

It has been possible, as we have seen, to reject in this way not only the historic tradition of Christendom, in favour of Reformation insights, but also not inconsiderable parts of that heritage which the Church of England has itself retained in the classical theology of the Caroline divines. It seems relevant here to put the question whether it is likely that Christ our Lord, who is in his Church, and the Holy Spirit, who, according to his promise, guides it into all truth, would have left it with an authority so fallible in the preservation of that truth as to allow it, in such a vital matter, and to such a wide extent and at so very early a stage in its history, to choose the road to error. Anglicans themselves, when they accept the guidance of the historic tradition, have not seldom reached in this matter, as in others, conclusions of scholarship concerning the biblical data identical with those of the Catholic Church. This is an additional confirmation for Catholics in their belief that the only safe *ultimate* criterion of the truth or falsehood of doctrinal development is the living voice of the Church.

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## CATECHISM FOR ADULTS:

### XI. 'THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS'

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**T**HE worship of the Christian community culminates in the sacrifice of the Mass. At Mass, a priest, assimilated by his ordination to the High Priesthood of Christ, offers, in the name of Christ, a true sacrifice to God. This act of sacrifice is identified with our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary for though the manner in which the victim is offered is different, the victim is the same. The body given and the blood shed is made present through the signs of the bread and the wine. More than that, Christ who died then and once and for all released the bonds of sin, is now,

under the appearance of bread and wine, really present, so that his body and his blood become the heavenly food of the Christian community. This is the sacred passover meal at which the lamb is sacrificed that the people may be delivered. The lamb of God who offered himself, who gave himself upon the Cross as a pure and holy victim, offers himself again, by the ministry of priests, in an act of adoration, love and generosity.

The Mass is the memorial of that sacrifice that makes all other sacrifice acceptable, of the sacrifice through which the world is overcome. It is the union of the people of God with their risen Lord; hence it is the sign of victory. The life of the Church which is constituted by the victory of Christ, is one in which we share in the gifts won for us by Christ. The grace, that flows from him, draws the Church towards God 'until we all meet into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fulness of Christ' (Ephesians 4, 13). Made in the image of God, the Christian by the power of the Resurrection is built into that perfect building that is the Temple of God, founded on Christ, or to change the metaphor, is incorporated into the Body of Christ, becomes one of the members of that 'one new man' of which Christ is the head. This is just another way of saying that in Christ the Christian stands in a new relationship to God—the new covenant of love. Christ himself, his charity and love, is the new covenant and man belongs to the new in so far as he belongs to Christ, in as much as he loves like Christ. The new commandment 'to love one another, as I have loved you' was given at the Last Supper and in a sense explains it. The Last Supper, the breaking of bread, the Mass is the point at which man, sharing in Christ's action, is in Christ united to God. This is, then, a banquet of love, a sign of God's love that is creative of divine love in the souls of men.

The bread and the wine are not simply the first fruits which man offers to God the Creator in thanksgiving, nor do they merely signify man's offering of his whole being to God. They have been touched, blessed and given by Christ so that they are sacred signs of the unseen working of the power of God. At the gathering together of the people, at the meal, God acts, so that this meal is communion—union with God. It is by this that the Church lives, it is this that gathers her together and makes her one; it is this, with baptism, that makes the Christian community. The Church

is one in Christ, she lives by Christ—of her living unity with her Head the Mass is the supreme sign. This is a unity of love, as is of a bride with a bridegroom. (Cf. Ephesians 5.)

The Mass, because it is a sharing in the offering of Christ, is the greatest act of love and worship man can give to God—it is the Eucharist, the thanksgiving. At Mass the whole Christian community gives itself to God that it may be transformed in Christ and walk in newness of life. It proclaims God as King and Redeemer, it asserts that the Christian lives by Christ alone.

In the early Church the first part of the Mass was called the *synaxis*, or the gathering. In this, which was modelled on the worship of the synagogue, the community came together for prayer, to listen to the Word of God and to hear the instruction of the Bishop. After this came the Eucharist proper. First the offertory, then the great prayer of blessing and thanksgiving that is introduced by the preface, culminates in the words of institution and ends at the 'Amen' before the 'Our Father'.

It is of more than passing interest that this Eucharistic Prayer came very early to include commemorations of the living and the dead. In the Roman rite, that for the living was finally put at the beginning of the prayer and that of the dead at the end of the prayer after the Consecration.

First (*in primis*) the Church offers the sacrifice that God may pour forth his grace upon the whole Church, for we ask through Christ that the Holy Catholic Church be given peace under her appointed rulers. Then the names of those to be specially mentioned are remembered with all those who offer up to God this sacrifice of praise. This prayer is offered in union with the Court of Heaven—the Church triumphant. Therefore we remember the saints, or those who, in Christ, have won the victory, and whose memory we venerate. They, by whose merits and prayers we are supported, are one with us in Christ.

Christ is the Head of the human race as its restorer, as the second Adam; Christ as the first-born of all creation is the highest in dignity of all beings. As Redeemer and as source of grace he is the Head of the Church. This does not mean that he is Head only of those who on earth are united to him by faith and charity. It means that he is Head, for ever, of all those who, through him are united to God. Thus he is the Head of the Church Triumphant as well as of the Church Militant. In him we on earth are united

by a living bond of charity to the saints, so that they are of the same family as us.

The Church on earth—the poor, the meek, the clean of heart, the peace-makers, the persecuted, the mourners, those that hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful—this is the Church of those called to be saints. They are a holy people, because they are separated from the world by the call of God; they are sanctified in Christ Jesus. It is true that they are not separated by self-conscious rightness, but by obedience and loyalty to God. In all else they are not separated, for their charity reaches out to all men and their longing makes them servants.

All who belong to Christ belong to the communion of saints—have communion with Mary the mother of God, the blessed apostles and martyrs and all the saints, with all those who having made up in their persons the suffering of Christ, share, through union with him, in his redemptive work. They are those who have led a full life in the Body of Christ, by whom the temple has been built up and who now stand before the living God in adoration and wonder.

It is not only these who make up the communion of saints, not only those who in this life are journeying toward sanctity and those who have achieved it in heaven. To these are joined the Church Suffering. 'Be mindful, also, O Lord, of thy servants and handmaids who have gone before us'; for these the Church asks for solace, light and peace. Those who have died in faith, but who still must be purified from sin, who in longing wait for God. These too have Christ for their Head, these too are called to be saints, will be saints when they have been cleansed.

Lastly we pray for ourselves also, sinners, thy servants. Weak, mean, lustful, arrogant, we can yet hope in Christ that we shall have, by God's mercy, some fellowship with the saints. 'Into their company, we beseech thee, admit us.'

The communion, the fellowship of the saints, is Christ ruling in the souls of those he has redeemed.