

An Introductory Talk on The Catholic Religion

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If you take up this little pamphlet at all, I suppose that your attention must have been drawn to the Catholic Religion somehow. Perhaps you have friends who are Catholics. Or you may have been struck by the fact that so many people in these days are becoming converts to the Faith. You may sometimes also have attended services in Catholic churches, and been rather puzzled by them. In any case, your interest has been aroused somehow, and you would like to know more about it. But you do not know where to begin. Before going into details, you want to get a general notion of what it is all about. You know that we Catholics have a lot of curious ceremonies. Especially we have a service called Mass, to which we attach great importance. And we go to Confession, and eat fish on Fridays, (or do other 'penances' on that day,) and other strange things. But what is it all about? What is the meaning of it all? What is the good of it? What are we aiming at? If that is how you feel, if that is the sort of questions that you are asking, this little pamphlet is for you.

THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE

Let me begin by giving a short and plain answer to all these questions. The answer is, that the Catholic Religion is the way to Eternal Life. God has prepared for us an eternal life of perfect happiness after this short earthly life. And notice, this does not mean a life of lazy, selfish enjoyment, like the paradise of the Moslem follower of Mohammed. No, the eternal life for which we hope is one in which men will be happy, just because they have been purged of all that is mean and base, because all the noblest powers of the soul are freely employed, and because they live not for self, but for God. It is a life of perfect unselfishness and perfect activity, in which the soul, forgetful of self, is absorbed in God, and finds its happiness in seeing, loving and glorifying Him. That is the end for which we were created. But we do not reach that end inevitably or (as it were) automatically. On the contrary, there is the awful alternative of missing it, and drifting away into eternal misery. That glorious end can only be reached if, during our life in this world, we follow the right way. And the right way is nothing else than the faithful practice of the Catholic Religion. That is the plain statement of our belief. And you will certainly agree that, if this is true, the Catholic Religion is of tremendous importance, and worth taking a great deal of trouble about. And it is worth your while to make enquiries, and to satisfy yourself whether it is so. You know that there are some 300 million people (in 1963, today the figure is more like 1.1 billion,) in the world who believe that it is true, and you must at least admit the possibility of their being right. At least, with so much at stake, it is worth your while to examine the matter carefully.

GOD'S WAY

But here, I think, your first question will be: On what grounds do Catholics believe all this ? The answer is that we believe it, because God has said so. This is the next fact to get clear in your mind. The Catholic Religion is not a collection of human opinions. It is not the product of human reasoning. It is revealed by God. Of course I do not expect you to take my word for this. It is true. But you must examine the evidence for yourself, and form your own conclusion. I am not

attempting in this little pamphlet to prove to you the truth of the Catholic Religion. Later on you can look for the proofs elsewhere, and examine them at your leisure. I am merely trying to give you some preliminary notions of what it is. And this is the next fact about it to grasp clearly, that it is (or at least claims to be) a revelation from God.

Briefly, the facts about the origin of our Religion are these. About 1,900 or 2,000 years ago there appeared in the world a unique Personality, a Man unlike any other man whom the world had ever seen, the Man whom we call Jesus Christ. Not only did He far surpass all other men by His perfect goodness, His marvellous wisdom and strength of character. But He made the most extraordinary claims, and did the most extraordinary things. He claimed plainly to be the Son of God; not a Son of God, in the sense in which any man may be a son of God, but in the literal sense, that He was Himself God, the eternal Divine Son of the eternal Divine Father. And in proof of His claim He did many wonderful works which no mere man could do. He healed the sick, the lepers, the blind, the deaf and the dumb with a word, He raised the dead to life, He changed water into wine, He fed 5,000 people with five loaves, He commanded the winds, and the storm ceased at His word. And finally, after He had been put to death. He Himself rose from His grave alive, and appeared to many witnesses. Now this Jesus Christ, who thus claimed and proved Himself to be the Son of God, came into the world to teach us just those things about God, and our relation to God, our duty to God, our destiny after this life and so forth, which we could not find out for ourselves. And then, in order that His teaching might be handed on, and taught to all nations and all generations, He founded a permanent Teaching Body, which He called His Church, with St Peter as its first Head, and commissioned it to carry on His teaching.

