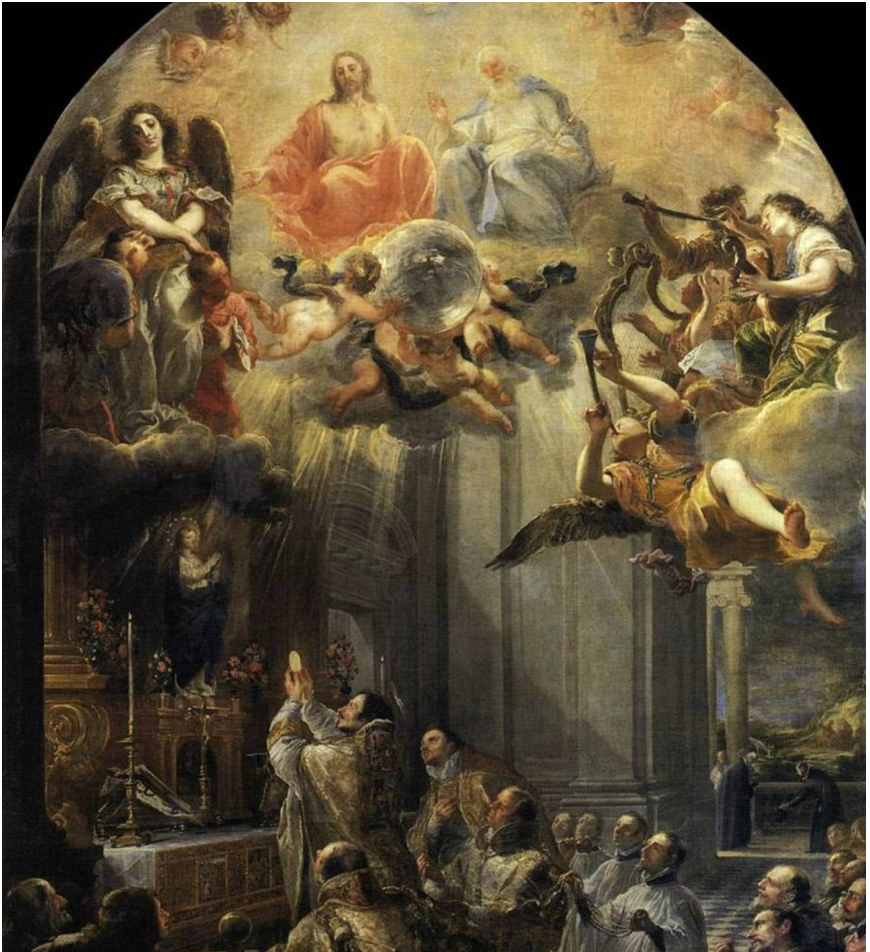


FLORIDA NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. PIUS X

1513



CATHOLIC FAITH AND CULTURE IN FLORIDA
N. 34

OCTOBER 2024

THE GREATEST ADVENTURE EVER

Indiana Jones and The Mass



A foot slips. Dust and rock rise up in a cloud of gritty powder as a worn boot scrapes across the hard ground of some dim and ancient cavern. An echo, ringing down along the long and winding path wrapped in granite walls and glimmering stone, announces the arrival of some foreign presence. Then from the shadows, a lone and mysterious figure emerges...

What is the Mass? Is it a ceremony we attend on some Sunday morning or afternoon? Is it a communal affair that allows the parishioners to come together and celebrate and worship the greatness of their God? Is it a personal experience which fills the soul with courage and love? Is it a burden to us? Is it tiresome? Or maybe has it become

just too familiar? What is the Mass?

The Mass is simply this - the greatest adventure known to Mankind.

How do I know this? Because it is revealed to me everyday in one of the most critical moments of the entire ceremony - the prayers at the foot of the altar.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It begins how all things must - with the end in sight. The Church announces right from the beginning why we are about to do this. What we do is for our God and nothing else. He is the beginning and He is the end. Simply.

V: I will go in unto the altar of God

R: Unto God, who gives joy to my youth.

A man is entering the altar of God. It is a specific place that he speaks about. And he does not simply walk up to it but rather he walks into it. Immediately we have the idea of immersion, of him being surrounded by this altar of God. This will not be some passing experience or affair. This will be an all encompassing endeavor which will demand of him everything.

