

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

Introduction:

The Catholic Mass is the renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary offered to God in a bloodless manner through the ministry of priests (Council of Trent).

I. THE CONCEPT OF SACRIFICE (sacrum facere = to perform a holy act).

1) Definition:

Sacrifice is the offering made to God alone of something destroyed in recognition of God's sovereign dominion.

- The offering is the essence of sacrifice; the value of a sacrifice is measured by the price of the thing offered.
- But destruction (or immolation in the case of a living being) is necessary for the sacrifice to be complete.
- Which is to recognize and magnify God's absolute ownership of all things (called sovereign dominion).
- Offering a sacrifice is a natural right. Its propitiatory nature alone stems from original sin and subsequent faults. It is always an act of praise, thanksgiving and supplication.

2) History:

Abel, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek (bread and wine) all offered sacrifices. The pagans also did so (Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Gauls, Germans, etc.). But it was mainly the Law of Moses that codified the practice desired by God in the Old Testament:

- The holocaust (where the entire victim is burned);
- The peace offerings (one part is burnt, the other reserved for priests).
- Unbloody sacrifices (bread offerings, oil, incense, salt, etc.).

Note: The sacrifices of the Old Testament were legitimate, instituted by God. Those of the pagans, offered to idols and therefore most often to demons, were often monstrous. All are now illegitimate and gravely sinful: only that of Jesus Christ, infinite and unique, remains for eternity.

II. THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS (Identity with that of the Cross).

On the Cross, the Son of God offered his Father a true sacrifice of infinite value.

- He offered Himself (the offering is therefore His humanity, body and soul).
- This offering was destroyed by His death (separation of soul and body).
- For the purpose of glorifying His Father and redeeming sins.

Note: This unique Sacrifice (Christ died once and for all) is unparalleled, both in terms of the One who offers it = the Son of God, and in terms of the offering = the humanity of the Son of God. It is perfect because the perfection of the sacrifice consists in the union of the victim and the priest: here, there is total identity.

The sacrifice of the Mass is substantially identical to that of the Cross:

It is the same priest = Jesus Christ; the same victim = the humanity of Christ; and the same act of offering one by the other.

Only the mode differs:

- The Cross is bloody, not the Mass.
- At the Cross, Jesus Christ offers himself directly, at Mass through the ministry of priests.

III. THE SACRAMENTAL RITE.

- By making Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist, the priest enables Our Lord to offer His own humanity to His Father.
- Immolation (non-bloody) is achieved by the sensible sign that sets apart the body and blood of Our Lord, which is characteristic of a sacrificed victim.
- These two aspects form a single sacrament; they are realized through the same visible sign (the double consecration) and produce a single reality: the renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary.
- Real presence and communion are the essential conditions of this sublime act, inseparable from it:
 - To enable it (presence).
 - And to reap the rewards (communion).

The Mass is therefore a drama (in the Greek sense of sacred action) in which the Son of God renews his unique sacrifice for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind.

IV. EFFECTS AND FRUITS OF THE HOLY SACRIFICE.

ALL GRACE, without exception since original sin, flows from this sacrifice of Jesus Christ, reconciling God and sinful men.

Its effect is infinite (infinite greatness of the priest and the victim).

- The values of praise and thanksgiving are always obtained, as they are not dependent on human beings.
- The values of propitiation and petition (also infinite) depend on the dispositions of those attending Mass.
- We must attend Mass, as if we were at the foot of the Cross on Good Friday, since it is strictly the same reality that is being realized before us.
- While Mass is always offered to God alone, the priest has the power to assign its fruits, both for the living and for the deceased (the fee paid to him has nothing to do with the price of the Mass).

Conclusion:

The Mass, where Our Lord is glorious and risen, is the sun of the Catholic Church. The only homage worthy of God, it is the life of the Church, its salvation and the secret of its inexhaustible supernatural efficacy. It is the testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which she must preserve unceasingly against the wrath of the devil. It is the most sublime act of charity of the Son of God and the very reason for his coming to earth.

It is the Mass that made saints, because it is the Mass that makes us conform to Jesus Christ in his sacrifice and glory.