Moreover, He promised that He would remain with that Church, guiding and enlightening it, so that it would never go wrong, but would always teach without error just those truths which He came into the world to reveal. Now the Church which Jesus Christ founded is the Catholic Church, that great Body ruled by the Pope, the successor of St Peter. That is a plain historical fact. The Catholic Church is the only one which goes back to the time of Jesus Christ Himself, the others having all been founded at later dates by various people who broke away from the Catholic Church. Therefore the Catholic Church is the one that Jesus Christ founded. Moreover, God's promises cannot be broken. He promised that He would remain always with His Church, and guaranteed that it would always teach the truth revealed by Him, and nothing else. Therefore we are sure that whatever the Catholic Church teaches is no human invention, but the truth revealed by God. Therefore the Way to eternal life, which the Catholic Church teaches, is God's way. By this we do not mean to assert that no one who is not a Catholic can ever reach that eternal life. There are many people who have really no chance of knowing the Catholic Religion, and so it is not their fault if they do not practise it. And we are sure that God, in His infinite mercy, will not let them suffer for what is not their own fault. If they do their best, He will lead them to the end somehow. Nevertheless, the Catholic Religion is God's Way, and that is what concerns us here.

OUR UNHAPPY SITUATION

Now let me try to give you some idea of what that Way is. In other words, I must give you an outline of what God has taught us to believe and to do. First of all, then, God has explained to us the situation in which we find ourselves, when we come into this world. It is necessary to understand this, in order that you may understand God's plan for delivering us from it and leading us to eternal life. When God created our first parents, the first man and woman, whom we call Adam and Eve, He first of all gave them that wonderful gift of a rational soul, which no mere animal has. But He

gave them a still higher gift, namely what is called 'Sanctifying Grace'. The reason was this. God had prepared for Man a, glorious destiny. He intended that he should actually share eternally His own Divine Life and happiness. But to make that possible it was necessary that he should receive the gift of a supernatural life, a new kind of life, which would raise him altogether above the level natural to a mere creature. And that is what sanctifying grace is. It is the germ of a supernatural life, the supernatural life in its first stage. And if a man keeps the gift of grace till death, then the life of grace passes into what is called the life of 'Glory', which makes him actually capable of the most intimate union with God in Heaven.

This, then, is the gift that God gave to Adam. And if he had kept it, he would have been able to transmit it to his descendants, and we should all have come into the world with the Divine life of grace in our souls. But Adam rebelled against God and broke His laws. Consequently he lost that gift of grace. And having lost it, he naturally was not able to transmit it to us. Therefore we are born without it. That is what is meant by saying that we are born in 'original sin'. We are born without that gift of grace, which we ought to have had, and should have had, if Adam had not sinned. And you see what a miserable state it is; because not having that divine gift, we are by nature utterly incapable of reaching that glorious destiny, for which God created us. And even that is not all. For, in losing grace, man lost also certain other divine gifts, which accompanied it. These included the power of easily and completely controlling all the passions and impulses of our lower nature. That being lost, he became subject to that immense difficulty in doing what is right, of which we are all painfully conscious. Even if we will to do right, our lower nature rebels. We are assailed by temptations to pride, avarice, sensuality, sloth, and all the other passions that war against the soul, so that we cannot do the things that we would. And so great is this difficulty that it is morally impossible for us to resist throughout our lives temptation to sin. And so if God had not provided a remedy, there would have been no hope for the human race,

Having fallen from God's grace, it could only drift away into that eternal separation from Him, which is hell.

GOD OUR SAVIOUR

But it was not God's will that through the fault of Adam we should all perish, and therefore He has not left us in that hopeless state, to which the sin of our first parents would have brought us. He has provided a remedy, by which all who will may still receive the gift of grace, and so be made capable of eternal life.

But to understand this we must first grasp the fact that in God there are three 'Persons'. This is one of the great mysteries which God has revealed. There can, of course, be only one God, one infinite Divine Being; but somehow in that one Divine Being there are what for want of a better term we call three 'Persons'. By teaching us to use this term God means, no doubt, to tell us that the mysterious Three have at least all that we mean by personality, although without those limitations which we associate with the word, when we use it of human persons. It is quite impossible for us really to understand this. We can only accept what God has revealed, that somehow there is in God this distinction of three Persons, who are known to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Having then revealed to us this first great mystery about His own Being, God has next taught us how the second of these Divine Persons, God the Son, came to us to deliver us from the hopeless state, in which the sin of Adam had left us, and to restore to us the gift of grace that he had lost. To do this He actually became Man, and lived amongst us as Man. That is to say, that He made for

Himself a human nature, uniting, it to His Divine Person, so that it was His very own, and He therefore really became Man, while at the same time of course remaining God, as He was before. This is the Person who became known on earth as Jesus Christ, who is therefore both God and Man. He is God made Man. This again is a great mystery, which we cannot understand, but which we accept on the word of God.

