

Catholic Life

A Selection of Leaflets From The Bellarmine Society

By The Bellarmine Society.
Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.apol062 (1962)

- 1) INDULGENCES.
- 2) THE REAL PRESENCE.
- 3) WHY CATHOLICS HONOR MARY.
- 4) CONFESSION.
- 5) THE MASS — THE HOLY SACRIFICE.

(Editor's Note: These Apologetic leaflets were issued by the Bellarmine Society of Oxford University. We are proud to reproduce them here in the hope that many more souls will benefit by their wisdom.)

1) INDULGENCES.

An indulgence is NOT — as some wrongly believe — a pardon for sin; still less is it permission to commit sin. No one can gain an indulgence for unforgiven sins, for sins that are still upon his conscience; only when the moral guilt of the sin has been forgiven can he gain an indulgence. Also, no one can obtain an indulgence unless he be in a state of grace, that is, free from serious sin.

WHAT THEN IS AN INDULGENCE?

It is the remission, the cancelling, of part or all of the temporal punishment, which may remain due to sin, after the guilt of sin has been forgiven. And what is temporal punishment? As opposed to eternal punishment, it is punishment which will come to an end, either in this life or in the next.

In the Early Church, penances for sin were very heavy, but gradually the Church came to grant indulgences in regard to these severe penances; that is, for a good reason she lessened the penance that would ordinarily have had to be done, and made up what was wanting by her power over the superabundant merits of Christ and His Saints. The purpose of indulgences is to encourage and help the faithful to sanctify themselves. Thus, an indulgence is granted only for a good reason and when certain prescribed conditions have been fulfilled, all of which tend to the sanctification of the person concerned. A good reason is required; for the Church, having only the power of dispensing the merits of Christ and His Saints, cannot grant indulgences arbitrarily and at her mere whim. This reason is usually the purpose for which the indulgence is granted — the promotion of the worship of God, the fostering of works of charity, the spreading of a special devotion, and so forth. Among the conditions, the Church may prescribe Confession and Communion, together with a visit to a church and the recital of certain prayers there, or the good work prescribed may take the form of fasting, almsgiving, and so on. When the necessary conditions have been fulfilled by a person in the

state of grace, the Church grants remission of part or all of the temporal punishment still due. This remission holds good before God.

But it may be asked: "When God forgives, does He not forgive wholly?" Here we must make a distinction. We must note that there is a double offence in sin: there is a personal offence against friendship with God, for the sinner withdraws from God and gives to a creature the love that is due to God alone; and there is also an offence against justice, for the sinner, by disobeying God's Law, withdraws the respect and honor that is justly due to the Divine Majesty: Now, the offence against friendship with God incurs the GUILT of sin; the withdrawal of the honor due to God merits PUNISHMENT. When the sinner repents, the guilt of the sin is wholly forgiven. But some debt of punishment remains due, and justice demands that satisfaction be made for it. We can the more easily understand that the Divine Justice should require this satisfaction, if we remember that sin is a violation of "the temple of God" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:17) and that it grieves the Holy Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 4:30).

God forgave Adam and Eve; He forgave Moses; He forgave David; but, though the eternal punishment they had deserved was cancelled, we know from Scripture that God nevertheless inflicted temporal punishment. Read the divine message delivered to David by Nathan, and you will find the distinction between GUILT and PUNISHMENT clearly brought out.

"The Lord also has taken away your sin. You shall not die.

"Nevertheless, because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to you shall surely die" (2 Kings [in the Vulgate] or 2 Samuel 12:13-54).

You may perhaps object: "Yes, God Himself can remit punishment; but has the Catholic Church the power to grant indulgences?"

The Catholic Church has this power. It was given to her by her founder, Jesus Christ. This power is a necessary part of the "Power of the Keys," given by Our Lord to St Peter and his successors, for the Power of the Keys extends not only to the GUILT of sin, but also to the PUNISHMENT due to forgiven sin.

