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HIDDEN
TREASURE
— *Holy Mass* —

Saint Leonard of Port Maurice

*In the world you will have
affliction. But take courage,
I have overcome the world.
— John 16:33*

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NIHIL OBSTAT: H. A. Brann, D.D.

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

“Where there is no Mass,” writes one of the Fathers of the English Oratory, “there is also no Christianity.” The reason is plain: Christ’s life was one of sacrifice—not merely of the figurative sacrifice of praise and prayer, but one of outward act, of suffering and of death. His religion must be like Himself: it must be the continuation of the divine-human life that He led upon earth, representing and perpetuating, by some sacred rite, the sacrifice that began in the womb of Mary and ended upon the Cross of Calvary. That rite is the holy Mass. Do we always realize it as such? Does the conviction sink deep into us, when offering, or assisting, at the adorable Sacrifice, that Jesus is reenacting, in our presence, the mysteries of His life and death?

The altar of the Mass is the holy house of Nazareth, the crib of Bethlehem, the Egyptian place of exile, the hill of Calvary, the garden-tomb in which Our Saviour’s corpse reposed, and the Mount of Olives from which He ascended. The Passion, it is true, is that which is primarily represented and continued in the holy Mass; yet the prayers and rites of the Sacrifice refer, at times, to other mysteries. Thus the dropping of a part of the sacred Host into the Chalice, before the *Agnus Dei*, represents the reunion of Christ’s soul with His body and blood on the morning of the Resurrection. For a description of the many and beautiful analogies between the eucharistic life of Our Lord and His sacred Infancy, we refer the reader to Father Faber’s Treatise on the Blessed Sacrament.

The Mass is truly a “hidden treasure,” and, alas, our cold, dead faith allows it to remain so. If we valued it as we ought, we would hurry every morning to the church, careless of the snows of winter and the heats of summer, in order to get a share of the riches of this treasure.

The saints knew the value of one Mass: that was a dark day in their calendar on which they were deprived of the happy privilege of saying or hearing Mass. Although St. Francis de Sales was overburdened with apostolic work on the Mission of the Chablais, he made it a point never to miss his daily Mass. In order to keep his holy resolution, he had frequently to cross the river Drance, to the village of Marin, in which there was a Catholic church. It happened, in the winter of 1596, that a great freshet carried away a portion of the bridge over the stream, and the passengers were, in consequence, compelled to cross on a plank laid over those arches of the broken structure that had withstood the waters. Heavy falls of snow, followed by severe frosts, made this board very slippery, so that it became dangerous to attempt passing on it; but St. Francis was not to be deterred, for, despite the remonstrances of his friends, he made the perilous journey every morning, creeping over the icy plank on his hands and feet, thus daily risking his life rather than lose Mass.

Dear Christian reader! beg this glorious Saint to obtain for you and me some portion of his burning love for the most holy and adorable Sacrifice of the altar.

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, a religious superior, whose works have been specially blessed by our dear Lord, asked for a translation of the following book. The version now presented to the public was undertaken at my request by a Catholic layman; and as the coadjutor Bishop of the Western District of Scotland has kindly revised it, I am glad to be allowed to cooperate with this venerable Prelate in recommending it to the perusal of Catholics.

If St. Philip Neri was satisfied with a book when the name of its author began with S, it will be surely unnecessary to recommend this treatise, which bears the name of the heroic missionary, Saint Leonard of Port Maurice. To those who have read his Life it must appear strange how he found time, in the course of his apostolic wanderings, to compose his various works. Reviewing his efforts to gain souls, his retreats, his sermons, his journeys, they will conclude that his support under such labors must have been in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass; and they will not wonder that he has spoken with so much unction of its efficacy and graces. Where could he, after hours spent in the confessional, hours short for his zeal, but long for his bodily strength, find vigor, save in the refreshing waters for which, as he said in his daily preparation, he thirsted as the stag thirsts after the fountains of water? To him Our Lord was truly the strong and the living God, and from Him he received each day power to begin anew the fight which ended only when he went to receive his crown. While the holy missionary was collecting the faithful to the Stations of the Cross

in the Coliseum, he may, perhaps, have looked to the building on the neighboring hill where his earthly remains were to await the resurrection, and felt in ardent faith that the sacrifice which those Stations commemorated was really and truly offered on the altars of that humble church. And then his heart would burn with the desire to make all Christians love the Lamb Whom his faith beheld “standing as if slain,” *stantem tanquam occisum* (*Apoc.* 5:6), and he would wish to make men understand how certainly this blessed Victim offers for our sake, day after day, the sacrifice of Mount Calvary.

We think that if we had lived with Mary and the Apostles, we should have loved Him really. If so, when the Fathers tell us that in the Blessed Sacrament He perpetuates and continues the Incarnation for us, we ought to show this love; and where is it? When we have to bear the reproach of our many sins, we persuade ourselves that we should not have committed them if we had knelt with John under the Cross; and yet in the Mass the very same Sacrifice is before our eyes, while we too often remain as hardened as ever. But Saint Leonard saw that it would be at least difficult for men to remain in their sins if they were drawn often to this Sacrifice, by the offering whereof, as the Council of Trent teaches, “the Lord being appeased, sends grace and the gift of repentance, and forgives crimes and even grievous sins.” Therefore, he sought to draw them to the altar, and bade them pray for the grace that cannot fail. More than once it has happened that those who were not Catholics have been converted by being present during Mass: and can we wonder at it when He, Whose look converted Peter, looks upon them from the altar? Some there are, favored souls and fervent in prayer, who cannot hear Mass without tears. No one ever saw the holy Pontiff Gregory XVI in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament without witnessing the tenderness to which he was moved.

If we had but faith, we should see the Heavenly host gathered around the altar during Mass, "since," as the Council of Oxford says, "it is undoubted that the whole Heavenly court is then present." (Anno 1222.) When the prophet prayed, the eyes of his servant were opened, and he saw the hill covered with fiery chariots (*4 Kings* 6:17); and if the holy author of this book would pray that we might see the altar as he saw it, our eyes, opened to the light which is there shining (*in lumine tuo videbimus lumen*), would behold the chariots of fire on which the Heavenly host are borne when their King comes from His throne to earth. If some pious person possessing worldly means were to see the picture designed in explanation of Mass by M. Olier, the devout leader of the Sulpicians, we think he would be disposed to fulfill the intention which death prevented that holy man from carrying out, by having the picture engraved, and scattered among the faithful. The picture is in itself a meditation, and a sermon upon the mysterious presence of the saints and angels with their glorious Queen during the holy Sacrifice, upon the graces which flow from the altar over the whole Church, and upon its ineffable comfort to our suffering brethren in Purgatory.

We venture to extract from the Life of M. Olier a description of this picture; and while we are reading it, let us remember that *such is the Mass every time it is offered*, rendering glory to Heaven, pouring grace upon the earth, and shedding consolation over Purgatory.

"*When the priest celebrates,*" says the author of the Imitation, "*he honors God, he rejoices the angels, he edifies the Church, he helps the living, he obtains repose for the dead.*" (iv, v., 3.) This is the subject which M. Olier wished to represent in this picture. At the moment of the Elevation, the Church Triumphant, borne on the clouds, descends, and

unites herself to the Church on earth, to be an offering to God, as one sole victim with Jesus Christ.

“In the upper part we see God the Father, to Whom the sacrifice is offered. He contemplates the holy Victim Who immolates Himself to His glory, and He seems to accept the oblation with infinite complacency and satisfaction. The most holy Virgin is placed a little lower; she kneels, as do all the saints and angels, to show their dependence in respect of the Creator; nevertheless, she addresses God with the confidence of a Spouse, and seems to exercise that *suppliant almightiness* which the holy Doctors recognize in the august Queen of Heaven.

“The celestial spirits, ranged around the God Whom they adore by Jesus Christ, are divided into three hierarchies, of which each is made to contain three orders, forming altogether the nine choirs of angels; at their head we see St. Michael, then the angel Gabriel, who bends toward Mary. The holy Precursor is alone, on account of his greatness, among the children of men.

“Next we see, on one side, Adam and Eve, and the just of the law of nature; and, on the other, Moses with the saints of the Mosaic Law, who, in transports of gratitude, confess that they have obtained salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ alone, the sole virtue of all the ancient sacrifices. These are headed by the prophet David, placed thus near to Mary and St. Joseph, as being their ancestor.

“The next portion of the picture is the Christian Church, in three orders, or circles. The holy Apostles appear in the first—they who, triumphing over idolatry, shed over the world the knowledge of God. St. Peter, their chief, returns thanks to the Eternal Father for having inspired him to make the immortal confession which was the origin of his prerogatives; St. Paul blesses Him for having called him to the apostolate

(*Gal.* 1:1); and St. James the Great, for having given him a place in His kingdom (*Matt.* 20:23). Close to St. Peter we get a glimpse of St. John, placed nearer to God, Whose highest mysteries he seemed to penetrate, and next to the most holy Virgin, to whom he was given as a son and a guardian. St. Andrew, St. Thomas, and St. Bartholomew come next, each designated by the instruments of his martyrdom; and then the other Apostles, the disciples, and the preachers of the Faith. Opposite are the holy martyrs, triumphant over their persecutors: they return thanks to God by Jesus Christ, their invisible strength, and renew their offering in union with His. Their leader, St. Stephen, seems still continuing his sacrifice: we recognize several of the most illustrious martyrs following him—St. Domitella, St. Laurence, St. Cecilia, St. Vincent, St. Barbara, St. Agnes.