God the Son, then, came into the world to restore to us the Divine life, that we had lost. But before doing so, it was the Father's will and His will that He should first make reparation to the Eternal Father on behalf of the human race, as its Representative and Head, for the injury done to Him by man's rebellion. And this He did by the complete surrender of Himself as Man to the Father's will, even to the acceptance of suffering and death. Again a tremendous mystery, into which we can only see a very little way. But beware of a common mistake. People often totally misunderstand this great act of God's love. They talk as if it meant that God was punishing one of His creatures, who was sinless, for the sins of the rest, and they naturally describe such a transaction as horribly unjust. But that is a mere travesty of the Catholic doctrine. I cannot go into this mystery here at length. But I will just say this. Those people forget that Jesus Christ is not a creature. He is not a Being separate from God. He is God, Although He is a different 'Person' from the Father, He is not a separate Being. He is one and the same Divine Being. He is God. Therefore, when you see Christ upon the Cross, the Sinless One suffering for the guilty, you do not see God punishing one of His creatures for the sins of the others, but God Himself in a mysterious way taking upon Himself the burden of our sins. Truly no injustice, but a marvellous act of mercy and love.

GOD IS OUR SAVIOUR!

Jesus Christ, then, the Son of God made Man, having made this reparation for the sins of men, having died upon the Cross, rose again from death and ascended into Heaven with that same human nature, which He had created and made His own. And so He remains for ever with that human nature most closely united to His own Divine Being. This is the first step in the restoration of Humanity. For there now is Humanity, in the Person of its new Head and Representative, taken into the most perfect union with God. But how does that benefit the rest of us? In this way. That Human Nature of Our Lord now becomes the nucleus, as it were, of a new Humanity, a new human race gathered out of the wreck of the old race of Adam, and united through it and in it to God. Our Lord said Himself: 'I, if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all things to myself.' He is like a great magnet, drawing to Himself all men of good will, But He does more than the magnet. For as He draws men to Himself, He pours grace, which is His own Divine life, into their souls, and so makes them one with Himself, united to His Sacred Humanity, and so united to God, and living in God, or, to put it all in a phrase, we are united to God by being 'incorporated' into Christ, that is to say, made one Body with Him.

Mgr Kolbe, in his book called *The Four Mysteries of the Faith*, gives a beautiful illustration, which may help to make this clear, and which I therefore venture to borrow. In the middle of the Victoria Falls in Africa, he tells us, there is a little island-rock standing up alone. All round it the waters of the great Zambezi river rush along, carrying everything before them, plunging down into the abyss. But on the rock and clinging to it all round are innumerable forms of animal and vegetable life. The rock is the only refuge where anything can live and escape destruction. The meaning of the parable is obvious. The Rock is Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. Apart from Him we are helpless. We have lost God, we have no power or strength to deliver ourselves from the forces of evil, or to rise to that divine life for which we were created. We can only drift helplessly along, until we plunge

into the abyss. You may think that this is exaggerated, but it is not. It is what God Himself has told us. The Incarnate Son is our only refuge. We can only be rescued from the flood and find life by taking refuge in Him, clinging to Him, being made one with Him, and so living with the life that flows from Him, like those innumerable living creatures that cling round that rock in the Zambezi, and find shelter and nourishment there.

UNION WITH CHRIST

But what is the nature of this union with Christ, and how is it to be accomplished ? First of all, it is clear that it must be founded on faith and love. We cannot have union with Christ unless we believe in Him and love Him. Again, union with Him must be a moral union. It must mean that we are gradually transformed into His likeness. But this will necessarily follow if we really love Him. Love is the great uniting force and the great transforming force. Study, therefore, that sublime figure of Jesus Christ, as He is depicted for us in the Gospels. Read the Gospels again and again, dwell upon His gracious actions and words, His kindness, His patience, His courage, His strength, His purity, His compassion for sinners, His boundless charity, until that wonderful Personality takes possession of your heart, and awakens your love. With that awakening love will come the desire for His love, the desire to please Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him. And when you really love Him, that love will begin to transform you into His likeness. You will begin to see things as He sees them, to think with His thoughts, to will with His will. You will begin to love what He loves, and to hate what He hates. You will hate all your miserable sins and faults, which keep you apart from Him. And as you hate them, you will get power to conquer them. You will find yourself insensibly growing more unselfish, purer, stronger, more generous, more charitable.

But union with Christ is more than mere moral transformation. It is not only change of moral character, or improvement of our natural life. It implies, as we have seen, the reception of a higher kind of life altogether, that supernatural life of grace, which flows from Him, and raises us to His level. And that is the question which we must consider next: how are we to get into vital contact with Christ, so that grace may actually flow from Him into us?