He is going into the altar of God and to the God who gives joy to his youth. Joy to my youth. What is meant by this expression? How do we give joy to youth? What is joy? Joseph Pieper, in his remarkable book *Happiness and Contemplation*, says that: "Joy is a response to happiness." And what is happiness? It is to possess or to attain what one seeks, also known as "the good". Man is always seeking the good. Only a madman would seek after something that he sees as being evil. Even when we do evil things we see them, in that moment, as being a good. Therefore, when we want something and we finally get it - we are happy. Ultimate happiness consists in attaining the ultimate good which is God. So if happiness is

the attainment of the good and joy is the response to that happiness or, let's say the disposition of our soul when we have attained that good or happiness - then what does joy to my youth mean? Well, what does youth seek? What does every young life seek? To live on. The most fundamental desire of any life form is survival. We fear death and we embrace life. So by giving joy to youth would mean to give to life, to youth, what it sees as being the greatest good it can possess - immortality.

The search for immortality has been the great endeavor of mankind throughout the ages. We are obsessed with it. Ancient royal halls and dusty common huts have echoed with tales and great epics of men looking for this greatest of prizes. It is the most fantastical adventure of them all - the search for the Holy Grail. Whether it be Sir Lancelot upon a noble steed or Indiana Jones fighting off Nazi troops - it is the very backbone of our literary world because it the quintessential tale. It is the tale of living forever - the greatest good of our youth and the Church, knowing how we learn from art and the telling of stories through drama, seeks to capture our souls by immersing Her greatest of rituals in the greatest of tales known to

Man.

This is the Mass. The search for the Holy Grail. The journey to find immortality. And this is where we find our traveller when he speaks the words: "I will go in unto the altar of God, the God who gives joy to my youth."

V: Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause against an ungodly nation: O deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man.

R: For Thou, O God art my strength.

He has entered into this chamber and immediately he announces himself to the Master that dwells there. He begs that God would look at him and "distinguish his cause against an ungodly nation." What does he mean?

So many men before him have come in search for this goal, for this immortality, for this Holy Grail. But so many of these men have come searching for it because of some selfish reason or motive. They have looked for immortality because they have envisioned in their lavish dreams, a life that is an endless pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction. This immortality is being sought simply for themselves. But he is not one of these men. He is not one of the ungodly men. He seeks this immortality so that he can be united to the One who gives it. Simply that.

"Deliver me from the fate of the unjust and deceitful man." He seeks deliverance from the fate of those who have come before him and who have been destroyed because their cause was unholy and their motives unclear. He wants no part of their fate. He simply wants immortality because it is his gateway to a life lived with the One his being wants most of all. He searches for this most treasured prize because in it he will find his God who is his strength.

R: For Thou, O God art my strength: why have You cast me from You, and why do I go sorrowful while the enemy afflicts me?

This is very interesting. We have this man proclaiming that God is his strength but then immediately he cries out to him and asks why God had cast him away and why he is sad as the enemy attacks and injures him. We see that there is conflict in the soul of this man. There is this back and forth struggle with hope and discouragement.

"If you are my strength, then why do you cast me away and why am I still sad and injured?"

The man is unsure and unsteady. And so he cries out again with even more desperation:

V: O send out Thy light and Thy truth: they have led me and brought me

to Thy holy hill, even unto Thy tabernacle.

God's light has led him in the darkness and His truth has carried him to the holy hill and even to the tabernacles.

The holy hill is the holy hill - Golgotha. The hill that has as its peak the greatest of tabernacles - the cross. It is an astonishing revelation for this man and a proof that he is not to be like the rest. He does not want pleasure or self satisfaction. He seeks immortality and is ready to do what is demanded of him. And what is demanded of him?

To go to the holy hill but not just that. He must not simply want to walk to the hill that so many did walk on that terrible and tragic day. He cannot simply be a bystander but rather he is to go beyond that. He must climb the Hill of Golgotha and ascend upon the cross, where he will then reach the tabernacle which holds the life of God; eternal life - immortality. He understands now what he is to do. He must die in order to attain life unending. He must give up everything he is - in order to attain everything that he was destined to be. He sees that and is still undeterred from his goal and once again states with a resolve and determination that outshines

even the most courageous of our heroes:

V: Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God who gives joy to my youth.

He understands. And he is ready.

V: I will praise Thee upon the harp, O God, my God.

*Why are you cast down, my soul?
And why are you disquiet within me?*

Our adventurer understands now what must happen and is full of hope and resolve. He calls out to God that he will praise Him on a harp, meaning that he has reached a great moment of joy because he will not just use words but will allow music to sing out his joy which is the most effervescent expression of it.