“In the second rank we see, on one side, the holy Doctors; at their head, St. Leo, St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine; they all give thanks to God for the victories they have gained over heresies, through Jesus Christ, the sole source of their enlightenment. On the other side are all the holy monks and nuns, represented by their founders, each in the habit of his Order; they glorify God for having enabled them to overcome the love of the goods of this world, by true poverty, and for having chosen them to represent to the Church, according to their respective institutes, some virtue, or some hidden perfection, of Jesus Christ. They are placed in the following order: St. Benedict, considered as patriarch of the Western Monks; an old religious of the Carmelite Order; next, St. Teresa, in the habit of her reform; St. Scholastica, as mother of the Benedictines; St. Bernard, restorer of the Cistercian Order; a Cistercian nun; a monk of Cluny, arrayed in black; St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Friars Minor; St. Claire, foundress of the Poor Clares; then St. Bruno,

patriarch of the Carthusians; St. Dominic, founder of the Friars Preachers; St. Francis of Paula, founder of the Minorities; St. Ignatius Loyola; and various societies of regular clerks.

“Finally, the laity of the different states of Christendom are represented by some one of their princes ranked among the saints; among others, the Germans by St. Henry, the English by St. Edward, the French by St. Louis, the Spaniards by St. Ferdinand, and those of the Eastern provinces by St. Helen: they give thanks to God that they have happily triumphed, by Jesus Christ, over the love of the honors and pomps of the world. Opposite are placed the penitents and anchorets who overcame its pleasures; we mark at their head St. Mary Magdalene, St. Antony, patriarch of the Cenobites, St. Jerome, St. Mary of Egypt, St. William of Maleval, founder of the Wilhelmites: and thus ends the picture of the Church in Heaven.

“That upon earth is also represented by some one personage of each of the different ecclesiastical orders, religious or political, of which she is formed: after the Sovereign Pontiff we see cardinals, prelates, priests, monks, and nuns of all the Orders; and, in the second rank, the Emperor of Germany; Louis XIV, in his youth; his mother, Anne of Austria; and a multitude of persons of all conditions and countries, on whose countenances the most lively and touching expressions of piety are visible.

“Lastly, the members of the suffering Church implore the Eternal Father to shorten their torments, for the sake of the Victim Who offers Himself for them; and at the foot of the picture is this inscription, in which the whole is condensed: *The most august Sacrifice of the Mass, offered to God for all His intentions and for all the intentions of the Church in Heaven, on earth, and in Purgatory.*”

So far the account of this wonderful design; and we hope

that some will be moved by it to look at the picture itself, or at the engraving in his book. It will help them to pray more fervently that they may never lose an opportunity of assisting at Mass; it will make them envy the rich, whose privilege it is to build churches and educate priests, in order that the Holy Sacrifice may be offered on many altars for the living and the dead. If they are priests, they will desire to preach unceasingly upon the Mass. If they are poor, they will learn to imitate so many of whom we have seen, renouncing situations because they could not hear Mass, or coming fasting till four in the afternoon, that they might receive the holy Communion.

A few years ago, the Confraternity of St. Patrick was founded at the Oratory in London for the purpose of encouraging the faithful to hear Mass; and Pius IX, ever anxious to spread devotion among his children, granted to the members an indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines, *so often as they shall induce any one to hear Mass*, and a plenary indulgence if, complying with the usual conditions of Confession and Communion, they pray according to the intention of the Holy Father on the feasts of Our Lord and of His Blessed Mother, of St. Joseph and of his patronage; of Sts. Peter and Paul, St. John the Baptist, St. Patrick, St. Philip Neri, and of Blessed Sebastian Valfré. These indulgences are applicable to the holy souls in Purgatory.

May this little book bring to many hearts a feeling of gratitude to our dear Lord for the love which He has displayed in allowing us to hear Mass, and may it move us to claim every day the grace of being present at this adorable Sacrifice.

THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

Treasures, however great and precious, are never appreciated until examined, counted over, and summed up. Hence it is, dear reader, that by many there is formed no due estimate of the holy and awful Sacrifice of the Mass. Though the greatest treasure which glorifies and enriches the Church of God, it is still a hidden treasure, and known to few. Ah, if this jewel of paradise were but known, who would not give up all things to obtain it! No one would then permit to escape from his mouth the scandalous words, "A Mass more or less makes little difference." Rather, like the merchant in the Gospel, would each man sink his whole fortune to render himself master of a treasure so precious: *Albiit, et vendidit omnia quoe habuit, et emit eam*, "he went and sold all that he possessed, and bought it" (*Matt.* 13:46).

To enlighten, therefore, him that liveth in darkness and hath no due conception of this thrice-holy mystery, is the present little work composed. But if you judge it by first appearances to be something either superfluous or presumptuous—superfluous, there having already issued from the press so many small works which teach so systematically and beautifully how to hear holy Mass with profit, that it would seem impossible to wish for more; or presumptuous, on the ground that a far other order of talent is needed for the illustration of a mystery so venerable as to surpass the apprehension of the very Seraphim—I must with all ingenuousness allow that you speak the truth, and confess that I have nothing to reply. Indeed, these two considerations have

held me back for some time, and I have experienced no slight repugnance to a work so likely to be received as something quite unneeded, as an attempt beyond my strength—and, therefore, a public stain on one's credit.

Two motives have, however, afforded an impulse sufficient to overcome the obstinate reluctance of my heart. The first is an exhortation, which I have venerated as a command, from one whom, by many titles, I hold myself bound to obey. The second motive is the hope that I might extend some little aid to the people whom I have already cultivated by missions. One of the greatest benefits resulting from these is the increased habitual homage and veneration toward the Most Holy Sacrament. Missions excite a holy fervor, spurring on the hearers to seek more frequent nourishment from the Bread of Angels, and to escort the most holy Viaticum whenever it is borne to the sick, so that it may be beheld accompanied by crowds of people and by multitudes of lights; in short, with all dignity, solemnity, and decorum. Still greater is the diligence used in these missions to induce all daily to hear holy Mass. Now, it cannot be easily imagined how much it assists the attainment of this holy end to place in the hands of the poor some little book composed in plain and simple style, and thus adapted to their capacity. Such books clear away difficulties in the way of devotion, affording light to the understanding and fervor to the heart, and not seldom bring about greater gain than all the efforts of preachers. Our poor words take flight and are gone, while written exhortations remain before the eye. Were this little work thus to turn out an aid to but one single soul, it could not be called quite superfluous.

In order that it may become more profitable to the unlearned, it shall be divided under three distinct heads. In the first place, there shall be set forth a short instruction upon the excellence of, and necessity for, holy Mass. In the second,

there shall be taught a practical and devout method of hearing it with profit. In the third, there shall be narrated some examples, which may act upon the hearts of persons of every condition, as stimulants to the hearing of it daily.

Such, then, are the motives which should excite in you some sympathy for me, if the attempt still appear too ambitious, and which awaken in me the hope of being useful even to you, who, perhaps, are not very complacent toward it, because, before the close, I shall reveal to you a hidden treasure which, if you but know how to avail yourselves of it, will enrich you with all good in life and in death, in time and in eternity. Farewell, and may all blessings attend you.

THE AUTHOR AND HIS BOOK

St. Leonard was born in 1676 at Port Maurice, a seaport near Genoa, the son of Dominic Casanova, a ship captain. Two brothers and a sister, besides himself, entered the Franciscan Order.

When thirteen years old, he went to the renowned Roman college where St. Aloysius once pursued his studies. There he so distinguished himself with piety, diligence, and good works that he was called another Aloysius. On completing his studies, he contemplated entering the medical profession, but during a visit to the Franciscan convent of St. Bonaventure in Rome, he received his call to the priesthood. He entered the Order on October 2, 1697 and soon became the glory of his convent. His exact observance of the rule was admirable; likewise were his fervor at prayer, his burning love of Jesus and Mary, his rigorous penance, his humility, and his tireless charity toward his neighbor. Ardently he desired to preach the Gospel in China, but his delicate constitution for a while prevented even his preaching at home. Consumption seemed to have claimed him, but at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, he was miraculously restored to health. He then devoted himself with renewed zeal to parish missions, and during twenty-four years he covered every section of Italy and the island of Corsica, which latter was notorious for lawless inhabitants. He scourged himself without compassion to obtain mercy for his sins and those of others, and the power of his words made a deep impression because of the austerity of his life. Thus he was able to convert innumerable sinners.