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The normal way by which we are united to Christ is through membership in His 'Mystical Body', which is the Catholic Church. Let me try to explain. We have seen that during His earthly life Our Lord founded a Society, with St Peter as its first Head, which He called His Church. And we have seen that one reason for the foundation of this Society was that it might continue His teaching. But the Church is more than a mere teaching institution. It is the body of Christ, His living and life-giving Body. It is not a mere organization, but a living organism, of which Christ Himself is the Life. St Paul often speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ. And he is careful to explain that he is not just using a loose phrase, but that he really means that the Church is a living organism, a real living body, whose life comes from Christ, and flows from Him to all the members of it. Our Lord Himself taught the same thing under the figure of the Vine and the Branches. 'I am the Vine, you are the branches.' The Vine is Christ. The Vine is also the community of the faithful, the living organism, the Church. So, although Our Lord has gone away into Heaven in His natural Body, He continues to live on earth in His Mystical Body. Therefore it is by membership in this Body that we are brought into vital union with Christ. That is to say, not by mere membership, but by a living, active membership, sharing in its life of prayer and worship and good works, and using all those

means provided in it which we shall discuss presently, whereby we are brought into living contact with Christ, and receive His grace into our souls.

THE NEW BIRTH

The next question is: By what means are we made members of this living Body of Christ? And the answer is that this is normally done by the Sacrament of Baptism. But before dealing with Baptism I must say a few words about Sacraments in general. What are Sacraments? A Sacrament is defined as 'an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls'. But perhaps the best way of getting an idea of what they really are is by comparing them to the arteries in the human body. Just as the blood flows through the arteries, carrying nourishment and life to all the different parts, so the grace of God flows through the Sacraments to us, who are members of the Body of Christ.

It may seem strange to you at first sight that grace should come to us through such curiously material means. Is not grace a purely spiritual thing, you may say? Why, then, should it be associated with such material things as water and bread and wine and oil? The answer is that, although grace is a purely spiritual thing, we are not purely spiritual beings. We are composed of body and soul, spirit and matter. Therefore it is eminently suitable that the means, by which God's gifts come to us, should have the same double nature. It makes it far easier for us to appreciate and realize those gifts, when we can see and touch the material elements, through which they are conveyed. It helps to bring home to us the reality of the gifts.

The first of the Sacraments, then, is Baptism. It is the Sacrament by which the new supernatural life of grace is first given to us. By it we are made members of the living Body of Christ, and the new divine life flows from Him into the soul. That is why Our Lord Himself called it our New Birth. It is to the supernatural life what natural birth is to our natural life, its external beginning. So Baptism is a very wonderful thing. Although we can see no difference between an unbaptized child and a baptized child, the difference is enormous. The unbaptized child has only its natural human life. The baptized child has in addition to that a supernatural life, which makes it capable of union with God, of sharing the eternal life of God Himself.

When, therefore, a person (whether child or adult) has been baptized, he is in a state of grace. He has received the new gift of life. But that is only the beginning. This new life of grace has to be kept and nourished, so that it may not be lost, but go on growing until the end. How do we keep and nourish this life? By keeping God's commandments, by prayer, by joining in the worship of the Body of Christ, to which we now belong, and by using the other Sacraments which God has provided for the purpose.

GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

A young man came to Our Lord one day and asked Him: 'Good Master, what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting?' And Our Lord's answer was: 'If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.'

That is the first essential; we must regulate our whole lives by the rule of God's commandments. And what these commandments are, and the meaning of them, the Catholic Church teaches us. You have of course a conscience, which guides you to a great extent as to what is right and what is wrong. But no man's conscience is infallible, and therefore God has given us definite commandments, and has given power and authority to the Church to teach and explain them. So the

Catholic Religion enters into the whole of life and teaches us how to regulate all our daily conduct. First it teaches us our duty to God, which is to love Him and worship Him. Then it explains our various duties to our neighbours and to ourselves. There is the law of justice, commanding us to do no wrong to any man, but to give to all their just rights. Then the law of charity, which goes beyond mere justice, and bids us love our neighbours as ourselves, doing all we can to be kind and helpful to them, and to seek their good in every possible way. Then the laws of temperance and purity, teaching us to be moderate in all things, and to restrain and regulate all our unruly passions. But I cannot here give all God's laws in detail. Enough to say that the Church, by God's authority, teaches us a complete and perfect code of morals regulating all our lives, and to that code we must strive to conform ourselves, if we would enter into eternal life.

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Prayer is defined as 'the raising up of the mind and heart to God, by adoring, praising, and thanking Him, and by begging of Him all blessings for soul and body'. And that being its nature, it must be obvious to everyone that there can be no living union and fellowship with God without prayer. It is the very breath of our spiritual life. We must pray each of us privately, and we must also join in the common prayers of the Church. Otherwise we should be isolated; we should not be sharing in the common life of the Body of Christ. We shall see presently that there is in the Catholic Church one special act of worship, which is something more than mere prayer. That is what is called the Mass. It is the central act of the Church's worship, in which all are bound to join. But it is so closely connected with the greatest of the Sacraments, that I must deal with them together, and that I will do presently. But first a few words about another important Sacrament.