But then once again comes a swift change in his state of mind. We see in a flash this struggle between the two sides of this man. He is happy and wants to praise God but then he wonders why his soul is sad and why there is still unrest within him? The realism of this situation is stunning. This is not some hyperbolic character that is all hero and no human. He is as human as they come. A man full of hope and full of doubt. He is frustrated that he cannot cast away this fear and anxiety within him. He wants the good but he

is full of worry of the future and of his faults. Will he be worthy? Will he be able to stand the test of time in this fight? Will he be faithful? Will he be happy? Why such unrest after resolving to give oneself to their God?

And then comes one of the most sublime moments in all of the Mass:

R: Hope thou in God: for yet will I praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.

This man is all worry and turmoil because of his falls from the past and his doubts for the future. And in a moment when nothing seems to be going right, his soul, emerges from the depths of his being and calmly tells him to be at peace:

“Just hope my dear one. Nothing else. Simply hope in Him and I will take care of the rest. Even in the moments when you feel that nothing is going right and you are not cared for by Him or worry that you are not truly being as a holy soul should be - just hope. For even in those moments, I will be praising Him. You are like the ocean. Upon the surface the waves crash and roar like a menace on a hellish tirade but as soon as you dive deep into the depths - there is nothing but peace and serenity. Within the deep chasms of the ocean’s

calm, one would never know there was a hurricane of war at the surface. But as long as you hope and desire in Him, no matter what else may happen, He will be pleased with you for He shall see only your desire. And why should He not? For He is the source of my life and my God. And there is nothing but hope in that.”

At these words of encouragement, the man realizes the greatness of this God and speaks not just the praises of Him, but recalls his resolve once again to do all to reach his goal:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen

I will go in unto the altar of God, unto God who gives joy to my youth.

As this man is about to enter into this innermost chamber where he will be tested, he understands that he must declare to God who he truly is and beg for mercy.

What happens next is the most magnificent display of humility put to words: a confession. But this is no ordinary confession. In this Confiteor, the man will call upon not just God but on the whole universe. From God all the way down to the most common of men, he will proclaim his

sinfulness and his need for forgiveness. The three great “*mea culpas*” ring out like a cry of one who is broken in sight of his unworthiness.

The confession ends with a hopeful plea that the Lord “may have mercy upon you, forgive you, and bring you to life everlasting.”

The final part of this entrance into the chamber of the Holy Grail is a masterclass of drama and theater. I will lay out the whole conversation so that you might see what I am speaking about:

V: Thou wilt turn O God, and bring us to life

R: And Thy people will rejoice in Thee

V: Show us O Lord, Thy mercy

R: And grant us Thy salvation

V: O Lord hear my prayer

R: And let my cry come unto Thee

V: The Lord be with you

R: And with thy spirit

V: Let us pray

These words happen right before the priest ascends the altar steps to begin the mass. Up until now the priest and server have exchanged thoughts and responses that were developed and of at least some length. But now the priest, or should I say the man in our adventure, is about to enter

into the innermost chamber. Just as the high priests of old would ascend once a year the steps to the Holy of Holies in fear and trembling for their lives, so now does this man. He knows that it is dangerous to tread upon the sacred ground of a God. He is fearful and the dialogue reflects this fear. Instead of the developed thoughts from the early part of the prayers, we now witness quick interjections being spoken with bullet like speed. Quickly and deftly the priest and the server exchange words that become more desperate as the time for the ascent draws nearer.

V: Thou wilt turn, O God and bring us to life.

R: And Thy people will rejoice in Thee.

This is a remarkable foreshadowing of what is to come later in the mass when literally the priest will turn around with the Blessed Sacrament and bring Life Itself to us.

V: Show us O Lord, Thy mercy.

R: And grant us Thy salvation.

He is begging now for mercy. It's as if this journey is not one of leisure but one of necessity. He needs this. It is not a matter of convenience but of spiritual survival.

V: O Lord hear my prayer

R: *And let my cry come unto Thee*

V: *The Lord be with you*

R: *And with Thy spirit*

V: *Let us pray*

He is about to go up into the chamber. He knows that many before him have failed. He knows that he goes to encounter the God of the universe and he is frightened. He begs that his prayer be heard and that his cry does not fall upon unmerciful ears. And as he makes the final preparations to ascend, he tells to the others that watch him depart: "May the Lord be with you." And they reply simply and profoundly: "And with you as well."

He takes a step forward. He is finally doing it. Walking up the staircase to God. And as he climbs under the shadow of the altar of God, he prays the entire time but he is so nervous that he cannot speak out loud but merely whispers the following words:

Take away from us our iniquities, we beseech Thee, O Lord, that with pure minds we may worthily enter into the holy of holies.