He caused to be built a retreat house for missionaries at Incontro near Florence, where preachers could withdraw a time in order to prepare themselves through a life of seclusion and penance for future activities. In Rome he founded several pious confraternities, most notably that of the Sacred Heart, whose compassion he taught the people to request with the little ejaculation: "My Jesus, mercy!" Wherever he went, he spread devotion to the Way of the Cross and perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. He fostered also devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin by way of a pious obligation of gratitude, since he attributed to her mediation all the good he had ever received or done in his life.

Returning to Rome from a mission in Bologna, St. Leonard died in the convent of St. Bonaventure on November 26, 1751. God glorified him with miracles in his life, but more so after his death. Pope Pius VI, who had known him personally, beatified him in 1796; Pope Pius IX canonized him June 29, 1867. Pope Pius XI appointed him patron of all missionaries. His feast is celebrated in the Church calendar on November 26.

The present work, suffused with saintly unction, is itself a rare "treasure," and one, let us hope, that will never be "hidden" to the world, but known and studied and applied universally by Catholics everywhere. When a saint writes, one truly senses this fact from the penetration of the words and the fervor of the admonition. And for this alone *The Hidden Treasure* is most worthy of the contemporary reader's meditative consideration. But, returning to print as it does, during this time of great change in the Church, it should serve both as a guide to priests and bishops in charge of liturgical reform and as a sober reminder to all of the great inspiring power of the ancient Latin Mass. Through St. Leonard's intercession and by the persuasive power of *The Hidden Treasure*, may

those in charge of liturgical revisions keep ever in mind the inner nature and devotional power of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. And may Holy Mother the Church ever continue to offer Mass in the ancient Latin rite that has come down to us from the earliest centuries in virtually its present form.

Thomas A. Nelson
Original Publisher
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SHORT INSTRUCTIONS

on the

EXCELLENCE, NECESSITY,
AND USEFULNESS

of

HOLY MASS

CHAPTER I

THREE GREAT EXCELLENCIES OF THE HOLY MASS

It requires great patience to endure the language of careless livers, breathing atheism itself, and ruinous to devotion; as for instance, "A Mass more or less counts for little." "It is no small thing to hear Mass on festivals." "The Mass of this or that priest is for length like one in Holy Week; when he appears at the altar, I generally get out of church forthwith." He who talks in this way lets it be perceived that he has little or no esteem for the thrice-holy Sacrifice of the Mass. That sacrifice is the sun of Christianity, the soul of faith, the centre of the Catholic religion, wherein are beheld all her rites, all her ceremonies, and all her Sacraments; in fine, it is the compendium of all the good and beautiful to be found in the Church of God. Wherefore, O ye who now read my words, ponder well how great are the matters to be spoken of in these instructions.

II. It is a certain truth that all the religions which have existed from the beginning of the world have ever had some sacrifice as an essential part of the worship which they offered to God. But because their whole law was either vain or imperfect, so were their sacrifices either vain or imperfect. Most vain were the sacrifices of the idolaters, nor is there any occasion to mention them; and those of the Hebrews, although, indeed, then professing the true religion, were poor and deficient, by

St. Paul called *infirmata et egenata elementa*, “weak and poor elements” (*Gal.* 4:9), because they could neither cancel sin nor confer grace. The sole Sacrifice which we have in our holy religion, that is to say, holy Mass, is a sacrifice, holy, perfect, in every point complete, with which each one of the faithful nobly honors God, protesting at one and the same time his own nothingness and the supreme dominion which God hath over him; a sacrifice called, therefore, by David, *sacrificium justitiae*, “the sacrifice of justice” (*Ps.* 4:5); both because it contains the Just One Himself, and the Saint of saints, or rather justice and holiness themselves, and because it sanctifies souls by the infusion of grace and the affluence of gifts which it confers. Being, then, a sacrifice so holy—a sacrifice the most venerable and the most excellent of all—in order that you may form a due conception of so great a treasure, we shall here explain, in a manner quite succinct, some of its divine excellencies. To express them all were not a work to which our poor faculties could attain.

III. The principal excellence of the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass consists in being essentially, and in the very highest degree, identical with that which was offered on the Cross of Calvary: with this sole difference, that the sacrifice on the Cross was bloody, and made once for all, and did on that one occasion satisfy fully for all the sins of the world; while the Sacrifice of the altar is an unbloody sacrifice, which can be repeated an infinite number of times, and was instituted in order to apply in detail that universal ransom which Jesus paid for us on Calvary. So that the bloody sacrifice was the instrument of redemption; the unbloody is that which puts us in possession: the one threw open the treasury of the merits of Christ Our Lord; the other affords the practical use of that treasury. And, therefore, observe that in Mass there is made not a mere representation, nor a simple commemoration

of the Passion and death of the Redeemer, but there is performed, in a certain true sense, the selfsame most holy act which was performed on Calvary. It may be said, with all truth, that in every Mass Our Redeemer returns mystically to die for us, without really dying, at one and the same time really alive and as it were slain—*vidi Agnum stantem tamquam occisum*, “I saw a Lamb standing as it were slain” (*Apoc.* 5:6). On the anniversary day of the holy Nativity there is represented by the Church the birth of the Lord, but Our Lord is not then born. On the day of the Ascension and on the day of Pentecost, there are shadowed forth the ascent of the Lord to Heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit down to the earth; yet it is by no means true that, as each of these days comes round, the Lord again ascends to Heaven, or the Holy Spirit visibly descends to earth. But the same cannot be said of the mystery of holy Mass, for in it there is made no simple representation of a bygone event, but the selfsame Sacrifice is unbloodily made which, with the shedding of blood, was made upon the Cross. That same body, that same blood, that same Jesus Who then offered Himself upon Calvary, now offers Himself in the holy Mass. *Opus*, says the Church, *opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur* (*Orat. s. in Mis. Dom.* 9, post Pent). Yes; *exercetur*; in Mass there is effected, there is continuously practiced, that same sacrifice which was made upon the Cross. Oh, awful, solemn, and stupendous work!

Now, tell me whether, when you enter church to hear Mass, you thoroughly well consider that you are going up as it were to Calvary, to be present at the death of the Redeemer. If so, would you go with behavior so unsubdued, with dress so flaunting? If the Magdalene had gone to Calvary, to the foot of the Cross, all dressed out, perfumed, and adorned, as when she associated with her lovers, what would have been said of her? What, then, shall be said of you who go to holy

Mass as if you were going to a ball? But what shall be said if you profane those functions of most dread sanctity with nods and becks, with tattle, with laughter, with the petty attentions of courtship, or with graver sacrileges of thought, word, or deed? Wickedness is hideous at any time, and in any place; but sins committed during the time of Mass, and before the altar, draw down after them the curse of God. *Maledictus homo qui facit opus Domini fraudulentem* (Jer. 48:10). Think seriously upon this, while I proceed to disclose to you yet other marvels and glories of this all-precious treasure.

IV. It seems to me impossible for a religious function to possess a prerogative more excellent than this of the holy Sacrifice of Mass, that it is no mere copy, but one original with the sacrifice of the Cross. Still further is its eminence enhanced by having for its priest none else than God made man. In so great a sacrifice three things attract consideration: the priest who offers, the victim offered, and the majesty of him to whom the offering is made. Now observe the marvellous grandeur of holy Mass, in virtue of each of these three considerations. The Priest Who offers is the Man-God Christ Jesus; the Victim is the Life of God; nor is it offered to any other than unto God. Rekindle, then, your faith, and recognize the true celebrant to be not so much the human priest as the adorable person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the primary offerer, not only because He has instituted this Holy Sacrifice, and has given to it all its efficacy through His merits, but also because in each Mass He Himself deigns for our good to transubstantiate the bread and wine into His most holy Body and into His most precious Blood. Behold, then, the chiefest privilege of holy Mass, to have for priest God made man; and when you see the celebrant at the altar, know that his highest dignity consists in being the minister of that invisible and eternal Priest, Our Redeemer Himself. Hence it

results that the Sacrifice itself does not cease to be agreeable to God, although the priest who celebrates may be wicked and sacrilegious, seeing that the principal offerer is Christ Our Lord, and the priest is His mere minister. In the same way, any one who gives alms by the hand of a servant is called in all truth the giver; and even though his servant may be wicked and infamous, yet if the master be good, the alms do not cease to be praiseworthy and holy. Blessed, then, be God, Who hath bestowed on us a holy, a most holy Priest, Who offers to the Eternal Father this divine Sacrifice, not only in every place (the holy Faith being now everywhere diffused), but every day, and even every hour; since the sun is rising to others, while to us it sets. At every hour, then, in various parts of the world, this most perfectly holy Priest offers to the Father His blood, His soul, and His whole self for us: and all this He does as many times as there are Masses celebrated in the whole world. O boundless treasure! O mine of inestimable stores thus possessed by us in the Church of God! O happy we if we could but assist at all these Masses! What a store of reward would be thus acquired! What a heaping up of graces in this life, what a fund of glory in the other, would be the fruit of so loving an attendance!