CONFIRMATION

When a child has been baptized, for a few years that is all that he requires. The gift of life is his, and during his infancy he can neither lose it nor receive anything more. But presently he grows to an age when he is capable of understanding something about God, and the difference between right and wrong. And then his difficulties begin. He knows what is right and what pleases God, and he is tempted to do wrong. Therefore he now needs a new help, in order that he may keep the grace of his baptism, and not lose it through sin. I shall have more to say later about how grace may be lost, and how, if lost, it may be recovered. Enough to say here that it can be lost through sin. Therefore as soon as the child is old enough to commit sin, he needs a new power from God, that he may be able to resist temptation to sin, and so keep the grace given him in Baptism. And this God provides in the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is administered by the Bishop laying his hand on the child, praying that he may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and anointing him with a special kind of oil mixed with balsam, which is called Chrism. And the gift conveyed by it is the power to fight against temptation and resist evil. Like Baptism, it is only given once, because this gift once given remains for ever.

THE CENTRE OF OUR LIFE

We now come to what is the very centre of the life and worship of the Church. I mean the Mass, and that great Sacrament, which is closely connected with it, or rather forms one thing with it, that great Sacrament which is called the Holy Eucharist, or Holy Communion, or very often simply 'The Blessed Sacrament'. What, then, is the Mass ? And what is the Blessed Sacrament ?

The Mass is the Christian Sacrifice. But this needs explanation, because unfortunately the idea of sacrifice is no longer familiar to most of the people of this country. Yet it is an essential part of

religion. Sacrifices of some sort are found in all religions. The root idea of it is an offering made to God in acknowledgement of His supreme sovereignty over us and over all things. The most common form of sacrifice in pre-Christian religions was the offering of an animal by killing it. This is a natural symbol of what the worshipper wants to express, which is the complete offering, the total surrender of himself to God. To do this he takes an animal to represent himself, and offers that to God by destroying it. Then several other subsidiary ideas also come in. The worshipper remembers that he is a sinner, and so offers his sacrifice also as an act of reparation for his sins. He thinks of God's goodness, and offers it in thanksgiving. And finally, in return for this act of worship he hopes for future benefits, and so it is an act of petition. Thus Sacrifice is really the highest and most complete act of worship.

But there was one great defect in all those old sacrifices of animals and the like. That is that they were of no real value in the sight of God. The worshipper did his best, but he had nothing of any real value to offer. But the coming of the Son of God changed all that. I have already spoken of how He offered Himself to the Father in His acceptance of suffering and death upon the Cross. Now this offering by Our Lord of Himself was really a perfect sacrifice, made by Him on behalf of the whole human race. It was offered by Him as a supreme act of worship, in acknowledgement of God's sovereign majesty, as an act of reparation for the sins of men, as an act of thanksgiving for all God's goodness to His creatures, and as a petition to the Father to bestow further benefits upon them.

Henceforth, therefore, no other sacrifice could be required. And yet we must have a sacrifice that we can offer, for we have seen that it is an essential part of religion. Consequently God has made a wonderful provision whereby we can continue to offer the sacrifice of the Cross, and to offer it as our sacrifice. That is what the Holy Mass is. It is the continual renewal of Our Lord's Sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross. Our Lord instituted it on the evening before His death. After He had eaten His Last Supper with His Apostles He took bread into His Hands, blessed it, and said: 'This is My Body.' Then He took a cup of wine and blessed it, and said: 'This is My Blood of the New Testament, which shall be shed for many unto the remission of sins.' And, as He said these words, He actually changed the bread into His Body, and the wine into His Blood. And then He gave to His Apostles and their successors power to do the same. So, when a priest says Mass, he simply repeats what Our Lord said and did at that Last Supper. And when he repeats the words, 'This is My Body . . . This is My Blood', the bread and wine are again changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. That is to say, that Our Lord becomes actually present under the appearance of bread and wine. And, as He does so, He, in a mysterious way, renews the Sacrifice that He offered long ago upon the Cross. He renews it in such a way that we can take part in it. We could not take part in it, when it was offered on Calvary, because that was long before we were born. But now that it is continually renewed in our midst, it is very easy. All we have to do is to unite ourselves in will and intention with the sacrifice which Our Lord is offering, asking God the Father to accept it as ours.

