for us, so that we, if we would — again God would not force man's will — might seek and obtain pardon for our sins, and the help and grace needed to lead a good and holy life for love of Him. And as a final proof of His Godhead, Christ our Lord, having died for man, rose again from the dead, which is beyond the power of mortal man to do.

We now come a step further. Our Lord, being God, could foresee the dangers that would come to mankind; how false teachers would spring up to lead them astray; how the pleasures and the cares of the world would gradually come between them and the thought of God; how they would be led to forget Him; and how the memory of all He had done for them would fade away, if they were left to themselves. It was, then, absolutely necessary — our very reason tells us so — that Our Lord, while He was yet visibly upon this earth, should establish here a teaching Body, who to the end of time would keep alive the things He had taught; who would have His Authority to go on teaching; and, more than that, would have not only His Authority, but His Presence in their midst. And so He established His Church upon earth, in the persons of His Apostles. He left them in no doubt, His commission to them, on the very Mount of the Ascension, was clear, and clear was His promise to remain with them and with their successors, for all time.

"All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Going therefore teach you all Nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Saint Matthew 28:18-20).

Christ came for all the world, therefore His Church belongs not to one nation only, but to the whole world, for as has been seen, He commissioned His Apostles, the nucleus of His Church, to teach "all nations."

The Church, therefore, that is the Church founded by Christ Himself, must be the same in all nations, teaching the same truths, and worshipping in the same way (not in Uniformity, but in Unity). Thus, there are several rites within the One Church. Indeed, as though to emphasize the fact that the Church of Christ is no mere National Church, she has for centuries held her liturgical services and her offices for the Western Rite in the Latin tongue, which is the tongue of no one nation.

All letters, (Encyclicals), all ecclesiastical directions, admonitions, et cetera, sent out from the Pope who is the visible Head of the Church on earth, are sent in the Latin tongue, so that all nations receive them alike, each one being of course free to translate them into their own language for the instruction of the "Faithful."

The Church of Christ, just because it is His Church, must be holy. This does not mean that all her members are holy. Human beings still have free will; they may still choose the way of God, which is often the way of the Cross, or they may reject it; they may obey their Church, or act contrary to her Teaching. The worst enemies the Church has had are those of her own members who have refused to live according to her standard. The Holiness of the Church of Christ then means that her teaching is holy; her standard of life is holy; her way of worship is holy; and furthermore that there have been those who having lived according to her counsels of perfection have attained to "heroic sanctity," in other words, have after their death been declared and universally recognized as Saints.

In order to understand aright the Catholic way of worship, we must keep the essentials clear in our minds — the Divinity of Christ — the Sacrifice of Calvary — the establishment by Our Lord of a Church that will keep His Truth ever alive before His people, the Truth that must be One, and must be Holy, because it is God's Truth. We must recognize that God's Truth is something, which exists outside ourselves. It matters not whether every part of it appeals to each one of us or not; it matters not whether the way we are told to go is easy or hard — the thing that does matter is, is it true? Did Our Lord come to show us an easy way, or did He come to lead us along the Way of the Cross?

Does the Catholic Church teach the easy way, or the Way of the Cross? We have each to solve that question for ourselves.

And now, having faced the essentials, we are able to look with understanding at the Catholic "Way of Worship."

As our religion is not only founded on, but built up round the Divinity of Our Lord and the Sacrifice of Calvary, it stands to reason that the central act of Worship in the Catholic Church is the Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is not a service in the usual sense of the word. It is the daily renewal, in a painless and mystic way, of the supreme Sacrifice of Calvary. It is this that puzzles people sometimes. [Our author is, of course, speaking of the Liturgy of Saint Pius V. Vatican II introduced several significant changes.] They wonder why the priest so often speaks in such low tones during Mass, why the people kneel there so silently, responding to no prayers out loud. It is just because the priest is not "taking a service." He is offering a Sacrifice, the same Sacrifice, which was offered on Calvary, and the people kneeling in the church are joining with him at the foot of the Cross. They are free to join in any way they like. Some follow closely in their books, in their own language, the words, which the priest is saying in Latin, now aloud, now in a whisper at the altar. They pray the prayers with him. Others pray in their own words — others kneel in wordless adoration before their Lord. It matters not whether the worshippers are learned, or whether they can neither read nor write; whether they are old, or whether they are little children; they can each join in their own way in this central act of worship, the Sacrifice of the Mass, where Christ our Lord offers Himself once again to the Eternal Father, but now under the appearance of bread and wine, for all the needs of the world, for the souls of the living and the dead.