V. But what is implied in this word “attendance?” Those who hear Mass not only perform the office of attendants, but likewise of offerers, having themselves a right to the title of priests. *Fecisti nos Deo nostro regnum et sacerdotes* (*Apoc.* 5:10). The celebrating priest is, as it were, the public minister of the Church in general; he is the intermediary between all the faithful, particularly those who assist at Mass, and the invisible Priest, Who is Christ; and, together with Christ, he offers to the Eternal Father, both in behalf of all the rest and of himself, the great price of human redemption. But he is not alone in this so holy function, since all those

who assist at Mass concur with him in offering the Sacrifice; and, therefore, the priest turns round to the people and says, *Orate fratres ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat*—“Pray, O my brethren, that mine and your sacrifice may be acceptable to God”; in order that the faithful may understand that, while he indeed acts the part of principal minister, all those who are present make the great offering together with him. So that when you assist at holy Mass, you perform, after a certain manner, the office of priest. What say you, then? Will you ever dare, from this time forward, to be at Mass sitting, prating, looking here and there, perhaps even sleeping, or content yourselves with reciting some vocal prayers, without at all taking to heart the tremendous office of priest which you are exercising? Ah me! I cannot restrain myself from exclaiming, O dull and incapable world, that understandest nothing of mysteries so sublime! How is it possible that any one should remain before the altar with a mind distracted and a heart dissipated at a time when the holy angels stand there trembling and astonished at the contemplation of a work so stupendous?

VI. You are surprised, perhaps, to hear me speak of the Mass as a stupendous work. But what tongue, human or angelic, may ever describe a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the simplest priest in the Mass? And who could ever have imagined that the voice of man, which by nature hath not the power even to raise a straw from the ground, should obtain through grace a power so stupendous as to bring from Heaven to earth the Son of God? It is a greater power than that which would be required to change the place of mountains, to dry up seas, and to turn round the Heavens; it even emulates, in a certain manner, that first *fiat* with which God brought all things out of nothing, and in some sort would seem to surpass that other *fiat* with which the sweet Virgin

drew down into her bosom the Eternal Word. She did nothing else than supply matter for the body of Christ—made indeed *from* her and her most pure blood, but not *by* her, in the sense of her own potential act. But altogether different, and most marvellous, is the sacramental manner in which the voice of the priest, operating as the instrument of Christ, reproduces Him, and does so as often as he consecrates. The Blessed Giovanni Buono made this truth (*S. Ant.* 3 p. hist. tit. 24, c. 13) in some sort comprehensible to a hermit, his companion, who was unable to imagine how the words of a priest could be allowed such power as to change the substance of bread into the Body of Jesus Christ, and the substance of wine into His Blood, and who, unhappily, had consented to the devilish suggestions of doubt. The good servant of God, perceiving this man's error, conducted him to a fountain, took thence a cup of water, and gave it him to drink. He, when he had drunk of it, declared that during his whole life he had never tasted a wine so pleasant. Then Giovanni Buono said, "Do not you now feel, my dear brother, the marvellous truth? If, through means of me, a miserable man, water is changed into wine by divine power, how much more ought you to believe that, through means of the words of God—for the priest only uses the words instituted for the purpose by God Himself—the bread and wine are converted into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ? Who shall dare to assign limits to the omnipotence of God?" This so effectually enlightened the hermit that, banishing every doubt from his mind, he did great penance for his sin. Let us have but a little faith, a little living faith, and we shall confess that the mighty and admirable things contained in this adorable Sacrifice are without number; nor will it then seem too strange to us to behold the marvel repeated continually—the thrice-holy humanity of Jesus multiplying itself in thousands and

thousands of places, enjoying, so to speak, a kind of infinity denied to every other body, and reserved to it alone through the merit of His life, sacrificed to the Most High. It is said to have been once granted to an unbelieving Jew to have the mystery of this multiplied existence illustrated by the mouth of a woman. He was amusing himself in the public square, when there passed a priest who, accompanied by a crowd, carried the most holy Viaticum to a sick person. All the people, bending the knee, rendered due homage of adoration to the Most Holy Sacrament; the Jew alone made no movement, nor gave any token of reverence. This being seen by a poor woman, she exclaimed, "O miserable man, why do you not show reverence to the true God, present in this divine Sacrament?" "What true God?" said the Jew, sharply. "If this were so, would not there be many Gods, since on each of your altars there is one during Mass?" The woman instantly took a sieve, and holding it up to the sun, told the Jew to look at the rays which passed through the chinks; and then added, "Tell me, Jew, are there many suns which pass through the openings of this sieve, or only one?" And the Jew answering that there was but one sun. "Then," replied the woman, "why do you wonder that God incarnate, veiled in the Sacrament, though one, indivisible, and unchanged, should, through excess of love, place Himself in true and Real Presence on different altars?" Through this illustration, he was held on to confess the truth of the Faith. O holy Faith! A ray of thy light is needed in order to reply with energy of spirit to the captiousness of carnal minds. Yes, who shall ever dare to assign limits to the omnipotence of God? Through the great conception which St. Teresa had of the omnipotence of God, she was wont to say that the more lofty, deep, and abstruse to our understandings are the mysteries of our holy faith, with so much the more firmness, and with so much the greater devotion, did

she believe them; knowing full well that the Almighty God could work prodigies infinitely greater still. Revive, then, your faith with Heavenly grace, and, acknowledging this divine Sacrifice to be the miracle of miracles, feelingly confess that Majesty so great must needs be incomprehensible to our poor minds, and is, therefore, the more sublime; then, full of astonishment, exclaim again and yet again, "O treasure, how great! O treasure of love, how immense!"

VII. But if the intrinsic wonder and glory of the Sacrifice move you not, be moved at least by the extreme necessity for its existence.

If there were no sun to shine on the world, what would it be? All darkness, horror, barrenness, and misery supreme. And if there were not holy Mass in the world? O unhappy race! We should then be vessels empty of every good, and full of evil to the brim; we should be a mark for all the thunders of the wrath of God. Some are surprised at its really seeming as if since ancient times our good God had in some sort changed His mode of government. He then caused Himself to be called the God of armies and of battles, and spoke to the people from the midst of clouds, with lightnings in His hand. He then chastised sin with all the rigor of justice. For one adultery there fell by the edge of the sword 25,000 of the tribe of Benjamin. For the pride of David in numbering the people He sent a pestilence so malignant that quickly 70,000 persons were no more. For one curious and somewhat irreverent look He overthrew in frightful slaughter more than 50,000 of the Betsamites. And now He will bear with patience not only vanities and frivolities, but adulteries the most base, scandals the most iniquitous, and blasphemies the most revolting, vomited forth against His most holy Name by many Christians every hour of the day. How comes this? Why so great a difference of government? Are, perhaps, our

sins of ingratitude more excusable than those of old? Quite the contrary. They are very much more culpable, since there is the addition of benefits so immeasurable. The true reason of a clemency so stupendous is the holy Mass, in which is offered to the Eternal Father the great Victim—Jesus. Behold the Sun of holy Church, that scatters the clouds and renders Heaven again serene! Behold the heavenly Rainbow, pacifying the storms of divine justice! For myself, I believe that were it not for holy Mass, at this moment the world would be in the abyss, unable to bear up under the mighty load of its iniquities. Mass is the potent prop that holds the world upon its base. Therefore, when we are assisting at it, we ought to practice that which once Alphonsus of Albuquerque did, who, finding himself with his fleet in danger of perishing during a fierce and terrific tempest, adopted the following means: He took in his arms an innocent little child which was on board his ship, and lifting it up toward Heaven, he said, “If we are sinners, this creature is certainly free from sin; O Lord, for love of this innocent, remit to us the death we deserve!” Will you believe it? The spectacle of that stainless babe was so pleasing to God that He tranquilized the sea, and changed into joy for these unfortunates their terror of a death already imminent. Now, what do you believe is done by the Eternal Father when the priest, lifting in the air the thrice-saved Victim, shows to Him the innocence of His Divine Son? Ah, then His compassion cannot resist the sight of the most spotless innocence of Jesus, and He feels as if compelled to calm our storms, and to provide for all our necessities. Thus without that thrice-holy Victim, Jesus, first of all bloodily sacrificed for us upon the Cross, and daily since unbloodily upon our altars, it would be all at an end with us; each might say to the other, “We part to meet in Hell.” Yes, in Hell! But possessing this treasure of holy Mass, hope breathes again; and

if we but throw it not away by our own mismanagement, we have holy paradise within our grasp. Well may we, therefore, kiss our altars, perfume them with incense and holy sweets; and, what is more, honor them with the utmost reverence and awe, since through them there cometh so much good. And do you, O priests, join your hands in thanksgiving to the Eternal Father for having placed you in the sweet necessity of often offering to Him this Victim of paradise; and, still more, thank Him for the unbounded gain which you can gather from it, if you but be faithful, not only in offering it, but in offering it for the proper ends for which He bestowed a gift so precious.