THE HOLY MASS - THE CENTRE OF OUR LIFE

This, then, is the great act of Christian worship, the Christian Sacrifice. But it is more than that. For, after Our Lord has offered Himself to the Father, He then gives Himself to us to be the Food of our souls. After the sacrifice is completed, the Body of Christ is distributed to the Faithful in Holy Communion. It is not bread that they receive, but the actual Body of Christ, that is to say, Christ Himself. He gives Himself to us to nourish and increase the Divine Life in our souls. And so you see how it must be as I have said, that this is the very centre of our life and worship. For here is Our

Lord Himself in the midst of us, offering Himself for us, inviting us to join in His Sacrifice, and giving Himself to us.

But even that is not all that the Blessed Sacrament is to us. For, when the Mass is finished, what remains of the Blessed Sacrament is placed in a receptacle above the altar, called the Tabernacle, and there it is kept perpetually, so that Our Lord remains always present in our churches. The Blessed Sacrament is kept primarily that it may be always ready to be taken to the sick, but also that we may have Our Lord's continual presence, so that at any time we can go into the church and find Him there ready to receive our worship and to hear our prayers. We also make use of it in the beautiful service called Benediction. The Blessed Sacrament is taken out of the Tabernacle, and placed in a vessel called a monstrance, so that we can see it. And then, after certain hymns and prayers have been sung and said, and after there has been sufficient time for adoration and worship, the priest takes the monstrance in his hands, and silently makes the sign of the cross over the people, who kneel to receive Our Lord's blessing. For then it is not the priest, but Our Lord Himself present there in the Blessed Sacrament, who is blessing them. There are also other practices connected with the Blessed Sacrament, such as 'Exposition', when it is left exposed in the monstrance for several hours or even days for the worship of the Faithful, and Processions of the Blessed Sacrament, and so forth. But all these are easily understood, when once you have realized the fact that it is Our Lord Himself who is present there under the appearance of bread.

LIFE LOST AND RECOVERED

I have already said that it is possible to lose grace by sin. Sin means any action which is contrary to God's law, and therefore an offence against God. But it is obvious that some sins are worse than others. In fact they are divided, according to their gravity, into 'mortal' and 'venial' sins. A mortal sin is one which is so gravely offensive to God that the person who has committed it no longer remains the friend of God. He has, as it were, turned his back on God. Consequently God withdraws from him the gift of grace. Then the soul has lost its supernatural life, and if the person were to die in that state, he would be for ever separated from God, and incapable of eternal life. But he may afterwards repent and desire to return to God. And God, in His infinite mercy, has provided a means whereby he may regain the gift of life that he has thrown away. This is another Sacrament, called the Sacrament of Penance, or more commonly 'Confession', or 'Reconciliation'. The penitent sinner has to go to a priest and confess his sins, and then the priest, if he judges that the penitent is really sorry for his sin and intends to try to avoid it in future, gives him 'absolution'. That is to say that by God's authority he conveys to him God's forgiveness. And then immediately the grace which he had lost is restored to his soul. Our Lord gave this wonderful power to the priests of His Church after His Resurrection, as we read in St John's Gospel.

I should, however, mention here that Catholics are in the habit of going to Confession even when they have not fallen into mortal sin, because although Confession is not necessary for the forgiveness of venial sin, it is a good thing to confess one's venial sins. and have them forgiven in that way. The reason of this is that through this Sacrament we not only get our sins forgiven, but also receive grace to overcome our faults and to avoid falling into graver sins. So all good practising Catholics go to Confession frequently.

TWO OTHER SACRAMENTS

Besides the four Sacraments that I have mentioned there are three others, making seven in all. But one of them, which is called 'Extreme Unction', or 'Anointing of the Sick' is specially concerned

with the end of life, and so I will leave it until I come to speak about the end. The other two are 'Holy Orders' and 'Matrimony'. These two differ from the other five in this, that they are not meant for everybody, but for special classes of persons. They make provision rather for the whole community than for individuals. Holy Orders is to provide the Church with priests, who are needed for the administration of the other Sacraments, and to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to give them the special graces and powers that are needed for their holy office. And Matrimony is to make proper provision for the propagation of the Christian community. The real unit of human society is the family. Marriage is normally the foundation of a new family. Therefore God has provided a special Sacrament by which the family is sanctified in its origin, giving to the married couple just that grace which they need to be loving and faithful to one another, and to bring up their children in the fear and love of God.