One last time he begs that he may be seen as worthy to enter this holiest of chambers wherein lies the Holy Grail and the secret of immortality. And as he finally approaches the altar, he goes

down to kiss its cold marble face and utters silently:

We beseech Thee O Lord by the merits of Thy saints, whose relics are here and of all the saints that Thou would vouchsafe to grove me all my sins. Amen.

He has begged that God see him as worthy. But just in case this plea does not appease the God of Majesty, he looks down upon the relics that lie engrained in the center of the altar. These are relics of men and women who succeeded in this adventure, who shed their blood upon the holy hill and gave their lives within the tabernacle. And gazing upon the remains of these unparalleled warriors, the man begs that God see not him but rather them.

"My God, it is true that I am but a sinner and unworthy to enter. But see these men and women who have died for you and have gained immortality. If they have done it, then so can I. Look only upon them and know that I will try as they did to seek only You in this journey. Do not judge me based upon me alone but judge me based upon the merits of those who have come before me and who are beloved in Your eyes and attached forever to Your Heart."

And with these words - he kisses the altar. It will either be the kiss

of Judas or the kiss of Peter. Both were men who entered the chamber of the Holy Grail. Both were men that kissed the Master. Judas kissed him because he was weak but later had no hope in the mercy of his God. Peter would have kissed the Master when seeing Him for the first time after the Resurrection. He would have approached him as a former traitor who knew that his Lord had forgiven him because He loved him and was therefore determined to never offend Him again. The two kisses were both by traitors. But one was full of hope - and that is what made all

the difference.

And with a kiss, the chamber door opens. But the figure entering is not some mysterious stranger that we do not know. The figure is us. It is us every day that we walk into that church for Mass. And in that moment, we now enter the most magical place known to Man. The place that men have looked for since the beginning of time. We might be afraid. We are certainly weak. But we now understand what we are about. We are souls thirsting for the cup of immortality and our wondrous journey is only just beginning.



THE TERRIFYING PATH OF OUR DESIRES

A Review of Andrei Tarkovsky's *STALKER*



“May everything come true. May they believe. But, above all, may they believe in themselves and become as helpless as children. For softness is great and strength is worthless. When a man is born, he is soft and pliable. When he dies, he is strong and hard. When a tree grows, it is soft and pliable. But when it's dry and hard, it dies. Hardness and strength are death's companions. Flexibility and softness are the embodiment of life. That which has become hard shall not triumph.”

To try and understand Tarkovsky's *Stalker* is like trying to ascend a great mountain that defies all of Man's attempts at conquering it. It is a film that right from the first moment puts

us on notice that it will not even attempt at satisfying any single one of our desires for excitement or stimulation. From the first scene, Tarkovsky will painstakingly stretch out shot after shot of a world that has been burned or lost all sense of wonder and beauty.

We find ourselves following the preparations of *The Stalker*, a man who has been trained in navigating what is called *The Zone*, a specific land mass that has mysteriously been abandoned after some otherworldly force landed and left it with special powers. *The Stalker* meets up with two other men, *The Writer*

and The Professor. These two men will rely upon The Stalker to help them to safely make it through The Zone until they reach what is called The Room, a place hidden in The Zone where that which one desires most of all will come true.

After preparations and a slow but at the same time enthralling evasion of the soldiers who protect The Zone, we find ourselves with the three men along a railroad journey that at its end, blasts us with full color as we enter the forbidden area. There is breathtaking beauty to the camerawork of Alexander Knaszhinsky, which purposefully pans upon a misty landscape that is in stark contrast to the industrial sepia tone that oppressed us in the opening minutes of the film.

The Zone is filled with traps which can ensnare any being that does not safely avoid them. Tarkovsky gives us the impression that The Zone is almost a living and sentient being that protects at all costs its priceless secret. One cannot but think that The Zone is its own Garden of Paradise with its flaming sword keeping away any of those souls who are not worthy to enter into its most precious and secret sanctuary. There is unrest in the minds of

The Writer and The Professor as they follow The Stalker through the exquisitely beautiful maze of The Zone. But The Stalker shows relief that he is finally back in The Zone although he becomes increasingly worried as they come closer and closer to The Room.

Tarkovsky has created a film that is slow in its motions and heavy in its dialogue between characters but at the heart of it, we find ourselves slowly mesmerized by what The Room could possibly be or contain. What will happen when the characters reach their sought after goal? What is it that these men truly desire? It is magical how the patient and open minded viewer is slowly rewarded by being drawn into the film's seductive powers as they get closer and closer to The Room and begin asking themselves these burning questions.