VIII. A sense of what is noble and virtuous does undoubtedly supply very powerful influences whereby to move the human heart; but a perception of what averts calamity, or secures an advantage, is generally still more powerful. Should, then, the glory and the beauty of the holy Sacrifice be of small importance in your eyes, how shall you fail to appreciate the vast gain it brings to both good and wicked, both during life and at the hour of death, nay, even after death itself? Imagine yourself to be that debtor in the Gospel who, burdened with the heavy debt of 10,000 talents, and summoned to account, humbled himself, pleading and beseeching time fully to satisfy his obligations—*Patientiam habe in me, et omnia reddam tibi*, “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (*Matt.* 18:26). The very same should you do, for you have not one but many debts with the bank of divine justice. You should humble yourself, and solicit so much time as is needed for hearing holy Mass; and be sure that thus it is possible for you most fully to satisfy for all. The angelic St. Thomas (1. ii., art. 3, ed. 19) suggests what those obligations are which we all owe to God, saying that they are specially four, and that each of the four is infinite. The first is, to praise and honor His

infinite Majesty, worthy of infinite honor, infinite praise. The second is, to satisfy for so many sins committed against that infinite Majesty. The third is, to thank Him for so many benefits received. The fourth is, to supplicate Him as the Giver of all graces. Now, how shall we wretched creatures, who are in a state of dependence for the very breath we draw, ever be able to fulfill obligations such as these? Behold the method, a method most sweet and easy, which should console me, which should console you, and every one! Let us take care to attend many Masses, to attend with all the devotion possible, and to cause them to be celebrated elsewhere as frequently as we can; and thus, were our debts the most exorbitant, were they even literally innumerable, there is no room to doubt but that with this treasure we might be able most fully to pay them all. But, in order that you may have a fuller perception of these your debts, we shall explain the four classes of them, one by one; and you will then find no small consolation in viewing the inexhaustible means which you possess for their payment in the rich mine of the holy Sacrifice.

IX. The first obligation by which we are bound toward God is to honor Him. It is indeed a precept of the natural law itself that every inferior owes homage to his superior, and by so much the higher the superiority, so much the deeper the homage that should be offered. Whence it results that, as Almighty God possesses a greatness utterly unbounded, there is due to Him an unbounded honor. Oh, wretched that we are! Where, where shall we ever find an offering worthy of our Creator? Turn your eyes round among all the creatures of the universe—no, you will not find one that is worthy of God. Ah, no! an offering worthy of God can be none other than God Himself. And He Who resides on the throne of His greatness, He it is that must needs descend to lay Himself a Victim on our altars, in order that the homage rendered may perfectly

correspond to the eminence of that infinite Majesty. This it is which is effected in holy Mass. In it Almighty God is honored as He deserves, because He is honored by that God Himself, that is to say, by Jesus, Who, placing Himself in character of Victim on the altar, with an act of inexplicable submission, adores the Most Holy Trinity, even as it is adorable—in such manner that all other acts of homage, by all other beings, vanish before the face of this self-humiliation of Jesus, as stars before the sun. It is told of a holy soul (*Sanct. Jure.* p. 3, c. 10) that, enamored of God, the fire of her charity flashed forth in a thousand longings. “O my God,” she said, “my God, would that had as many hearts, as many tongues as there are leaves on the trees, atoms of the air, and drops in the waters, that I might so love Thee, and so honor Thee, as Thou deservest! Oh, had I but in this hand all creatures, I would place them at Thy feet, so that all might melt themselves away in love before Thee; and then, oh, that I might but love Thee more than all of them united—yes, more than all the angels, more than all the saints, more than all paradise itself!” One day when she had done this with the utmost fervor, she heard herself thus answered by Our Lord: “Console thyself, my daughter; by one Mass heard with devotion thou wilt render to Me all that glory which thou desirest, and infinitely more.” You wonder, perhaps, at this, but you are wrong; for our good Jesus, being not only man, but omnipotent God, by humiliating Himself on the altar, offers in that act of humiliation to the Most Holy Trinity homage and honor infinite; so that we who join with Him in offering the great Sacrifice attain—yes, even we, through Him—to the privilege of rendering an infinite homage and honor unto God. Oh, how great a thought! Let us repeat it yet once again, since it so much imports us to know it: We—yes, even we—by attending holy Mass, may render to God homage and honor infinite. Be now confounded for

very wonder, reflecting that the proposition just laid down is indeed most true; a soul assisting with adequate devotion at holy Mass renders more honor to God than that which all the angels and all the saints put together render with all their adorations. For, after all, they also are but mere creatures, and their homage is therefore limited and finite; whereas, in Mass, Jesus humbles Himself, a humiliation of infinite merit and value; and thus the homage and honor which we through Him give to God in the Mass is an homage and honor infinite. And oh, what blessedness, if it is really so, that through a devout hearing of holy Mass this our obligation is fulfilled! O blinded world, when will you open your eyes to understand truths which so much concern you? And you have yet the heart to say, "A Mass more or less matters little!" O mournful, dreadful blindness!

X. The second obligation by which we are bound toward God is to satisfy His justice for the commission of so many sins. Oh, what a measureless debt is this! One single mortal sin so weighs in the scales of divine justice, that to satisfy for it, all the good works of all the martyrs and of all the saints who as yet have existed, who exist now, or ever shall exist, would not suffice. And, yet, with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, viewed according to its intrinsic preciousness and value, satisfaction may be completely made for all committed sin: and that you may understand how much you are thus obliged to Jesus, attend to what I now say. Although truly He is the very party offended, yet, not contented with having satisfied divine justice for us on Calvary, He hath bestowed, and doth continuously bestow, on us this method of satisfaction in the Holy Sacrifice of Mass; for, as there is renewed in Mass the offering which Jesus hath already made on the Cross to the Eternal Father for the sins of the whole world, that same divine blood which was once paid down as the

general ransom of the whole human race comes to be specially applied to each of us individually, by being offered in the Mass for the sins of him who celebrates, and of all those who assist at so tremendous a sacrifice. Not that the Sacrifice of Mass by any means cancels our sins immediately, and of itself, as does the Sacrament of Penance: but it cancels them mediately, calling down various aids of interior impulse, of holy aspiration, and of actual grace, all tending toward a worthy repentance of our sins, either at the time of Mass itself or at some other fitting time. Therefore, God alone knows how many souls issue from the filth of sins through the extraordinary aids which come to them by this divine Sacrifice. And here reflect that although indeed the man in mortal sin is not aided by the Sacrifice as a propitiation, it yet avails as supplication; and therefore all sinners ought to hear many Masses, in order to obtain more easily the grace of conversion. To souls that live in grace it gives a wonderful force, tending to maintain them in their happy state, while it immediately cancels (according to the most common view) the guilt of all venial sins, provided, at least, that as a whole they are repented of, according to what St. Augustine clearly says: *Si quis devote audiat Missam, non incidet in peccatum mortale, et venialia remittentur ei* (Sup. Can. Quia passus, de Consecr. dist. 2), "He who devoutly hears holy Mass will receive a great vigor to enable him to resist mortal sin, and there shall be pardoned to him all venial sins which he may have committed up to that hour." Nor should this surprise; for if, as St. Gregory narrates (*Dial* 1. 4, c. 57), the Masses which a poor woman caused to be celebrated every Monday for the soul of her husband, who had been enslaved by barbarians and was thought by her to be dead, caused the chains to be loosened from his feet, and the manacles from his arms, so that ever while these Masses were being celebrated he remained free and unchained, as he

himself declared on his return; how much more must not we believe such a sacrifice to be most efficacious for the loosening of spiritual bonds, such as venial sins, bonds which hold the soul, as it were, imprisoned, leaving it no power to work with that freedom and fervor with which it would work were it not for these impediments? O blessed Mass, setting at liberty the sons of God, and satisfying all the penalties due to so many offences!