MORTIFICATION

You probably know that the Church has certain rules about fasting and abstinence, as, for example, in 1963 that all her members must abstain from flesh meat on Fridays. [Today this is commuted into an obligation to perform some penance or mortification on Fridays.] I cannot give the rules here in detail, but I must just explain the principle underlying them, for indeed it is one of the important principles of our Christian life. I have already said that, if we would enter into eternal life, we are bound to regulate all our lives by the rule of God's commandments. But the great difficulty about this is that our fallen human nature is full of selfish, evil and unruly desires and inclinations, which hinder us in our efforts to obey God's laws. Even the wonderful grace that we get from the Sacraments does not altogether overcome this difficulty. We must therefore practise what is called 'mortification'. That is to say, we must practise ourselves in suppressing and restraining all those evil inclinations. And the rules about fasting and abstinence are intended to help us. By submitting ourselves in these matters to the laws of the Church and sometimes denying ourselves things which in themselves are perfectly lawful, we discipline ourselves and gain the power to restrain ourselves when tempted to do what is not lawful. The Church's rules in this matter are very simple and easy. But in obeying them we learn the principle. And we are encouraged to use other voluntary mortifications of our own.

OUR LADY AND THE SAINTS

These, then, are the chief means by which the Divine Life given to us in our Baptism is nourished and kept alive in our souls. But God in His goodness has given us another powerful help. He has provided that all the Saints and Angels in Heaven shall help us. He has taught us that we can pray to them, not in the same way that we pray to Him, but asking them to pray for us. And we believe that this is of very great use to us. For the Saints in Heaven are much holier and nearer to God than we are, and therefore their prayers must be of much more power than our poor efforts. And then, greater and holier by far than all the Saints and Angels, there is the Blessed Mother of God. You know of course that we Catholics have a very great devotion to Our Lord's Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. We do not worship her at all in the way that we worship God. We know that, however great and holy, she is only a creature, and between God and even the holiest of His creatures there is an infinite distance. But we do give her great honour above every other creature. Why? Simply because God Himself has honoured her above all His other creatures. She is quite literally the Mother of God. Jesus Christ is God, and the Blessed Virgin Mary is His Mother. Therefore she is the Mother of God. And what greater honour could God give to a creature? We believe also that, since God chose her for that great honour, He kept her perfectly free from every stain of sin, and

filled her with most wonderful grace. That is why we love and honour her so much. But besides that we regard her as our Mother. Our Lord has adopted us all as His brothers and sisters. Therefore His Mother becomes our Mother, and she is bound, out of love for Him, to regard us as her children. And so, more than to all the Saints, we pray to her with perfect confidence, knowing that she loves us, and that her Son will deny her nothing that she asks of Him.

VARIOUS DEVOTIONS

Besides the one great Sacrifice and the seven Sacraments instituted by Our Lord Himself, the Church has devised many other ways of stimulating and helping our spiritual life. Thus we have what are called 'sacramentals'. These are not Sacraments, because they do not actually convey grace, as the Sacraments do. But they are called sacramentals because they have a certain resemblance to Sacraments, and we get grace by the devout use of them, through the prayers of the Church. Such, for example, is Holy Water. The Church blesses this water, and prays that those who use it may be defended from evil spirits, and receive health of soul and body, and so forth. We trust, then, that God will hear the prayers of His Church, and grant those graces to those who piously use it. And so also the Church blesses many other things for our use, not only pious objects like crucifixes and medals and statues, but houses and food and medicine, and all kinds of things that we use daily. Then, as you have noticed, we have crucifixes and statues and pictures in our churches, to keep us constantly in mind of our Lord Who died for us, and of His Blessed Mother and the Saints. Again, the Church has devised many beautiful forms of devotion, such as the Way of the Cross, the Holy Rosary, various practices of devotion to our Lord's Sacred Heart, and so forth. But I have not space to describe all these things. Enough to say that they are all just devout practices, which help to express and stimulate our devotion and love of our Blessed Lord, who is the Centre of all our worship.

APPROACHING THE END

Sooner or later we all come in sight of that great crisis which we call death, the end of our earthly life, which generally comes as the result of some sickness. Now, when death is near, or when we seem to be in danger of it, we have reached a time of great trial and difficulty, when we need very special help and grace from God. And so to meet this need God has made very particular provision. When a person is very ill, and there seems to be some danger of the illness terminating fatally, he receives what are called the 'Last Sacraments'. First of all he goes to Confession, in order to make sure that all his sins have been forgiven. Then he receives Holy Communion, which in these circumstances is called the Viaticum, which literally means Food for his last journey. Naturally, when the Christian is in danger of death he wishes again to receive his Lord and have Him with him. And then he receives the sacrament called 'Extreme Unction' or 'Anointing of the Sick', which is the special sacrament for the sick. It consists outwardly in the anointing of the sick person with oil blessed by the Bishop, accompanied by prayer. And the effect of it is to give the sick person just that grace of which he stands in need. Sometimes it has the effect of restoring bodily health. But in any case, it takes away the remains of sin, and gives wonderful consolation, courage and peace of soul to the sick person.