This can be proved from Our Lord's words to St Peter:

"And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

"And whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matthew 16:19; see also 18:18).

And from His words to the Apostles, conferring on them the explicit power to forgive sins:

"Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:23).

Christ, then, has given His Church the fullest power in the remission of sin, and of every bond that would keep a man out of heaven. But this power would not be the fullest power, unless it embraced also power over the temporal punishment due to those sins, the guilt of which has been forgiven — unless, in other words, it included the power to grant indulgences.

This is the Catholic doctrine of indulgences. We do not deny that abuses, on the part of individuals, have existed in the past. These abuses arose mainly from the fact that almsgiving was often a condition of gaining an indulgence, and in this, there is nothing essentially wrong or simoniacal.

But over-zealous and imprudent preachers of indulgences made a traffic of them and practically sold them for money. In this, they acted wrongly. But the truth and usefulness of the doctrine itself were unaffected by these abuses. The abuse of the doctrine is no argument against the doctrine itself. What good thing is there which, at some time or other, has not been abused? Popes and Councils have condemned these abuses.

The Council of Trent especially emphasized this condemnation: "Being anxious that abuses... should be amended and corrected, (the Council) ordains that all evil gains for the obtaining (of indulgences)... be wholly abolished."

To deny the truth of the doctrine because of the abuses is as unreasonable as to deny to drivers of motorcars the right to drive because of the criminal carelessness of some of their number.

CONCLUSION.

An indulgence, then, is the remission of all or part of the temporal punishment which may remain due to sins after their guilt has been forgiven.

In granting indulgences, the Catholic Church is exercising lawfully a right and a power given to her by Christ Himself.

2) THE REAL PRESENCE.

The Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence is that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly, really, and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist, so that after the consecration there remains no substance of bread and wine; but that substance has been changed into the substance of Christ's Body and Blood, the appearances of bread and wine remaining unchanged.

I. THE PROMISE.

In St. John 6:54 and following verses, Christ declares: -

"Amen, Amen, I say unto you: except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." (54)

"He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood has everlasting life." (55)

"My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed." (56)

"He that eats My flesh, and drinks My blood, abides in Me, and I in him." (57), etc.

Christ meant His words to be taken literally.

1.

He uses the solemn formula "Amen," i.e., "in very truth."

2.

Six times in six verses, (54-59,) He repeats His statement, now negatively, now positively.

3.

He did not disabuse His hearers when they understood Him literally, murmured (verse 53,) and fell away (verse 67). On the contrary, He continued to insist on His first assertion.

4.

The only figurative meaning of eating another's flesh and drinking his blood in the language used in the time of Our Lord, is to hate or injure another (e.g., Ps. 27:2), [Psalm 26:2 in the Vulgate,] a meaning impossible in this context.

N.B. — It follows, with even greater certainty that Christ cannot have meant a figurative eating and drinking consisting in the acceptance of His word by Faith.

II. THE FULFILLMENT.

(St. Matthew 26:26-28; St. Mark, 14:22-24; St. Luke, 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

The words by which the Holy Eucharist was instituted are: —

"This is My Body";

"This is My Blood of the new testament" (St. Matthew, St. Mark), or, equivalently:

"This chalice is the new testament in My blood" (St. Luke, St. Paul).

1

No words could state more clearly a Real Bodily Presence. As the statement of a figurative presence, they would be singularly misleading. When Christ speaks in parables, He makes it clear that His words are not to be taken literally. The words, "I am the vine," "I am the door" of the sheepfold, for example, if understood literally, would make nonsense. But the words Christ uses in referring to the Holy Eucharist must be understood literally, for if they are not, they can, as noted above, denote only hatred and injury.

2

For nearly three years the disciples had seen, and shared, His miraculous powers. He had encouraged them to place implicit faith on His word. Is it credible that He should now have given them no indication that He spoke in figure merely?