XI. You will, perhaps, say to me, It suffices, then, to hear one single Mass to strike off the heaviest debts due to God through many committed sins, because, Mass being of infinite value, we can therewith pay to God an infinite satisfaction. Not so fast, by your leave; because, though indeed Mass is of infinite value, you must know, nevertheless, that Almighty God accepts it in a manner limited and finite, and in degrees conformable to the greater or less perfection in the dispositions of him who celebrates or who assists at the Sacrifice. *Quorum tibi fides cognita est, et nota devotio*, says holy Church, in the Canon of Mass, suggesting by this method of speech that which the great teachers expressly lay down (*De Lug.* dist. 9, n. 103); namely, that the greater or less satisfaction applied in our behalf by the Sacrifice becomes determined by the higher or lower dispositions of the celebrant, or of the assistants, as just now mentioned. Now, then, consider the spiritual bewilderment of those who go in search of the quickest and least devoutly conducted Masses, and, what is worse, assist at them with little or no devotion; nor have any zeal in causing them to be celebrated, or in selecting with that view the more fervent and devout of the priesthood. It is true, according to St. Thomas (3 p. qu. 82, art. 6), that all the Sacrifices are, as Sacraments, equal in rank; but they are not, therefore, equal in the effects resulting from them; whence the greater the actual or habitual piety of the celebrant, so

much the greater will be the fruit of the application of the Mass; so that not to recognize the difference between a tepid and devout priest, in respect to the efficacy of his Mass, will be simply not to heed whether the net with which you fish be small or great. The same reasoning applies in regard to those attending Mass. And, truly, while I exhort you, to the best of my knowledge and power, to attend many Masses, I yet admonish you to have far more regard to devotion in hearing than to the number heard; because, if you shall have more devotion in one single Mass than another man in fifty, you will give more honor to God in that single Mass, and you will extract from it greater fruit, in the way called *ex opere operato*, than that other with all his fifty. *In satisfactione*, says St. Thomas, *magis attenditur affectus offerentis quam quantitas oblationis* (3 p. qu. 79, art. 5). It is true, indeed, (as a grave author asserts,) that through one single Mass, attended with singularly perfect devotion, it might possibly happen that the justice of God would remain satisfied for all the transgressions of some great sinner. And this is quite in harmony with what the holy Council of Trent teaches; namely, that by the offering of this Holy Sacrifice God grants the gift of penitence, and then by means of true penitence pardons sins the most grave and enormous. *Hujus quippe oblatione gratiam et donum paenitentiae concedens crimina et peccata etiam ingentia dimittit* (Sess. xxii. cap. 2). Yet notwithstanding all this, since neither the internal dispositions with which you attend Mass are manifest to yourself, nor the amount of satisfaction which corresponds thereto, you should make sure to the best of your power by attending many Masses, and by attending with all the devotion possible. Blessed are you if you maintain a great confidence in the loving mercy of God, which shines so wonderfully forth in this divine sacrifice; and with lively faith and devout recollection attend as many Masses as you can; for I

declare that, doing this with perseverance, you may attain to the sweet hope of reaching Heaven without any intervening share in Purgatory. To Mass, then, dearest friends, and never allow yourselves to utter the thought, "A Mass more or less is of little consequence."

XII. The third obligation is that of gratitude for the immense benefits which our most loving God hath bestowed upon us. Put in one heap all the gifts, all the graces you have received from God—so many gifts of nature and of grace, body, soul, senses, and faculties, and health, and life itself; yes, the very life, too, of His Son Jesus, and His death suffered for us, which in themselves immeasurably swell the great debt which we owe to God—and how shall we ever be able sufficiently to thank Him? On the one hand, the law of gratitude is observed by the very beasts, who sometimes change their cruel anger into gentle homage to their benefactors; and how much more, of course, has it not to be observed by man, gifted as he is with reason, and so nobly endowed by the divine liberality! But, on the other hand, our poverty is so great that there is no way of truly making any return for all the blessings of God; because the least of them all, coming as it does from the hands of Majesty so divine, and accompanied as it is by an infinite love on His part, thus acquires an infinite value, and lays us under a debt of infinite correspondence in the way of reverence and love. O poor, miserable things that we are! If we are incapable of sustaining the weight of one single benefit, how shall we ever be able to bear the burden of so many, so countless many? Then, here we are, placed in the hard necessity of living and dying, as it were, ungrateful to our Supreme Benefactor. But no: take heart; the way most fully to thank our good God is taught us by holy David, who, led by divine inspiration to speak with mysterious reference to this divine Sacrifice, indicates that nothing can

sufficiently render the thanks which are due to God, excepting holy Mass. *Quid retribuam Domino pro omnibus quae retribuit mihi?* “What return shall I offer to the Lord for all the benefits which He hath bestowed upon me?” And answering himself, he says, *Calicem salutaris accipiam*; or, according to another version, *Calicem levabo*—“I will uplift on high the chalice of the Lord”; that is, I will offer a sacrifice most grateful to Him, and with this alone I shall satisfy the debt of so many and such signal benefits. Add to this that the sacrifice was instituted by Our Redeemer principally in recognition of the divine beneficence, and as *thanks* to Him; and therefore it bears as its most special and worthy name the *Eucharist*, which signifies an *Offering of Thanks*. He Himself also gave us the example when, in the Last Supper, before the act of consecration in that first Mass, He raised His eyes to Heaven, and gave thanks to His Heavenly Father: *Elevatis oculis in caelum, Tibi gratias agens fregit*. O divine thanksgiving, disclosing the chief end for which was instituted this tremendous Sacrifice, and which invites us to conform ourselves to the example of our Head, so that in every Mass at which we assist we may know how to avail ourselves of so great a treasure, and offer it in gratitude to our Supreme Benefactor! And all the more, since the beloved Virgin, and the angels, and the saints, rejoice to witness this our tribute of thanks to so great a King.

XIII. The life of the venerable Sister Francesca Farnese was at one time troubled by a thousand anxieties of Heavenly love. She mourned to see herself covered from head to foot with divine benefits, and yet unable to prove in act the gratitude she felt, by making to her Lord any competent return. Behold, one day there is said to have appeared to her the most holy Virgin, who put into her arms her Heavenly Babe. “Take Him,” she said, “for He is yours, and because with Him alone you will fulfill all your duties.” O blessed Mass, by which

we come to have the Son of God placed, not only within our arms, but in our hearts. *Parvulus datus est nobis*. Nor is there a doubt but that with Him, and Him alone, we shall be able to satisfy the debt of gratitude which we have contracted with God. We almost seem in Mass to render to God more than He has given to us—not in reality, of course, but in appearance, since once only hath the Eternal Father given to us His Divine Son in His Incarnation, while we give Him back to Him again innumerable times in this holy Sacrifice. Thus we seem to have the advantage, not in the quality of the gift—it being impossible for greater to be given than the Son of God—but apparently by the repetition so many times of that self-same gift. Truly, He gives it to us each time, for us to offer back again; but, at any rate, there it is, an infinite offering on our part, offered many times. O great God! O most loving God! Oh, for tongues infinite in number and power, to give Thee infinite thanks for so great a treasure! If, reader, in time past it has lain hidden from you, now that you begin to know it, can you fail to exclaim, “Oh, the treasure bestowed upon me! how great—how great thou art!”

XIV. But the immense benefit of the Holy Sacrifice of Mass does not end here. It is in our power by means of it to pay the fourth debt due to God, which is to supplicate Him, and to entreat new graces of Him. Try to realize to yourself how great are your miseries both of body and of soul, and the need, therefore, in which you are of having recourse to God, in order that at every moment He may assist and succor you, for assuredly He alone is the Beginning and the End of all your good, whether temporal or eternal. On the other hand, what courage, what heart have you for asking new benefits, seeing the utter ingratitude with which you have failed to respond to so many favors already bestowed on you—nay, seeing you have even turned into offences against Him the

very graces He gave you? But still take courage, take heart. If you do not deserve new benefits, your good Jesus has deserved them for you. He has desired for this end to be for you in Mass a pacifying Victim, a supplicatory sacrifice, for obtaining from the Father everything of which you have need. Yes, yes: in holy Mass our dear beloved Jesus, as the chief and supreme Priest, recommends our cause to the Father, prays for us, and makes Himself our advocate. If we knew on some occasion that the great and blessed Virgin was uniting herself with us in prayer to the Eternal Father to obtain for us the graces we desired, what confidence should we not conceive of being heard? What hope, then, what confidence should we not have, knowing that in Mass Jesus Himself prays for us, offers His most precious blood to the Eternal Father for us, and makes Himself our advocate! O blessed Mass! O mine of all our good!

XV. But let us dig farther into the depth of this mine, in order to discover more of the vast treasures contained in it. Oh, what precious gems lie there! What graces, virtues, and gifts holy Mass calls down! In the first place, it calls down all spiritual graces, all the goods appertaining to the soul, such as repentance for sins, and victory over temptations, whether such result from external trials, as bad companions and infernal spirits, or internal, as for instance, those arising from rebellious appetites. It calls down the aid of grace, so necessary for enabling us to rise up, to stand upon our feet, to walk forward in the ways of God. It calls down many good and holy inspirations, and many internal impulses, which dispose us to shake off tepidity, and spurs us on to work our best with greater fervor, with will more prompt, with intention more upright and pure; and these, again, bring with them an inestimable treasure, being the most effectual means for obtaining from God the grace of final perseverance, on which depends

our eternal salvation, and the grace, of as much moral certainty of eternal bliss as is ever permitted here below. But further still, it calls down temporal blessings, so far as these may not oppose the salvation of the soul, such as health, abundance, peace, with the exclusion of the evils which are their opposites, such as pestilences, earthquakes, wars, famines, persecutions, hatreds, calumnies, injuries; in fine, here may we find liberation from all evils, here may we find enrichment by every sort of benefit. In a word, holy Mass is the golden key of paradise; and while the Eternal Father gives us this key, which of all His other benefits can He refuse? *Qui proprio suo Filio non pepercit*, says St. Paul, *sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum, quo modo non etiam cum illo omnia nobis donavit?* “He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?” (*Rom.* 8:32.) Now, was not that good priest quite right who used to say that whatever he asked of God, even the loftiest height of grace, for himself or others, while celebrating holy Mass, he seemed to himself to be asking nothing in comparison with the offering which he was engaged in making to Him? (*Oser. Com.* 8, tom. 4.) He reasoned thus: All the favors which I ask of God in Mass are finite, whereas the gift which I offer to Him is uncreated and infinite, and so, the account being rightly summed, I am the creditor, He the debtor. The good priest by no means purposed to deny that the power of offering the gift, and the gift itself, came first from God; but, putting it thus, he courageously besought great graces, and received yet greater. And you—why do not you also awake? Why not demand great graces? Take my advice, and in every Mass ask God to make you a great saint. Does this seem too much? It is *not* too much. Is it not our good Master Who protests in the holy Gospel that, for a cup of cold water given out of love of Him, He will, in return, give paradise? How,

then, while offering to God the blood of His most blessed Son, should He not give you a hundred Heavens, were there so many? How can you doubt but that He wishes to give you all the virtues and all the perfections which are required to make you a saint, and a great saint, in Heaven? O blessed Mass! Expand yet more and more your heart, and ask great things of Him, with the reflection that you ask of a God Who does not grow poor by giving, and, therefore, the more you petition for, the more you will obtain.