AFTER DEATH

It remains to give a brief outline of what God has revealed to us about our life after death. Death, of course, is merely the parting of the soul from the body. And the first thing that happens to the soul after that is that it is judged, and its eternal destiny is at once settled and made known to it. In this

judgement everything depends upon whether the soul is then in a state of grace or not. It will be evident from what has been said that this must be so. It is grace alone that makes the soul capable of union with God and of living for ever in perfect happiness in Him. This grace the soul received in Baptism. Everything depends upon whether it kept it to the end, or if it sometimes lost it by mortal sin, whether it at least regained it before the end. And here let us notice for our comfort that God is so merciful to sinners that he gives them every chance even to the last moment. The way He has appointed of being restored to grace is the Sacrament of Penance. But if for any reason it is not possible for a person to receive that Sacrament, then what is called an act of perfect contrition will suffice. Perfect contrition means being sorry for your sins, because you love God, and you know that they have displeased and offended Him. If anyone is sorry for his sins in that way, even at the last moment, and even if he cannot go to Confession, God forgives him and restores him to grace.

But in any case, the last moment does come some time or other, and then the soul is either in a state of grace or in a state of unforgiven sin. And in the state in which it leaves the body it remains for ever. Now, if it is in a state of unforgiven sin, it has not got that divine life, which would make it capable of union with God. On the contrary, it is in a state of enmity against God, and therefore it can only fall into that state of eternal separation from God and eternal misery, which is called hell. On the other hand, if it is in a state of grace, it must reach that union with God which is Heaven, sooner or later. But it may not be fit for that just yet. It may have committed many sins, of which indeed the guilt has been forgiven, but for which it, still has to suffer. Or, in other words, it has so defiled itself with sin, that before it is fit for Heaven it has to go through a period of purification by suffering. And the place of this purification is what is called Purgatory. God has not revealed to us very much about Purgatory, except that it exists, and that many people have to pass through it before they can reach Heaven. And He has also told us that we, who are still on earth, can help the souls in Purgatory by our prayers, and by offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for them. This is a very comforting piece of knowledge, for it enables us still to do something for the friends who have been separated from us by death.

We have no idea how long the purification of souls in Purgatory lasts. But sooner or later those who have died in a state of grace will reach Heaven. What is Heaven? It is something so far beyond our experience, that no power of imagination can form any idea of it. All we know about it is that if and when we reach that state, we shall in some wonderful way see God as He is, we shall be perfectly united with Him, and He will fill us with perfect happiness, of which there shall be no end.

And is not that enough for us to know? What more can we desire to know, if we are assured that somehow God will satisfy all the highest desires of our nature, and make us perfectly happy for ever? We can well wait for the knowledge of what the exact nature of that happiness is.

But even when the soul has reached Heaven, all is not yet perfected. For the human soul is not complete without the body. A soul is not a complete human being. A complete human being is composed of soul and body. And so there will come a time when our bodies will be restored to us. That will happen at the end of the world. Our bodies will be raised, not as they are now, but in some wonderful way 'glorified', made free from suffering and change, and from all the limitations of this earthly life, and fit for an eternal and glorious life. And so we shall live in God for ever.

CONCLUSION

Such in brief outline is the Way to Eternal Life, which God has revealed to us. I said at the beginning that God is very generous to those who, through no fault of their own, fail to find this

way. It is quite certain that without the gift of grace no human being can attain to heaven, and the way that I have outlined is the way that God has appointed for receiving and keeping that gift. But at the same time we also know that to those who without their own fault are ignorant of the Catholic Religion and the Catholic Church, God gives grace in other ways. That is a very comforting thing to know, because thus, of our friends who have lived and died in ignorance of the true Religion we may have a good hope that God has led them to the end in other ways. But on the other hand it is obvious that it is far better to go by the King's Highway. That is the only way for us who know the truth.

And as to you, my friend, who read these words, what are we to say ? If you have taken the trouble to read this pamphlet, you have probably got some idea that this may be the right road. Then I would just say this in conclusion. You must take the further trouble to study the question. Those who know nothing of the true way may be led by God along other ways. But that does not apply to those who take no trouble about the matter. If you are too much occupied with your worldly business to take the trouble to enquire, you cannot expect God to lead you. If, then, you have once got an idea that this may be the right way, go on and look into the matter. I have not attempted here to put before you the proofs that it is so. You have now to examine the evidence, and you will find plenty of books in which it is set forth at length. You will find a number of other pamphlets in the C.T.S. rack where you found this, which will help you.

Examine the evidence for yourself. And as you do so, pray very earnestly to God to show you the truth. If you will only do that honestly, and with a sincere desire to know and to do what is pleasing to God, without fear of the consequences in this world, I have no doubt about the ultimate result.