Finally the great moment arrives and the characters find themselves at The Room. The men are on edge and we, as the viewers, find ourselves in the same exact position. The film is about two men looking for what they most desire and at the same time, Tarkovsky pulls us into the same quest with one burning question on our minds: *What is that I desire?* Every time I watch

this film, I find myself slowly pulling out of my heart the great desires that I have and trying to pinpoint that one which is greatest as the men reach for the threshold. But right before the men are to enter, *The Stalker* relates to them a story of his mentor. Many years ago, the man who taught *The Stalker* how to navigate *The Zone* went searching for *The Room* to fulfill his own greatest desire; the healing of his cancer ridden brother. The man upon entering *The Room*, left, and when he returned from *The Zone*, found himself to be a man of great wealth and his brother still sick. A few days later, the mentor hung himself.

At this moment, *The Writer* and *The Professor* are stopped dead in their tracks and the viewer along with them. *The Room* does not grant to men what they say they desire most, but rather what they truly desire most, regardless of whether they know it or not. It is a moment of endless horror and magnitude. Every time I witness this moment, I am just as floored as the time before it. What do I desire most?

We find ourselves many times speaking about what we desire or the ones that we love but do we truly want and love these things?

There is nothing more terrifying than understanding oneself in the stark light of reality. I say I love God, but do I actually love Him? I say I want God more than anything else, but do I? I say I desire Heaven more than anything else, but is that the great desire that lies at the heart of my soul?

How well do we know ourselves? If we were placed at the threshold of a room that would grant whatever we desired in the innermost depths of our being, would we choose to enter such a room? When we are painstakingly brought through the journey of Tarkovsky, the choice suddenly becomes one more terrifying than thrilling. And why? The reason is that Tarkovsky is forcing us to slowly begin to understand who we truly are. Only the soul who understands his fallen nature is petrified by the idea of his deepest desires being known and realized because he lacks trust in himself and what he desires. He knows how easily his heart can become hardened by selfishness and weighed down by delusional ideas of oneself. It is why the prayer of *The Stalker*, cited at the start of this review, resonates so poignantly with the heart that knows its own limitations and incapacity for goodness: *“But,*

above all, may they believe in themselves and become as helpless as children. For softness is great and strength is worthless.”

The three men all encounter a profound moment of self knowledge and honesty that will affect the trajectory of each of their journeys and the answer to their desires. Attachments and false hopes will fade and be left behind as they creep closer and closer to The Room. Tarkovsky shows us a powerful image of guns and needles and other devices that others before them brought upon their journey. But in order to achieve one’s ultimate desire, one must sacrifice everything. All must be left behind. One must become weak and helpless like a child to attain the most precious of treasures and most far reaching of desires. But most importantly, to reach our final goal, we must shed the illusion that we have fashioned with our pride, and finally come face to face with who we truly are; the man behind all of the inner masks.

This is the searing genius of Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. There is no film in history that brings the viewer through such a psychological journey that impeccably mirrors the very same journey of its own characters. Most films push us

into feeling what the characters on screen feel by explosions, jumps or the emotions of the actors. But Tarkovsky uses the mystery and humanity of art at its apex, to fashion a path that slowly entrances us and leads us through the web of our own desires and the haunting steps of our hearts.

To enter into *Stalker* and be taken by its forces is to come face to face with who we are and how far we are from what we should be. It is art at its pinnacle and an artist at his most powerful.

Great art is an encounter with the transcendent, but only when we are willing to bare ourselves in our truest form. But this act of self abandonment takes humility and the courage to be willing to open the door to our soul and look with daring into who we actually are in the eyes of God; without any illusion or disguise.

Every time I reach the final moment of transcendence in *Stalker*, I am left emptied and completely outside of myself. For Tarkovsky’s journey in its most powerful form, will shatter the soul of any honest and open minded viewer. But in the final moment of eternal hope, Tarkovsky will put you back together again and ready you for the next stage in your journey.

THE DANCE OF PAIN AND JOY

The Sorrowful Beauty of The Mass



Is there anything more painful than beauty?

This is one of the many questions that haunts the soul that seeks to wrestle with both the world and the art that reflects it. But what if the questions at the heart of the world and of art could also be found at the heart of the Sacrifice of the Mass?

The Mass is a sacrifice and a sacrament. This is a dogmatic certitude. But the Mass is also a work of art, both on the part of Christ who founded it and on the part of the Catholic Church that shaped and crafted the ceremonies and rituals that surround such a holy and endlessly mysterious

sacrament.

So what if our understanding of art could help us understand the journey of the Mass in a more profound way?

What is art? Or perhaps a more interesting question is: What does great art do to us? What is it meant to do?