3

The only Scripture parallel to these words of Christ — Exodus 24:8 — where Moses sprinkles the people with sacrificial blood, saying: "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you," demands the literal interpretation.

III. THE WITNESS OF ST. PAUL AND THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

"For as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice, you shall show forth the death of the Lord until He come. Therefore, whoever shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

"But let a man prove himself; and so let him eat of that bread and drink the chalice. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:26-29).

1.

The consecrated elements are specially marked off — "this bread" and "the chalice of the Lord."

2.

The action is a solemn one; for a man must "prove himself," to examine if he be worthy, and the solemnity is due to the nature of the food eaten.

3.

The unworthy partaker is "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" — language which only the doctrine of the Real Presence can justify.

4.

The penalty is damnation, because he did not "discern the body," i.e., he presumed to treat as ordinary bread what was in fact the Body of the Lord.

IV. THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

All early practice points to the belief in a real and permanent Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

1.

It was the custom to receive Holy Communion fasting.

2.

The formula of administering was: "The Body of the Lord," "The Blood of the Lord," to which the recipient answered "Amen."

3.

Communicants were enjoined to be most careful lest fragments should fall, because it was the Body of the Lord.

4.

Holy Communion was regularly carried to the sick and to prisoners under the species of bread only. Hermits in the desert received it: in persecution, the faithful took it to their homes in order to be able to communicate in case of need.

This is, and always has been the doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church about the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

3) WHY CATHOLICS HONOR MARY.

The Virgin Mary was the Mother of Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ was God, and therefore Mary was the Mother of God Incarnate (Matt. 1:18). That is the fundamental reason why Catholics honor her.

To carry out the purpose of His Eternal Wisdom to redeem mankind, God the Son came into this world as a Man Himself. In becoming Man, God chose to be born of a human mother. By His Omnipotence and Wisdom He was able to choose, from all the nations and peoples existing throughout the ages, the one woman who was to be His Mother. God's choice fell upon Mary, the Virgin Spouse of Joseph, who was living in the little village of Nazareth in Palestine.

Mary was the Mother of Jesus Christ, True God and True Man. Catholics, therefore, honor Mary because:

I. GOD CHOSE HER ABOVE ALL OTHER WOMEN.

Would one not look for the greatest perfections in the woman God chose to be the Mother of Christ, His Eternal Son? Surely, God could choose a perfect mother; it was fitting that He should do so; therefore, He did choose a perfect Mother.

The Angelic Salutation.

God Himself, through the mouth of His Archangel Gabriel, has told us that Mary was perfect. "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you: Blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28). Catholics do but follow the Archangel's example when they repeat the prayer well-known as the "Hail Mary."

The Salutation of Elizabeth.

When Mary visited her, this same salutation was repeated by Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Ghost" (Luke 1:41-42); and in reply Mary herself was inspired by God to make this prophecy: "For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me Blessed. Because He that is mighty has done great things to me" (Luke 1:48-49).

Mary then was perfect in the eyes of Almighty God, who is Infinite Purity Itself. She is more worthy of love and honor than any other of God's creatures. If it is wrong to love and honor Mary in a special way, then surely the words 'love' and 'honor' have lost their very meaning.

II. SHE IS CHRIST'S MOTHER.

Although Jesus Christ was truly God, He was also truly Man; as a man, therefore, He depended on His Mother during His childhood and youth for nurture, training, and education. During the three years of His public life, Christ taught a doctrine which is the admiration even of those who deny His divinity. He went about healing and doing good, and showing men the way of salvation. His preparation for all this was thirty years spent with His Mother at Nazareth.

She shared in His work.

Through Mary's consent when she said to Gabriel, "Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), the Redeemer came down on earth. This consent brought her the immense privilege and honor of the divine motherhood, but it involved also suffering, labor, and tremendous sacrifice. It brought joy with the visit of the shepherds, sent to the Infant Christ by angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest"; joy with the visit of the Wise Men, led from the East by the star. It brought suffering in the flight from Herod to exile in Egypt, sorrow at Calvary when all the disciples but John had fled away and "there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother" (John 19:25). Then was fulfilled Simeon's prophecy to Mary: "And your own soul a sword shall pierce" (Luke 2:35). Mary, therefore, claims our love since she shared so closely in the joys and sufferings of Him who laid down His life that we might be His friends for all eternity.