XVI. But—will you believe it?—besides the benefits which we ask in holy Mass, our good God grants many others which we do not ask. St. Jerome distinctly declares, *Absque dubio dat nobis Dominus quod in Missa petimus; et quod magis est, saepe dat quod non petimus* (cap. cum. mart. de celeb. Miss.). “Without doubt,” says the Saint, “the Lord grants all the favors which are asked of Him in Mass, provided they be those fitting for us; and, which is a matter of greater wonder, oftentimes He grants that also which is not demanded of Him, if we, on our part, put no obstacle in the way.” Whence it may be said that Mass is the sun of the human race, scattering its splendors over good and wicked; nor is there a soul so vile on earth who, hearing holy Mass, doth not carry away from it some great good, often without asking, often without even thinking of it. This is the lesson conveyed by the famous legend told by St. Antoninus of two youths, both libertines, who went one day into the forest, one of them having heard Mass, the other not. Soon, it is said, there arose a furious tempest, and they heard, amid thunder and lightning, a voice which cried “Slay!” and instantly came a flash which reduced to ashes the one who had not heard Mass. The other, all terrified, was seeking escape, when he heard anew the same voice, which repeated “Slay!” The poor youth expected instant death, when lo! he heard another voice, which answered,

“I cannot, I cannot; today he heard, *Verbum caro factum est*; his Mass will not let me strike.” Oh, how many times hath God freed you from death, or at least from many most grievous perils, through the Mass which you have attended! St. Gregory assures us of this in the fourth of his dialogues: *Per auditionem Missae homo liberatur a multis malis et periculis*. “It is most true,” says the holy Doctor, “that he who attends holy Mass shall be freed from many evils and from many dangers, both foreseen and unforeseen.” “He shall,” as St. Augustine sums it up, “be freed from sudden death, which is the most terrible stroke launched by Divine Justice against sinners.” *Qui Missam devote audierit subitanea morte non peribit*. (Sup. Can. Quia passus, de Consecr. dist. 2). “Behold a wonderful preservative,” says the Saint, “against sudden death: attend holy Mass every day, and attend it with all possible devotion.” He who carries with him so effective a guard, shall live secure against the occurrence of so terrific a misfortune. There has even existed a current popular opinion, attributed by some to St. Augustine, that, during the time of Mass, the human frame grows no older, but is maintained all the time in the same essential vigor in which it was at the commencement. I do not care to know whether this be true or not; but, at any rate, this I say, that if he who attends Mass grows older in respect of bodily age, the lapse of time during Mass leaves him at least no older in sin than he was: because, as St. Gregory says, “one who attends holy Mass with real devotion keeps in the direct way of the Spirit.” *Justus audiens Missam in via rectitudinis conservatur* (de Sac. Miss. apud. Bern. de Bust.). Grace and merit are all the while increasing in him, and he makes ever new acquisitions of virtue, so as more and more to please his God. St. Bernard even sums it up thus, that more is to be gained in one single Mass (here we must understand him of its intrinsic value) than by distributing your means to the

poor, or going on pilgrimages through all the most famous sanctuaries of the world. *Audiens devote Missam aut celebrans multo magis meretur, quam si substantiam suam pauperibus erogaret, et totam terram peregrinando transiret* (apud Bern. de Bust. p. 2, ser. 6). O unbounded riches of holy Mass! Grasp well this truth: it is possible for you to gain more favor with God by attending or celebrating one single Mass, considered in itself and in its intrinsic worth, than by opening the treasury of your wealth and distributing the whole to the poor, or by going as pilgrim over the whole world and visiting with utmost devotion the sanctuaries of Rome, of Compostella, of Loreto, Jerusalem, and the rest. And this most reasonably follows from the position laid down by the angelic St. Thomas, when he says that in Mass are contained all the fruits, all the graces, yea, all those immense treasures which the Son of God poured out so abundantly upon the Church, His Spouse, in the bloody sacrifice of the Cross. *In qualibet Missa invenitur omnis fructus et utilitas quam Christus in die Parasceves operatus est in cruce* (de Consecr. dist. 2).

Now, pause a little—close this book—read no further at present, but sum up in your mind all these singular uses of holy Mass, weigh them well in silence, and then tell me, will you have again a difficulty in believing that one single Mass—speaking of its own intrinsic worth and value—is of such efficacy as, according to the speculation of various learned men, might have sufficed to obtain the salvation of the whole human race? Imagine the case that Our Lord Jesus Christ had not suffered anything on Calvary and, in place of His bloody sacrifice of the Cross, had solely instituted Mass for our redemption, with an express command that in all the world it should only be celebrated once. Well, then, had this been the case, that single Mass, celebrated by the poorest priest in the world, would have been sufficient, considered in

itself and so far as its own share in the work is concerned, to win from God the salvation of all men. Yes; one single Mass, taking the case imagined above, might thus have been made to obtain the conversion of all Mahometans, all heretics, all schismatics, in fine, of all unbelievers, and also that of all bad Christians; closing the gates of Hell to all sinners, and emptying Purgatory of all the souls there obtaining purification. We, unhappy creatures, through our tepidity, through our little devotion, and possibly even through our scandalous improprieties committed during attendance at Mass—oh, how we contract the limits of its vast circumference, and render ineffective its mighty worth! Would that I could climb the summits of the loftiest mountains, and thence exclaim aloud, “O nations deceived! O nations deceived! what are you about? Why run you not to the churches, there to listen with holy hearts to all the Masses in your power? Why not imitate the holy angels, who, according to the saying of St. Chrysostom, when holy Mass is being celebrated, descend in squadrons from the empyrean, and stand before our altars, covered with the wings of reverential awe, waiting the whole of that blessed time, in order that they may intercede for us the more effectively, well knowing this to be the time most opportune, the conjuncture, above every other, propitious for obtaining favors from Heaven. Sink down, then, in confusion for having in time past so little appreciated holy Mass, for perhaps having even many times profaned an act so dread and holy; much more so if you are of the number of those who have recklessly dared to utter, “A Mass more or less is of little importance.”

XVII. And now, to end this instruction, reflect that I have not by mere chance dropped the expression that one Mass alone, so far as itself is concerned and in the sense of its own intrinsic value, is sufficient to empty Purgatory of all

the souls in process of purification, and place them in holy paradise. For this divine Sacrifice not only avails for the souls of the dead, as propitiatory and satisfactory of their penance (De Lug. s. 6, n. 158), but it also assists as a great act of supplication for them, conformably, you see, to the custom of the Church, which not only offers Mass for the souls that are being purified, but prays during the sacrifice for their liberation. In order, then, that you may be stirred to compassion for the holy souls, know that the fire by which they are covered is one so devouring that, according to the opinion of St. Gregory, it is no less than that of Hell (*Dial.* 1. 4, c. 131), operating as the instrument of divine justice with such force as to render their pains insufferable, greater than all the possible martyrdoms that can be witnessed or felt, or even imagined, here below. Still more than all this, the pain of loss afflicts them because, deprived as they are of the beatific vision of God, they, as the Angelic Doctor says (in *Dist.* 12, art. 1), experience an intolerable passion, an intense and vivid desire to behold the Supreme Good, and this is not permitted to them. Enter here into yourself and ponder. If you should see your father or your mother on the point of being drowned, and if to save them would not cost you more than the stretching out of your hand, would not you feel bound by every law of charity and of justice to extend that hand to aid them? How then? You behold with the eyes of faith so many poor souls, and perhaps your nearest and dearest, in a lake of flame, and you will not endure a little inconvenience in order to attend devoutly, for their help, one single Mass! What sort of heart is yours? I do not doubt that holy Mass not only shortens their pains, but also extends great immediate relief to these poor souls. It has even been thought by some that while Mass is being celebrated for a soul, the fire, otherwise most devouring, suspends its rigor, and no pain is suffered by