The secret to the artistic encounter can be found in the journey of Dante as he finds himself in a mysterious dark forest and eventually down a path into the fires of Hell and ascending the heights of Paradise. For after all, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is not simply the story of a journey of a soul, but

also a meditation on art itself. We find ourselves following Dante into the depths of Hell and as we pass along the cracks and crevices, we look down upon the damned and right from the first we stand there in judgment. We pity the souls we find there. We have disdain for them and even downright disgust. Dante lures us along the path of judgment. Each canto we encounter is a fresh moment where we set eyes upon a new gang of guilty prisoners. Group after group, canto after canto, we condemn the infernal inhabitants until we get to the point where we condemn before even knowing what lies before us. But inevitably, at some point, we turn the corner with Dante and in a moment we are face to face with the image of our own soul and the punishment that we ourselves would deserve. Our judgment turns to embarrassment and disgrace. We wish we could justify ourselves or make excuses for the lost souls we are now encountering but it is too late. Dante already has us. We have already condemned ourselves. All we want is to escape quickly and soon we do. Eventually, Dante leads us back up the winding road of Hell and upon the pathway through Purgatory, until finally reaching Heaven, we find Dante looking

down at us and challenging us to become the men and women that we encounter in Paradise. We no longer look in judgment upon others and their sin. We now only see what we must become in the triumphant vision of those saints who reign in glory.

This journey is the secret to great art and the answer to the question: Is there anything more painful than beauty?

Great art is so difficult and painful to encounter because the beauty of it lies in the deep revelation of who we actually are and what we must become. So often we only see ourselves in a faded and dusty mirror but when we can actually see ourselves on a level that strikes at the core of who we are, we are frightened. The honest encounter of self is a terrifying reality when coupled with the vision of what we were born to become.

And this is the journey of the Mass. I ascend the steps of the altar and the moment I kiss the altar, I am faced with the reality of the Last Supper and the sharing of the Eucharistic feast. I envision myself at the altar like one of the apostles on that fateful night and each moment is a stinging realization that I will soon betray Him, that I have betrayed Him. Day after day, I have

sold my Master for a few coins of pleasure or some false promises of glory or gain. Who am I? Am I Peter? Am I Judas? Or am I simply one of the nameless many who fled the moment Christ asked me to watch and to follow Him to death and the Cross?

The Mass is the most intense moment of self reflection as we walk unto the altar of God and witness the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of Mankind. Where do I encounter my infidelity? Is it in the words of Christ that I do not heed? Is it in the gifts of the Offertory that I so often like Cain, fail to give? Or is it in the complete and total abandonment of self that I am too cowardly to complete at the moment of the Consecration? Or perhaps the cold and heartless apathy that encapsulates me at the ecstatic act of the Communion? Each and every step of the Mass is a moment for understanding who I am on a level so deep that I could never have imagined in any other way or method. But in the same moments of the Epistle, the Gospel, the Offertory, the Consecration or Communion, I see Christ and His saints having performed the heroic acts that challenge me and that are threaded throughout the sacrifice. I see what I must become. I under-

stand the challenge before me and that is just as terrifying as self knowledge.

We cannot forget that the Mass is not some act that is made of stone and granite, but rather is a living and breathing encounter with Christ and the sacrifice of His Cross. Every Mass is a wholly new encounter of who I am in the eyes of my Crucified Lord. But I am not the same today as I was yesterday. Every encounter is new because I am different. I approach the sacrifice as a better man or a worse one, but never the same. And with every step of the Mass, I walk through like a soul following Christ along the path to the Cross.

Imagine if you were to walk side by side Christ like Simon of Cyrene did. All along the path you would witness Christ and what He was like. You would see Him react to the things that happened to Him, see how he treated those who persecuted Him, see how He handled pain and suffering. But you are not meant to simply look and observe. A wise and humble soul would see themselves in the Heart of Christ and understand who they are and how they are so unworthy to walk beside such a One. It is this that makes beauty so painful to witness.

I look upon the western sun fading over the horizon or a snow capped mountain top under a moonlit sky and it hurts. It hurts because when a soul encounters beauty, it senses its unworthiness to possess it. The moment we encounter the Crucified Christ is an endless moment of wonderment where all we can do is kneel and all we can say is: "Domine non sum dignus"