Difficult to grasp, it may be said, difficult to believe. It was always difficult, ever since Our Lord Himself, in the scene described by Saint John in the 6th chapter of his Gospel, promised to give His "flesh for the life of the world" (verse 52). So difficult was it indeed that we are told, "the Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying; 'How can this man give us His flesh to eat?'" And because He would not explain away His saying, but on the contrary reiterated it, many of His disciples "Walked no more with Him" (Saint John 6:67).

How was He the Bread of Life; how was it possible that He should give His Body and Blood to be the food of their souls? Like many today, they would not accept the Divine Word, because their little human minds could not understand it. So they left Him. And He let them go because He would not change His Truth. But turning to the twelve He asked them, "Will you also go away?"

And Simon Peter, speaking for them all, replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that You are the Christ the Son of God" (Saint John 6:69-70).

In other words, "We know, though we don't understand, that whatever You, the Son of God, say, must be the Truth."

Later, at the Last Supper, Our Lord fulfils His promise for the first time. He changes the bread and wine into His Body and Blood, and gives His Apostles the command — and with it the power to carry out that command — to do the same as He has done, that is to consecrate bread and wine, changing it by that act into His Body and Blood, in commemoration of Him. Thus was the Mass instituted, and thus it was believed from the very early ages of the Church.

Saint Paul said quite plainly:

"As often as you shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come." (1 Corinth 11:24).

You shall show the death of the Lord — that is plain, isn't it, just as we believe today, and as every Catholic believes — the Mass is the renewal, the showing again of the death of the Lord; the renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary. No wonder that it is the central act of worship in the Catholic Church to which no other one of her services, beautiful as they are, can be compared.

It is through the Mass that Christ Himself comes into the souls of His people in Holy Communion. There is no obligation under the Law of the Church for anyone to go to Holy Communion more than once a year, so that it is from no obligation, but out of love that thousands, in this country alone, go daily to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. Many go at considerable sacrifice to themselves. I know working girls who will go to work without their breakfast rather than miss their Communion. [At the time of writing, the Communion fast was from midnight.] And many who are unable to be daily Communicants, will never, if they can help it, miss their Sunday Communion. It is understandable once one knows what lies behind it in the Catholic Way of Worship — when one realizes what the coming of Our Lord Himself must be to a soul who loves Him.

I know an old woman — and there are probably many like her, for the world is full of hidden saints — who is very poor and very lame, living at what is for her a considerable distance from the church. Her work, for which the pay is very bad, is pulling rabbit skins, unpleasant work and unhealthy. Her hours are long, yet never does a day pass but that old woman, whatever the weather, goes fasting to Mass at 7 o'clock.

And each evening at 8 o'clock, she is again in the church for night prayers or Benediction. When she was taken ill one autumn and for a time was unable to leave her bed, it was her sorrow that she had to miss her daily Communion for the first time in twenty years. As soon as she was well enough, she was back at the altar every day. And it is no comfortable warmed church she goes to, but one which in winter freezes one to the bone with that kind of damp cold that goes through one, even when one has plenty of warm clothes to put on. To souls like that, there comes a happy familiarity with holy things; Our Lord is not someone far away who is addressed in formal words on a Sunday, and perhaps night and morning in a few set prayers. He is their friend, to whom they love to go, who cares for them every moment of their lives.

Speaking of the cold of a winter's morning in that un-warmed church, my old friend said:

"I'm glad of me hot cup o' tea before I go to work. Our Lord is very good. He'll never let one want for a cup o' tea, if one trusts in Him."

But it isn't only the old, whom the Catholic way of worship draws very close to the Person of Our Lord. All are drawn, once they have accepted the sacrifices. For the Catholic way is not the easy way, it is the Way of the Master, the Way of the Cross.