III. SHE IS OUR MOTHER.

But Mary as the Mother of the Redeemer is more to us than the Mother of our dearest Friend and our greatest Benefactor; she is our Mother as well. Redeemed by the Blood of Christ, we become sons of God by adoption. So we are Mary's children since we are brethren of Mary's Son, "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). It was to this that Christ referred on the Cross when He said to His Mother, "Woman, behold your son," and to His disciple, St. John, "Behold your Mother" (John 19:26).

She is our Helper.

We pray direct to Christ, the One Mediator, but since Mary is our Mother and the Mother of Christ, what wonder if we sometimes pray to her to intercede for us with her Son; for we show special love and honor to Our Lord when we approach Him through the Mother whom He loves so well, and whom He has given to us, to be our Mother also. At her request, Jesus performed the first miracle recorded in the Gospels, the changing of the water into wine at Cana (John 2:3-9). What wonder then, if the sick, the lame, and the blind go to her shrines, at Lourdes and elsewhere, in hope of cure, and when God sees fit, are cured? What wonder then, if millions of Christians daily beg of her, "Pray for us, sinners, now and at the hour of our death?"

Seeing what Mary is, how can we be surprised that all Christians of both East and West, during all the centuries the Church has been in existence, have, with the unhappy exception of the Protestant Reformers in the last four centuries or so, been jealous of her honor, and have felt that not to love Mary is to fail in love for her Son!

As [Blessed] Cardinal Newman wrote: "If we take a survey at least of Europe, we shall find that it is not those religious communions which are characterized by devotion to the Blessed Virgin that have ceased to adore her Eternal Son... They who were accused of worshipping a creature in His stead, still worship Him; their accusers... have ceased to worship Him altogether."

4) CONFESSION.

A leaflet for the Non-Catholic.

Confession is practiced and has always been practiced in the Catholic Church. Men whose greatness is recognized by all — thinkers, scientists, and generals, such as Pascal, the philosopher and scientist, Pasteur, the scientist, and Foch, the general — look upon Confession as an excellent and divinely appointed means to salvation.

WHY THEN ALL THESE ATTACKS ON CONFESSION?

Why do men still say it is unmanly and degrading, an incentive to sin, that it weakens character, or is the payment of a fine in order to sin again?

Because they do not realize that Confession is necessary for the forgiveness of serious sin. They do not realize what Confession is, nor what place it has in the life of a Catholic.

IN WHAT SENSE IS CONFESSION NECESSARY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS?

It is necessary because it is the means prescribed by Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The sinner is, indeed, always immediately forgiven when, moved by the Love of God, he repents; but, if he knows that Christ bids him confess all serious sins, he is bound to obey Christ's bidding.

HOW DOES A CATHOLIC VIEW CONFESSION?

We all have a deep-rooted tendency to do what we like. What we should like to do is often wrong and we know it. If we do it despite this knowledge, then we do wrong — as Catholics say, "we commit sin," we sin. Christ came on this earth, lived, taught, and finally died for us, that His Father might forgive us, in view of His sacrifice and our repentance. This forgiveness, however, was not to be a mechanical one.

THE SINNER'S PART — AND THE PRIEST'S.