This is the journey of the Mass. It is a dance of pain and joy. We walk along and follow the priest and realize Christ's goodness and our own evil and weakness. And by the time the Consecration comes around, we are shattered by how beautiful our Christ truly is and how unworthy we are. But the Mass will take our shattered selves and through the reception of the Eucharist, the Mass like great art will put us back together again by drawing us into an encounter with a beauty that transcends any human understanding. Many Catholics are puzzled by the Mass. They attend the Sacrifice but so often do not know what they should be doing during it. But the Mass is not made to be complicated or unapproachable. It is mysterious but not inaccessible. It is like any journey through a great work of art. The soul must be patient with the mystery of what is be-

fore him. It is not about stimulation or excitement but a slow encounter with a force far greater than we could ever understand upon one glance. We often like to keep our distance from the Mass. We find ourselves reading it like we would read a manual. But try and just be patient and allow yourself to move towards the Mass. Allow yourself to be drawn into its mystery. Be fearless in taking all of your shortcomings, weaknesses and moments of betrayal and carry them throughout the Mass. For what is the Sacrifice of the Cross if we do not allow Christ to shoulder the burden of our sins so that we might find redemption and peace? Too often we look for the comfortable art, the art that does not challenge us by showing us for what we truly are and what we must become. But the greatest art is that which makes us go outside of ourselves. It makes us uncomfortable. And the same goes for the Mass. Do not seek the comfortable Mass. Seek the Sacrifice of the Mass; that mystical journey that reveals your sins in the face of the bleeding Christ. It will be painful and it will injure our pride, but like great and beautiful art, it will always end in joy. For we will at last possess the One that we have for so long been hoping to find.

A REFLECTION

Supper at Emmaus by Michelangelo Caravaggio

Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus* is a painting of both extraordinary beauty and significance to a catholic soul interested in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We know well the scene that is taken from the Gospel of St. Luke. After the Resurrection, Christ, in disguise, joins two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus and spends the journey speaking to them about the prophecies of the Messiah. They find themselves at a local inn for an evening meal where Christ will dine with them in the same way that He would have on the night of the first Mass.

Caravaggio was obsessed with the decisive moment before any great action. He found it more psychologically interesting to delve into the moment before his characters reveal themselves or before they make a final decision. This painting is no different. Most painters are interested in the moment Christ reveals Himself to be their Lord, but Caravaggio is more interested in the moment right before the revelation.

Our eye is drawn towards Christ immediately and we notice that He is beardless. It seems likely that Caravaggio will use the

beardless Christ to denote His being shrouded in mystery. He is not showing Himself for who He truly is and it works. Christ without a beard seems strange and if we were to see this character outside of this context in another painting, then it is unlikely we would think it was Christ.

Christ's right hand is outstretched over the table but almost forms this channel with the outstretched hand of the disciple on his left. The arm of the disciple is coming from outside of the frame and almost reaching outside of the painting itself. We are literally drawn from our outside world into the painting and right into Christ. Caravaggio leaves us with no choice with the way he has this almost tunnel formed by the two arms leading straight to Our Lord.

The two disciples can be defined by the marks that Caravaggio gives to them. The disciple on the left has a tear in his elbow which shows he is poor and perhaps is not in the best of care, while the disciple on the right has a red nose from the cold and the shell of a pilgrim pinned to his vest. It is a beautiful representation of a simple dinner that

has great significance for those cold, tired, travelers on the road that seek a little warmth and some food from the darkness of the night. It is not so different from our walking into the sacrifice of the Mass; tired and worn down by the coldness of the world and looking for warmth and just a little bit of courage and strength.

The servant who attends their table is looking at Christ not as one who knows or even under-

stands what is happening, but certainly one who is interested in what is being said. For even the most ignorant soul is intrigued when they hear tales of a Son of God who came to die for the sins of Mankind.

The bland and undecorated background is Caravaggio's way of showing that Christ is among us even in the most dull and most human of moments. Every action and every stranger we encounter is truly Christ reaching



out with an extended hand into our world and hoping that we might see past the veil of the man or woman in front of us and simply see Christ within them. One can even see the basket at the edge of the table which casts the shadow of a fishtail. Christ, even in the simplest of things, will leave signs of His presence.

The table is set with food that looks so real that you could almost reach out and taste it. Caravaggio loved to show the scenes of the Gospels in stark realism to help us immerse ourselves in the real human moments that happened. For after all, these were not mystical experiences in a foreign world but rather events that happened to real men and women just like us. He invites us to place ourselves in their minds as a great moment is about to happen.

The final thing we notice is the moment of expectation that Ca-

ravaggio so brilliantly portrays. We see the disciple on the right of Christ in a crouched position of expectation, as if he is suddenly realizing something extraordinary. The light that Caravaggio casts on the right side of Christ's face seems to show that this disciple has just realized who He truly is, while the other disciple still sees the side of Christ that is hidden in shadows. The final masterstroke is the way the basket is teetering on the edge of the table. The fruit stacked upon it with such weight makes it seem impossible that it will stay up for much longer. It is the moment right before everything will change. Caravaggio almost has you taking a deep breath in preparation for such an incredible moment. For is there anything more exhilarating than the moment when Christ for even but a second, shows you that even in the darkest of times, He has never left you and never will?