A working girl unable to attend daily Mass, owing to the early hour at which she had to set out for her factory, said to me once:

"The tram passes the church. And I always say 'My Lord and my God,' as we go by. You see, I know Mass is going on, and it might just be at the Elevation."

To go back for a moment to the question of Unity, it is worth while realizing that if we stepped into that church during Mass, and were suddenly able to take those worshippers away to a Catholic

church, in, let us say, Norway, or Italy, or Africa, or anywhere in the world at the hour of Mass, they would be quite at home. The same prayers, in the same familiar Latin tongue, the same gestures, the same Mass in fact, with no shadow of difference. A Catholic is at home in any Catholic church all the world over. [Since the reforms of Vatican II, one can truly say that the Western Rite is still the same prayers, the same gestures, the same Mass but probably said in a different Vernacular. The Latin, however, remains normative.]

I remember once in Switzerland during Benediction on a Sunday evening, it came all at once to my mind that if the little company of Catholic Girl Guides which I was running at the time in connection with a South East London slum parish, could be dropped down into that Swiss church, they would be able to join in the singing every bit as lustily as the little Swiss children I saw about me. The same hymns in the same (Latin) language, even the same familiar tunes as it happened. Those young Londoners would have been as much at home as in their own Parish Church during a Sunday evening Benediction.

(It should be mentioned here that there are Catholic Churches in complete union with Rome which have been allowed to keep their own Ancient Eastern Rites and language, where a Catholic accustomed to the Latin Rite would be puzzled a little. The Mass in these churches is surrounded by many ceremonies quite unfamiliar to the majority of European, Australian and American Catholics. But the sacrifice is the same, the chief parts of the Mass, the Offertory, Consecration, Communion, et cetera, would soon be recognized.)

But to return to our main point. The Catholic knows that Our Lord's love for mankind has gone still further. Not content with becoming man, and suffering and dying for us — not content with leaving behind Him a Church upon earth of which He is the Head — not content with renewing daily upon the altars of that Church His supreme Sacrifice — not content even with giving Himself to be the food of each individual soul who wishes to receive Him, He does yet more. Have you ever gone into Westminster Cathedral, or some other Catholic church in the large thoroughfares of London or other big cities when there is no service going on? Always people are praying there. In the poorer parts of London, where most people are at work during the day, the larger number of these silent worshippers will be found after working hours. In Westminster Cathedral, they are to be found all day and throughout the evening too until the church closes at 9.30. Some will be kneeling, some sitting; all are praying quietly in their own way; some with books, the greater number probably without. That way of worship goes on all day, especially in the bigger churches of London and of other large towns. And in the country churches too there will be the intermittent visits of the "faithful."

What is behind this way of worship? Again Our Lord Himself. Through the Mass He has come down upon the altar, and He remains there all day and all night in the Blessed Sacrament hidden away in the tabernacle. It is no empty church those people enter to pray. They know by the lighted lamp hanging before the altar (it may be before the High altar, or it may be before an altar in a side chapel as in Westminster Cathedral) that Our Lord is there. Some go in for a few minutes only, on their way from work it may be, or to say a prayer during their dinner hour; some can spare a longer time. No one orders them to come; no one tells them how to pray when they are there. They just come because they love Our Lord, and He draws them. They may be in trouble, and want to tell Him about it and ask His help; they may want to thank Him for His Goodness; they may come to pray for someone who is dear to them, or someone in danger or sickness; or they may come simply to adore Him, asking for nothing, but that His Holy Will may be done in all things.

The Catholic "way of worship" is a very homely thing really; the humblest and the most ignorant will feel quite happy joining in spirit in the grandest ceremonies of the Church, and all the while speaking to God in their own way. Religion and church don't just belong to Sundays, they belong to every day. The Church like a mother looks after the needs of each individual soul, and meets them with a special help in all the greatest needs of their life.

The seven Sacraments, as it were, meet the soul at certain moments of life when help is specially needed. When the child is born, the Sacrament of Baptism makes it a Child of God, and a member of the Church. As it approaches maturity, the Sacrament of Confirmation gives it an added strength. The child of God is taken a step further and becomes a soldier of Jesus Christ.