Before going to Confession, a Catholic must be sorry for all the serious sins he is guilty of; "Against You only have I sinned" must be his attitude. He must recall his sins as far as he can remember. He must wish them undone, because they have insulted God's Majesty and "crucified again Jesus Christ," through whom he hopes to be saved; or at least he must turn from his sins because he fears the punishments of sin which God has revealed. That done — and it necessarily implies a resolve, with God's help, to avoid those sins in the future — he goes to the priest as to the doctor of his soul. The priest, like the medical man, has spent years of study before he is qualified to diagnose and cure the ills of the soul; he needs a special "diploma" before he is allowed to do so. But he, like the doctor, must be told what is the matter; then only can he judge of the case and give the kindly advice it needs. Then, satisfied that his patient is sincere and means to amend, he forgives him in God's name, by the power he has received from Christ. In this case, the patient is certain of his cure, for he has God's assurance of forgiveness, having done his own part. Indeed no consolation is so great as the knowledge that he is "friends with God" once more.

THAT is the Catholic idea of Confession — ANY OTHER IS FALSE.

CATHOLICS DO NOT PAY TO HAVE THEIR SINS FORGIVEN.

If they did, why do priests in crowded parishes remain so poor? The Catholic Church says that even to accept money, freely offered, for Confession would be the grievous sin called "Simony."

CONFESSING BEING EASY DOES NOT MAKE SINNING ANY EASIER.

Many argue that a Catholic may sin more readily because of the knowledge that he can be forgiven so easily. That is obviously untrue. Are there not often men who do wrong because "nobody will ever know," who yet would think twice if they knew they would have to confess it afterwards? But suppose any particular Catholic should sin the more readily because of "easy confession," he would show an appalling ignorance of the meaning of Confession. For Confession implies, not a mere recital of sins, but above all a true sorrow for them and a set purpose not to repeat them.

In fact, frequent Confession is the best strengthener of the will in its highest endeavors. So that Confession is not unmanly and degrading, for the mere fact of having to tell our failings to a fellow-man makes us face the issue more squarely than when left to ourselves. No! It is not unmanly, for how often we ourselves use the phrase, "Go on — own up and be a man."

Some say CONFESSING GIVES THE PRIEST TOO MUCH POWER — ALLOWING HIM TO PRY INTO OUR PRIVATE AFFAIRS.

The priest may not disclose any information received even to save his own or another's life. He can use that information only to direct this particular individual, and that only in the Confessional. The secrecy to which the priest is bound, under most severe penalties, is called "the seal of Confession," and is more binding than the obligation of lawyer or doctor to keep professional secrets.

And if he does ask a question, it is only that he may be able to judge better and help.

So that if Confession gives the priest any power it is that of promoting God's kingdom on earth by healing the sick of soul and giving that spiritual refreshment which Christ Himself promised to those that labor and are burdened.

Confession is an institution so noble that none but God could have conceived and fashioned it. It is God's own Court of Appeal on earth against the sentence, which, in the nature of things, is passed against the sinner in the moment that he sins.

And the priest has full powers from Christ, for He said: "Receive you the Holy Ghost -- whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

5) THE MASS — THE HOLY SACRIFICE.

WHAT IS A SACRIFICE?

In the worship of God, man realizes his position as a creature of God, as God's man. He tries to express this realization, and the expression of it is fourfold. It contains: -

1. Adoration, the offering of supreme honor to God,
2. The offering of thanks for God's benefits,
3. The offering of petitions for God's further help,
4. The offering of satisfaction or atonement, if man has offended God by sin.

Sacrifice, more than anything else, is the way that religious peoples have always used to express all this, and in the Bible (e.g. in the Book of Leviticus) we have the clearest description of sacrifice in practice and as approved by God.

The act of sacrifice consists in the offering up to God of a victim in token of man's complete submission and devotion to God.

WHAT IS A PRIEST?

But men are social beings; they live and act together. It is therefore right that they should worship God not only individually, but collectively as a body. And sacrifice enables man to do this, for it is offered in the name of all those who are present, and is thus a social act.

The Priest is he who offers the common sacrifice for himself and for the community. Only he who has been properly appointed may rightfully act in the name of the rest in offering the victim; and once he has been appointed, he offers not for himself only, but for all whom as priest he represents.

And this brings us to the Mass, for the Mass is the Sacrifice of the Christian Religion.