that soul during all the time that the Holy Sacrifice proceeds. We may well believe, at least, that at every Mass many issue forth from Purgatory and fly to holy Paradise. Add this consideration, that the charity which you exercise toward poor souls under purification will all redound to your own good. Examples without end might be adduced in confirmation of this truth, but one most authentic will suffice. St. Peter Damian, when left an orphan by his parents, and yet of tender age, was placed in the house of one of his brothers, who gave him the worst of usage, to the extent of making him go barefoot and in rags; in short, causing him to endure in every way the extremest penury. He happened one day to find on the road a piece of money, I know not what. Think whether he rejoiced or not! He seemed to himself to have found a treasure; but how to spend it? His necessities suggested many ways. At last, after thinking and rethinking, he resolved to give it to a priest, that he might celebrate a Mass for the holy souls in Purgatory. From that time forward, the scenes of his fortune changed. He was taken home by another brother of better dispositions, who loved him as his son, clothed him with propriety, and sent him to school, whence he finally came forth that great man, and great Saint, who was the ornament of the purple and so effective a prop of the Church. Now you see how from one single Mass, obtained at a slight personal inconvenience, all this happiness originated. O blessed Mass! at once assisting the living and the dead, beneficial for time and for eternity! For you must know that the holy souls are so grateful to their benefactors that, when once in Heaven, they constitute themselves their advocates, nor will they ever rest till they see them also in possession of glory. It would seem that an unworthy woman in Rome experienced this. Utterly forgetful of her eternal salvation, she had no other heed than to give vent to evil passions, and to ruin youth; nor did she do

any good, except that every few days she would get a Mass for souls in Purgatory. It was they, as we may well believe, who so interceded for their benefactress that one day she was overtaken by vehement contrition for her sins. Abandoning her infamous dwelling, she sped to the feet of a zealous confessor, made her general Confession, and soon after died in such good dispositions that she afforded to one and all clear signs of eternal salvation. This grace so altogether miraculous was generally attributed to the virtue of those Masses celebrated at her request, in behalf of the blessed souls in Purgatory. Let us then awake, and heed lest we permit that *publicani et meretrices praece dent nos in regnum Dei*—"lest publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before us" (*Matt.* 21:31).

XVIII. If I thought there was a chance of your being one of those so sunk in avarice, as not only to fail in charity by neglecting prayer for their friends departed, never hearing a single Mass for their poor suffering souls, but even trampling on every dictate of justice, by refusing to fulfill the pious legacies of their predecessors, or who, being priests, accumulate obligations to offer Masses, without ever doing so; oh, that I could take fire to cast at you, saying to your face—Away with you, worse than devil! after all, devils only torment reprobate souls, but you torment the spirits of the elect; devils are only cruel to those foreknown by God as lost, but you to the predestined, the loved of God. No; for you there is neither Confession that avails, nor absolution that is valid, nor confessor that can absolve, unless you do great penance for so great a sin, and accurately satisfy all your obligations toward the departed. "But, my father, I cannot; I have not the means." Cannot? have not the means? For all this external show there seems to be means; for extravagance of luxury you have means; for so much parade there are means; for the

cost of parties, and of feasts, for filling country-houses with company, for haunts of dissipation and even of vice, it would seem that you both have and can. And to satisfy positive debts not only to the living, but what is more, to the poor departed, how dare you say you have not, and cannot? Well, then, I understand you: but hearken, though there is none on earth who sees these accounts, you have yet to settle them with God. Give yourself up, if you will, to devouring the legacies of the dead, the pious destinations for Masses and for charities, but know that for you there stands registered in the oracle of the prophet a threatening of woe, malediction, misfortune, and ruin irreparable, in property, life, and reputation. It is the voice of God, and cannot fail: *Comederunt sacrificia mortuorum, et multiplicata est in eis ruina* (Ps. 105:28, 29). Yes, ruin, misfortune, downfall irrecoverable to that house which does not satisfy its obligations to the dead! Take a turn through Rome, and behold the many families scattered, houses gone to decay, warehouses closed, enterprises suspended, trades at a stand—what failures, calamities, and miseries! O poor ruined Rome! you say. But what is the cause of so much decay? If you scrutinize exactly these disasters, you will find, among many sins, one chief cause to be this very cruelty to the departed, this refusal of the help due to them, this negligence in satisfying pious destinations of property; and, further, because thus there have come to be committed infinite sacrileges; the Holy Sacrifice profaned, and the temple of God, as the Redeemer said, turned into a den of thieves. What wonder, if Heaven rain lightnings, and seem to threaten wars, earthquakes, and extermination—for behold, *comederunt sacrificia mortuorum, et multiplicata est in eis ruina*. Most justly were such ungrateful men declared by the fourth Council of Carthage to be excommunicate, as true murderers of their kin, and by the Valensian Council to be practically infidels, that must be

driven out from the Church. But this is far from the greatest chastisement inflicted by Almighty God on hearts grown cold to departed friends. Ah, the flood of woe reserved for them in the other life! According to the declaration of St. James, such souls shall be judged by God without pity, since they exercised none: *judicium sine misericordia illi qui non fecit misericordiam* (James 2:13). God will permit them in their turn to be paid in their own coin; no last wishes of theirs shall be fulfilled, no Masses celebrated for their souls, though provided for in their testaments; or if celebrated, they will not be accepted by God, but will be applied by Him to other souls in need, who in life had compassion on the poor departed. Thus we read in the chronicles of our Order, of a friar who, after death, appeared to one of his companions, and manifested to him the bitter pain he was enduring in Purgatory, particularly for having been very negligent toward the other departed brothers, and how, up to that time, all that had been done in his behalf, the Masses themselves that had been celebrated, had all availed him nothing; because Almighty God, in punishment of his neglect, had applied them to other souls, who, in life, had acted well by those under purification; this said, he disappeared (*Cron. Frat. Min.* part 2).

XIX. Before concluding the present instruction, permit me, with knees bent to the earth and with joined hands, to supplicate you who read, not to shut this little book without first making a solid resolution of applying for the future your most strenuous diligence to attend and also to get celebrated all the Masses possible in your circumstances, not only for the souls of the departed, but also for your own. Do this from two motives: first, to obtain a good and holy death—it being the invariable opinion of theologians that there is no more efficacious means than Mass for attaining so holy a purpose. Christ Our Lord is said to have revealed to St. Mechtilde (1. 3, Grat.

Spir. c. 27) that he who in life is in the habit of devoutly hearing holy Mass shall in death be consoled by the presence of the angels and saints, his advocates, who shall bravely defend him from all the snares of infernal spirits. Oh, how beautiful the death which is destined to succeed your life, if you shall have striven to hear with devotion as many Masses as you could! Another motive is that you may yourself issue quickly from Purgatory and fly away into eternal glory, there being no means more adapted for obtaining from God a grace so precious as that of going direct to Heaven, or at least of short detention on the way, than Indulgences duly gained, and the Holy Sacrifice. As for Indulgences, the Supreme Pontiffs have opened their hands, and liberally concede many to those who hear holy Mass devoutly; and as to the efficacy of the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for accelerating the remission of the pains of Purgatory, it is already sufficiently shown. The example and authority of that great servant of God, [St.] John of Avila, the oracle of Spain, should suffice. Being asked on his death-bed what he had most at heart, and what kindness he most longed for after death, he answered, "Masses, Masses." I should wish in this matter to offer you, with your permission, an advice of great importance. It is this: to procure that all the Masses which you would like to have celebrated for you after death shall be of fact celebrated for you during life, nor to trust to those who remain after you on the scene of this world. You will think the more of this counsel, from St. Anselm declaring that one single Mass heard or celebrated for your soul during life may perhaps be more profitable to you than a thousand after death: *Audire devote unicam Missam "in vita, vel dare elemosynam pro ea, prodest magis quam relinquere ad celebrandum mille post obitum."* (Apud Castell, diur. sac. Praep.) Well was this truth understood by a rich merchant of the coast of Genoa, who at his death left nothing in suffrage for his soul.

Every one was astonished how a man so rich, so pious, and so generous toward all, could have proved at death so cruel to himself. But after his burial there was found a record in one of his little books of the good which he had done for his soul during life: "Masses caused to be celebrated for my soul, two thousand *lire*"; "for the marriage of poor girls, ten thousand"; "two hundred for such and such a holy place"; and so on. And at the end of this little book was written: "He who desires good, let him do good in life, and not trust to the fidelity of those left behind at death." The proverb is very trite — "A taper before lights better than a torch behind." Make use of the noble example just recorded, and, having thoroughly pondered the excellence of holy Mass, wonder at the blindness in which you have lived till now, having formed no right estimate of a treasure which has for you too much remained, as it were, hidden and buried. Now, therefore, that you know its value, banish from your mind, and still more from your tongue, the monstrous thought that "a Mass more or less matters little"; or "that it is no small thing to hear Mass on festivals"; or "that the Mass of this or that priest is like a Mass of Holy Week for length; when he appears at the altar it is high time to get out of church." Renew also your holy resolution to hear from this time forward as many Masses as you possibly can, and, above all, with due devotion. To succeed, make use of the practical and devout method which follows; and may God bless you.