When temptations have proved too strong, and sin has been committed, the Catholic seeks pardon and grace in the Sacrament of Penance, which necessitates Confession, with true repentance and a firm purpose of amendment. All through life, the Church is ready to give the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, for this is the food, and often the daily food, of the soul. Then just as Mother Church was there to receive the soul and make it God's very own, when it came into the world, so is she there with a special sacrament to sanctify and help the soul about to leave the world. Extreme Unction (the Last Anointing or the Sacrament of the Sick) is given to those about to die, or in danger of death or otherwise seriously ill, and it brings with it spiritual peace, and consecrates anew the whole being to God.

But there are serious steps in life itself, which need special sacramental grace. To those men who give themselves altogether to the service of God in the priesthood, she gives the Sacrament of Holy Orders. To those about to marry, she gives the special grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

So that prayers and spiritual help surround the Catholic all through his life, that is, the help is there, offered to him if he will take it — he is not forced. If he chooses, he may turn away and refuse all that is offered. He is free.

In considering the Catholic Way of Worship, there is just one main fact to remember, and that is that Jesus Christ our Lord is the centre of it all. He is behind our veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Holy Mother, and the Saints. We love Our Lady, as we call the Mother of Jesus, because she was His Mother, and because she was the holiest of women chosen before all others to be the mother of God made man. We know by that wonderful 1st chapter of Luke's Gospel, that the Angel Gabriel sent by God Himself addresses Mary in these words, "Hail full of Grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women." And so in those very words do Catholics love to address her, asking her who must be so very dear to the heart of Our Lord, as she was His Mother, to pray for us.

And in the same way, we ask the special friends of God to help us by their prayers, because they loved Our Lord before everyone and everything else — many of them died for Him.

We all say "I believe in the Communion of Saints," when we say the Apostles Creed, and to Catholics that is just what it means, that we are all one family, and may help each other by our prayers; that those who are already with God may help their brothers and sisters on earth who are trying to get nearer to Him. After all, we love to feel that some good holy friend on earth is praying for us, don't we? We ask to be remembered in the prayers of those who we know love God. Why then should we not ask the prayers of those who are already with Him — men like Saint Francis of Assisi, who gave up everything to be more like Our Lord, and who lived their lives for Him alone.

"Bear you one another's burdens." (Galatians 6: 2). And so both in prayer and in deed must we help each other. Catholics pray not only for those who are living in this world. Their prayers do not end when their friends have passed into the valley of death, but they follow them after death. There is no great cleavage between this world and the next, and the Communion of Saints makes us all one.

At the last supper Our Lord prayed for His Apostles, whom He was about to leave, and for those who through them should believe in Him, that is for the Church that He had founded to carry on His teaching. And His prayer was for unity:

"And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one, as You, Father, in me, and I in You: that they also may be one in us; that the World may believe that You have sent Me" (Saint John 17:20-21).

2. DEVOTIONS.

So far, we have considered what may be called the Essentials in the Catholic Way of Worship, the way of worship, that is, of the greatest number of the laity. We have not touched upon the Divine Office, the great liturgical prayers of the Church said daily by the clergy (and others), and chanted in choir, by many religious Orders of both men and women. The Divine Office is certainly one of the essentials in the life of the Church, though it does not come within the scope of this pamphlet, for generally speaking, with the exception of Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Compline (Night Prayer), it does not enter into the way of worship of the laity. [This is less true since Vatican II, as the Church has been encouraging more of the Faithful to unite themselves with this Prayer of the Church.]

There are, however, certain "devotions" which do form a very intimate part of the religious life of every Catholic, of the completely unlettered as well as of the educated. Foremost among these is the devotion or "service" known as Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Again, Our Lord Jesus Christ is the centre, for without faith in the Real Presence this service would be meaningless.

During Benediction, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed above the altar in a vessel called a "monstrance" where all can see It. Certain hymns are sung, and incense, the symbol of divine worship, is burnt, and swung in the censer towards the Blessed Sacrament. It is a short and homely service. In all countries, Catholics feel at home when they step into a church at the hour of Benediction, which is usually in the afternoon or evening. There is nothing formal about it; it is literally a gathering of disciples about the feet of the Master to receive His Blessing.

