

EDITORIAL

THERE is a tendency noticeable in some promoters of the Liturgical Movement to decry the use of 'devotions', and in doing so to seem to imply that the only wholly legitimate kind of prayer is the official liturgical prayer of the Mystical Body, the prayer of the faithful participating in Mass and Divine Office. There is certainly truth in one of the premises from which this attitude derives, in that every prayer, no matter what its occasion or content, is offered to the Eternal Father through the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore through the Mass; not necessarily in this or that Mass, but in the life of Christ in his Mystical Body which is centred and has its focus in the Mass. It is entirely true therefore to say, and we should try to think in this way, that our morning prayers, our quick ejaculations shot out during the day in face of temptation or other crisis, or turned over in the mind to sanctify the ordinary routine of daily work, our visit to the Blessed Sacrament and our evening rosary, all speed home to him to whom they are directed in and through the redeeming power of Christ, and so in and through the Mass. And since the Divine Office leads up to and prepares for the celebration of Mass, and is indeed one and the same prayer with it, as the liturgical construction of the *Opus Dei* in religious communities amply illustrates, all prayer of whatever kind is fulfilled and completed in this official prayer of the Church, the prayer which Christ himself prays in his Mystical Body.

The error of this tendency to decry the use of 'devotions' lies in failure to relate them, and their place in the life of the Church, with the central core of the Church's prayer. This failure results in 'devotions' being treated as a kind of distraction from and diminution of the power and effectiveness of that prayer. Two causes, which are however closely related, contribute to this misapprehension. It may arise from over-emphasis on the excellence and necessity of corporate prayer, an over-emphasis which leads to the error that prayer apart from the assembly of the faithful is hardly true prayer at all. A devout member of the Student Christian Movement was on a walking tour in Greece. One night

he was entertained as a guest in a Greek monastery, and on the following morning, when setting out on the next stage of his journey, he found himself accompanied by a Greek monk who was travelling to another monastery. That evening they put up at a public hostelry and shared a room. The good protestant, before getting into bed, went down on his knees and said his prayers, the monk went to bed without saying any prayers at all. The same procedure was followed the next night at the next inn. Overcome by astonishment and perplexity the student at last ventured to ask the monk for an explanation. 'How can I pray apart from my brethren in the monastery?' was the answer he got. A genuine, if rather extreme, expression of the eastern Christian's deep sense of solidarity in Christ's Mystical Body, and a salutary corrective of the westerner's inveterate tendency to individualism.

For the failure to see the true place of 'devotions' in the Christian life arises also from a fear that this individualism will show itself in a tendency to substitute a purely private kind of prayer, envisaging purely private interests, for the common prayer of the Church, offered through the official act of the Church, an act whose meaning is best realised by the communal use of the Church's own words, which express the worship of the Mystical Body as a whole. It is this that lies behind the recurrent controversy in our Catholic papers concerning the use of the rosary at Mass, or its substitution for the traditional and liturgical Vespers or Compline as the Sunday evening service.

As the preservation of the integrity of human society depends upon a just balance being struck between community and the individual persons who constitute it, so in the worship of God, and for the same reasons, a similar balance must be kept between 'devotions' of a quasi-personal and private character and the common worship of the People of God which is wholly public and wholly a community act. The two elements are necessary to each other and complementary; each gives something vital to the other because the spiritual life of the community depends for its vitality and energy, as a body, upon the extent of the contribution each member of the community continuously makes to it, and in its turn the community, so vitalized, gives back its contribution to each of the members who constitute it.

The primary purpose of 'devotions' is the deepening of personal faith by spiritual penetration into the mysteries of redemption by

the operation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus in using the rosary the vocal prayers are only of relative importance; it is the mysteries of our Lord's life as seen through our Lady's eyes, and the spiritual understanding of them, that is primary. For this deeper penetration will convert our faith from notional to real assent and enable us to grasp by spiritual insight the bearing of Christ's redemption upon our own lives, so that its realization becomes more and more their motive power. Or again, in making the Stations of the Cross, we are brought into personal contact with Christ in his Passion. There is in this devotion a wealth of intimate detail drawn, in the main, from Scripture and best presented in scriptural words, which enables us to enter deeply into the things which were wrought for our salvation. In both Rosary and Stations of the Cross devotion to the Sacred Heart is closely involved; for it is by the love of Christ, a human love showed us in the life of obedience he shared with us, and in the supreme obedience of his death, that love for him is generated in our own hearts.

Behind these great personal devotions that the Church sets before us for our use lies another devotion wider in its scope; that to the Scriptures, in the *lectio divina*. In the slow prayerful study of God's Word written, regularly practised, even if only for a few minutes at a time, is to be found the raw material of our prayer. This will be transmuted by grace into that abiding prayer which is a permanent attitude of adoration to be perfected one day, please God, in heaven. Our *lectio divina* will take us through the Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles, and looking back from them to the Old Testament; to the psalms and the prophecies and to God's mighty acts of deliverance recorded in the sacred history of the chosen people, in which are divinely foreshadowed those mightier acts which wrought the world's salvation and ours.

Our faith and understanding thus deepened will increase the depth and power of our contribution to the corporate and official worship of the Church which is nothing less than our sharing with Christ our Lord in his redeeming sacrifice. 'Devotions' and Liturgy are not in opposition to one another. Rightly used they are complementary in the building of a personal sanctification which is at the same time a growing realization of the full meaning of the obligations and privileges of membership in the Mystical Body.