THIS ALONE MATTERS

A Prayer After Communion

Whether you are a priest, a doctor, a mother, a nurse, a monk or a student it does not matter; everything on the outside is just silliness. The only thing that truly matters is deep down within. Just you and Christ.

I just want to go down deep underneath who I am. As deep as I can possibly go where it is just You and me, Christ, and nothing else. And I know that I cannot be here forever. I know

that I cannot just stay here forever but can I just be here for a little bit with You? For up there is so much pain, so much betrayal and hurt and loss. Just give me a few moments here with You alone. I do not mind that it is a desert. I do not mind that there is no external stimulation or pleasure or satisfaction or excitement. But it is just You. It is just You and me. I feel so hurt at times, Lord. Some of it is my own doing, some of it is my own jealousy, or my own selfishness, or my wanting to be loved, or to be appreciated, or to be treasured in ways that I want to be loved, or treasured. I know deep down that none of that matters. All that matters is that it is You and me right now. Right here so deep and so far from anybody else that

only You and me matter. Can You please promise me that it will always be this way? Please promise that You will help me so that no matter what happens in my life, I will always be able to have this. This right here never changes. This never is different than what it is right now. I am sorry for all my selfishness. I am sorry for all of my distracted affections. But I am not there yet, Lord. I am still stumbling around in the darkness of self satisfaction, and still have not come before the light of complete self-denial. I need time. Not necessarily time to be convinced, but just time to build the strength to be able to only care about this. This and only this. Help me, Lord. Help me to forget about myself and become lost in You.



THE HEART OF THE WORLD

Archbishop Lefebvre on The Holy Mass



Jesus Christ instituted the priesthood at the Last Supper on the occasion of the first sacrifice – for the Last Supper was indeed a Sacrifice, as the Council of Trent teaches – when He made priests of His Apostles and enjoined them, “Do this in memory of Me.” He did not say, “Tell this story, describe this action of Mine to your children and to future generations.” He said rather, “Do this, re-do this, continue to do this which I have done.” It is very important that we realize the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is an action and not a narrative, not a story. I am sure you must realize why I am emphasizing: it is precisely because in our time Christ’s intentions are being sub-

verted, contradicted and suppressed.

It is vital, therefore, that we insist upon what is essential to our Holy Faith and indeed to the very idea of Christian civilization, in which we have good reason to glory still, and which we hope with all our hearts to regain and to see revitalized as it was in medieval times. The world chuckles today about the Middle Ages. Modern man tells us it was an age of obscurity – the dark ages – but history itself tells us the medieval age was the greatest age in history, and the thirteenth the greatest century that mankind has ever known. Why? Because of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and because of the spirituality

generated by the Mass. Today, more than ever before, our civilization needs its altars, needs its priests to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which in fact is a re-enactment of the Sacrifice of the Cross. The whole of our Christian civilization rests upon our altars. But if we destroy our altars and replace them with a table, and upon this table we simply prepare a meal which is but a memorial of Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Last Supper, which is but a narrative of what He said and did on that occasion, then we have forfeited the basis upon which Christian civilization rests. The Catholic Church then ceases to exist, for the Church rests upon the dogma, upon the reality of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, whence comes Holy Communion, which is Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. For Holy Communion – the Eucharist – transforms our very souls, civilizes us, disciplines us and imposes order upon our souls. Without the Eucharist we reek of disorder.

We frequently wonder why there are so few priests today. It is because there is no longer any pre-occupation with the Sacrifice of the Mass. There is no more ideal, no more goal for the priest to

pursue, His goal had always been to go unto the Altar of God to offer the Sacrifice of Calvary. That is precisely what made the sublimity of the priest, the ideal of the priestly vocation in a young man. Similarly, for the religious – nuns and brothers – the foundation of their vocation was the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, just as it was for you, the laity.

What, then, precisely is a Christian? Essentially, a Christian is one who offers himself as a victim on the altar with Our Lord. That is what the Sacrament of Marriage is also: a symbol of Christ's union with His Church. Just as Christ offered His life for His Church, so also do the spouses offer their lives for their families and for each other. This union is a vivid symbol of what occurred at Calvary, and thus the spouses derive the strength and courage required for the sacrifice of their union from the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass there can be no Catholic spirituality, no Christian life, and all that has been the life of the Church through the ages will simply wither and cease to exist. We, then, do have a vital requirement for the true Sacrifice of the Mass, and this is of fundamental importance to us as Catholics.

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