When they have sung their hymns, or prayed in silence, (some time in adoration is always included), according to their individual devotion, the priest then takes the monstrance in his hands; the bell rings; the worshippers bow down in silence; while the priest holds the Blessed Sacrament above the people and makes with It a large sign of the Cross. Then he turns, places the monstrance on the altar, kneels down, and all join in the "Divine Praises." It is very simple, and yet it is stupendous, for the fact of the Real Presence is in itself stupendous.

I once heard of a man who, having attended Benediction for the first time, asked what it meant. The Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament was explained to him, and he went away. He came back a few days later asking to be received into the Church. The idea of God made Man giving Himself daily to His people in the Blessed Sacrament had overwhelmed him. It must be true, he said, for only God Himself could think of such a thing.

On certain days of the year, which vary in different churches, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed above the altar, as for Benediction, all day while the Faithful come in at all hours to pray in silence before It. This is called Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. In every church in turn, there is Exposition for three days during the Quarant Ore or 'Forty Hours' Prayer. When it is possible, the watching and prayer are continued throughout the night. There is hardly a day on which the Forty Hours prayer is not taking place somewhere.

In many convents, where the nuns make Adoration their chief work, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed every day, in some cases through the night too. At the great Church of the Sacred Heart at Montmartre in Paris there is Perpetual Adoration, that is, the Blessed Sacrament is always exposed. The watching is undertaken by the laity, both men and women during the day, by men only at night. In London there is daily Adoration by the laity at the Church of the Sacred Heart at Horseferry Road from after the 8 o'clock Mass to the evening Benediction. Thus does the Catholic way of worship provide an endless fount of adoration and prayer during every hour of the day and night.

A popular devotion in the Church is the Rosary. It is often said in public, but more often still, it is used as a private devotion. It sometimes puzzles non-Catholics, for it seems to them like nothing more than a continual repetition of the same prayer.

The Rosary is first and foremost a meditation. For example, take the Five Joyful Mysteries. On each rosary, there are five decades, that is five sets of ten beads divided by a single bead. The first Joyful Mystery consists in saying an "Our Father" on the single bead, and a "Hail Mary" on each of the ten beads, ending with a "Glory be to the Father," while at the same time meditating on the Annunciation.

The second meditation (called the second Joyful Mystery) is the Visitation.

The third Joyful Mystery is the Birth of Our Lord in a stable at Bethlehem.

The fourth Joyful Mystery is the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple.

The fifth Joyful Mystery is the Finding of the 12 year old Child Jesus in the Temple.

Thus, the Five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary are concerned entirely with events surrounding the birth and childhood of Our Lord.

The five Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary form together a meditation on the Passion of Our Lord.

The Agony in the Garden.

The Scourging at the pillar.

The Crowning with thorns.

The Carrying of the Cross.

The Crucifixion of Our Lord and His death between two thieves.

The Glorious Mysteries are concerned with the Resurrection and events that followed, founded on Scripture and tradition.

Only those who have had experience of it know the extraordinary help to concentration on a definite scene to be found in those reiterated prayers, while the mind is carried on from one "Mystery" to the other. Mental prayer, helped by vocal prayer, and within the reach of all, so simple is it.

"Except ye become as little children ye cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Christ our Lord said that, over nineteen hundred years ago.

And today Catholic children and the old people, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, Catholics of all nations and all races, are one as their rosary beads slip through their fingers, and their minds go back to the foundations of Christianity; the Incarnation, God made Man; the Redemption; the Resurrection and the glory that followed.

There are many devotions in the Catholic Church. Those who follow her way of worship are very free.

No two souls are alike, some find spiritual help in one way, some in another. Once the central fact is recognized, that Christ lives in His Church, directing her, and guarding her from error, all else falls into place.

Man will always have free will, therefore there will always be erring members of the Church, members who give scandal, members who disobey, but the Faith itself will be safe. We have Our Lord's promise that the very "Gates of Hell" shall not prevail against His Church. Hence, there can be freedom of devotion in her way of worship, freedom, and at the same time unity. There is Peace too, and a sense of perfect security, because Christ our Lord is there, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and He has promised to remain there until the end of time.