THE MASS is a sacrifice in which Jesus Christ is the Victim offered up to God in expiation of sin and for man's salvation.

IT IS the same sacrifice as Christ offered of Himself on Calvary; there it was offered by Him personally in a bloody manner; here it is offered by Him through the ministry of His priests, and under the appearances of bread and wine.

IT IS the Sacrifice of the New Law, replacing and fulfilling the sacrifices offered by the Jews of old, which of themselves were powerless to atone for sin or to save a single soul.

These statements are made on the authority of the inspired word of God, that is of the Old and New Testament; and they are borne out by the teaching and practice of the Catholic Church from the time of Christ until the present day.

OPEN THE NEW TESTAMENT — at St. Matthew 26: 26-29; St. Mark 14: 22-25; St. Luke 22:19-20; and St. Paul, at 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

What these passages narrate is this: -

Jesus Christ, on the eve of His Passion and Death, changed bread and wine into His Body and Blood, and with His approaching death before His mind, offered Himself up thus as a Victim which was to be slain on Calvary for the remission of sins. Then He ordered His Apostles to repeat this act of His "in memory of Me."

Christ's words show this very clearly: "This is My body that is given for you;" "This is My blood which is shed for many unto the remission of sins."

Christ even compares His own sacrificial offering to the sacrifices which used to seal the covenants between God and the Israelites: "This chalice is the New Testament (or covenant) in My Blood." St. Paul too makes use of the same expressions as Christ: — to "give His body" and to "shed His blood."

But Christ added, "Do this in commemoration of Me."

Where and how is that command of Christ carried out? Nowhere except where Christ is again made present under the appearance of bread and wine, and offered up in true sacrifice as the Victim once slain for us on Calvary. It was a command to repeat Christ's sacrificial offering, as St. Paul says, "until He come." In the Mass, and only in the Mass is this done; in the Mass, the Catholic Church obeys the command of Christ.

NOW OPEN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

You will see that even before Christ's coming it was foretold that He would be offered up as a sacrificial Victim in the Mass. In the Prophecy of Malachy (1:10-11) we read of God's refusal to accept the unworthy sacrifices of the Jews, and of a promise of a new and worthy sacrifice, a pure bloodless sacrifice that would be offered everywhere and at all times. The words are clear:

"From the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation."

Has this prophecy never been fulfilled? Never, if not in the Mass, the one rite that fulfills it and fulfills it to the letter. The Mass is offered everywhere and at every moment of the day and night; it is a true sacrificial act; in it is offered a pure Victim, none other than Christ Himself, once really slain for us on the Cross and now offered to God in an unbloody manner by the Church.

Christ is still a Victim in the Mass for He continues to offer Himself there to the Father as the Victim of Calvary. This Victimhood is outwardly symbolized on the altar by the separate consecrations of bread and wine, as though the Body and Blood of Christ were really separated.

Thus, the Mass fulfills both the prophecies of the Old Testament and the commands of Christ in the New Testament.

IN THE MASS the Catholic Church does what Christ enjoined on His apostles. When His words, "This is My body," "This is My blood." are spoken by the priest, the bread and wine become in substance the true Body and Blood of Christ. And as He offered Himself in sacrifice on the eve of Calvary, so now He offers Himself again through His priests. And as He gave His Body and Blood to the Apostles, so in the Mass the priest consumes the Body and Blood of Christ and gives it to the faithful who desire to receive it.

IN THE MASS there is not a different sacrifice from that of Calvary. There it was a bloody offering of the Victim; here the same Victim offers Himself, but in an unbloody manner through the ministry of the priest.

IN THE MASS the Church performs the supreme act of Christian worship, the Christian Sacrifice. She solemnly bids her children to be present at it, if they can, every Sunday, and the faithful who unite themselves with that act have the marvelous benefits and graces won for us on Calvary applied to them. They perpetuate, as Christ commanded, His great Sacrifice, "until He come."
