

INSTRUCTIONS ON THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

PART I.—THE MASS AND CALVARY

“From the rising of the sun even to the going down My name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation.”—(Prophecy of Malachias i. 11.)

I. MEANING AND NEED OF SACRIFICE.

Reasons for Sacrifice.

1. **God's dominion.**
2. **Our dependence.**
3. **Thanksgiving.**
4. **Satisfaction for Sin.**

Sacrifice is the visible offering of a victim to God, made by a duly authorised person, to acknowledge by the destruction, or at least by some change in the victim, God's supreme dominion over us and our total dependence upon Him. It is the duty of all men to acknowledge God's supreme dominion over them, because He alone has supreme power over them—over their souls and bodies, their life and death. They must also confess their total dependence upon Him, because by Him they live, move and have their being. He is their Creator and Preserver, and anything they have that is good comes from Him. Hence the offering of sacrifice to the Supreme Being has always been regarded as one of the duties of the human race. Explorers testify that even among the most savage tribes there was always a sacrificial rite of some sort or other. These pagan rites were often of the most abominable and superstitious kind, but still they prove to us that even among such people there was the fundamental idea that the Supreme Deity who ruled their lives must be worshipped.

But besides the reasons for sacrifice already given there are additional reasons as well. Those who realise that all benefits come from God, feel the necessity of thanking Him for past favours, and of begging for their continuation in the future. This they endeavour to do by sacrifice. But the fall of man makes sacrifice doubly necessary. The justice of God has to be satisfied for sin, and a rational creature conscious of sin feels the need of atoning for it and of appeasing the just anger of God which he incurred by his disobedience to God's laws. Man has endeavoured to meet these wants and duties by sacrifice, but it is only by the Sacrifice of the New Law that he is able fully to satisfy them.

II. THE SACRIFICES OF THE OLD LAW.

The Jews, the chosen people of God, knew what sacrifice meant long before the coming of Christ, the great High Priest. The sense of sin and dependence on God made them have recourse to sacrifice. Sometimes it was the offering and destruction of the fruits of the earth and of the food that supported the life of man; often it was the destruction of animal life, the shedding of blood. The Jews recognising that they belonged to God took one of God's creatures and offered it as an acknowledgment of His supreme dominion. These were the sacrifices of the Old Law, but they were mere shadows, they were almost as nothing when compared with the glorious Sacrifice of the New Law.

The Prophets longed and cried out for the time when the sacrifice of justice would be fully acceptable to God, when a clean oblation would be offered from the rising to the setting of the sun. They knew and felt that their own efforts at sacrifice were not sufficient to atone adequately for sin, but they also knew and prophesied that One was coming whose worship and sacrifice would be worthy of the great God. There was to come a man, a God-man, Who would offer Himself in Sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

III. NEED OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

Man had sinned and rebelled against his Maker; he had separated himself from his Creator, and God's justice could not be fully satisfied by any atonement the sinner could offer. On all principles of human calculation sin has a kind of

infinitude about it. To strike against the eternal God, the first and last, without Whom nothing is, and from Whom are all things, this is a wrong which cannot be atoned for by man himself. Just as a person can, if he please, let himself down a high precipice, but cannot climb back its steep face again, so man can turn his back on God and place a span of immeasurable distance between God and himself, but, climb as he may, he cannot of himself regain those heights from which he fell. But oh! the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! When things were at their worst, then the Supreme Disposer of all things finds a remedy. He determined that man should be redeemed, and that full reparation should be made for sin. There was to come a man, and that man was to be such a one as to be able to pay the infinite price, to scale the infinite height, to satisfy God's justice to the full. The Redeemer was to be God-Himself made man. And when satisfied for He came, then for the first time since human sin, nature existed, an act of worship, a sacrifice, was offered before the eternal throne of God which was fully worthy of the Godhead, and which fully and adequately satisfied God's justice for sin. And Christ was well fitted to make this offering. He was the real and lawful Head of our human race by virtue of the dignity of His Person; He was the mediator between God and man, being Himself both God and man.

IV. THE SACRIFICE OF CALVARY.

When the time came for the great sacrifice, the sacrifice of God made man on Calvary, we know that it was one of blood. "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins." The priest and victim in this great sacrifice were Christ Himself, and the altar was the cross. The voluntary death of Christ on the cross was the greatest of all sacrifices, and it was the greatest victory ever wrought in this world. It was a complete victory over sin, and it left no claims of divine justice unsatisfied. By it the heaven of bliss was opened again; supernatural life was purchased for our souls, and the Father of all once more looked down with complacency on the world of men's souls. They could again be His children, heirs of His kingdom, partakers of His nature, and the enemy of mankind, the evil spirit, was held in restraint. The Creator's justice satisfied, heaven opened, grace purchased, hell conquered, these are the fruits of that great sacrifice of the God-man on Mount Calvary.

V. THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

But while Jesus now sitteth at the right hand of His Father, immortal and impassible, man is tempted, and being weak he falls into sin; he still needs the grace of God in his struggle against temptations. The fountains of grace flowing from Calvary are full, but how is man to partake of them. To apply the sacrifice of the cross to our souls Christ has left us His Sacraments. But the loving heart of Jesus has also thought of another device which only His love could have carried into effect. He has decreed that the sacrifice of Calvary is to be renewed every day of the year in the sacrifice, of the Holy Mass. Thus, the words of the prophet are fulfilled: "From the rising of the sun, even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation" (Malachias i. 11). The Mass, which was instituted by Christ at His Last Supper, is celebrated by nearly every priest every day of his life. He has been ordained by the imposition of the Bishop's hands, in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He is thereby given power to do what no one could do by his own power except Christ Himself. He takes bread and wine, pronounces the words of consecration, and in an instant a stupendous change takes place. The bread and wine are immediately changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. And this is what happens every time the august sacrifice of the Mass is offered.

VI. THE MASS A REAL SACRIFICE.

In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass we find that all the requisites of a real sacrifice are present:-

- (1) There is the Victim. Jesus Christ Himself is the Victim and is offered under the appearance of bread and wine.
- (2) The Altar.
- (3) The Priest. Jesus Christ is the chief and principal priest, but He acts through the ministry of ordained priests of His Church.
- (4) There is the actual sacrifice of the Victim. But how is this accomplished, because a sacrifice is effected by the destruction or at least some change of the Victim? And how is there a destruction or at least some change in the

Victim, Jesus Christ, during the sacrifice of the Mass? There is no knife, no cross, no physical death, no apparent change, and yet we call the Mass a real sacrifice. The eminent theologian, Cardinal de Lugo, answers this difficulty in the following way. The Mass is a real sacrifice on account of the annihilation, the humiliation, the lowering of state, which the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ undergoes during Mass. This is the change produced in the Victim during the holy sacrifice. Where now is that sacred voice of Our Saviour which once charmed the multitude of His listeners and raised the dead to life? It has been immolated. Jesus is silent under the sacramental species. Where now is that holy countenance which in heaven shines like the sun and is the glory of the elect? It is hidden behind a thick veil. Those eyes that "shine like a flame of fire" (Apoc. i. 14) seem to be closed in the Blessed Sacrament. They see us, but we cannot see them; by hiding them away Jesus sacrifices them.

On the cross, says St. Thomas, the divinity was hidden but the humanity remained; in the Mass all are hidden, divinity and humanity.

"In truce latebat sola Deitas

At hie latet simul et humanitas."

On the cross the Victim, by His sighs, His words and His last loud cry, showed some signs of life; in the sacramental state there is nothing to be seen except what appears to be bread and wine—no beauty, no trace of His divine personality. However glorious He is in the Sacred Host, He is nevertheless a Victim.

In heaven His acts are all powerful, His authority is unopposed. In the Host all this is absent. If a breeze blows Him off the altar, He obeys the natural laws of gravity, and falls to the ground. He will suffer Himself to be carried along by any movement, whether it be in the stream, or what is still more surprising, even in the sweepings of the street. He offers no resistance to the action of the priest who takes him up, even when it is to place Him on the tongue of a Judas. Annihilation! that is the state of Christ when He lies on the altar or enters into our souls. And it is this utter annihilation and lowering of Himself that in Lugo's opinion constitutes the Mass a real sacrifice.

VII. THE MASS A MYSTICAL REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH.

When Christ offered Himself in sacrifice on the altar of the cross there was a real separation of His sacred body and blood. But now His Sacred Humanity is glorious, immortal and impassible, and a real separation of His body and blood cannot take place; it can take place only in a mystical way. This is what happens during the Sacrifice of the Mass. By virtue of the words of consecration, This is My body, this is the chalice of My blood, the body and blood of Our Lord are mystically separated, and we have a mystical representation of Christ's real death on the cross.

However, by virtue of the words of consecration, only the body of Our Saviour is present under the species of bread, and only his blood is present under the species of wine. But as Christ's body and blood cannot now be separated from one another, it follows by what the theologians call natural concomitance that the living and real Jesus Christ is wholly present—body, blood, soul and divinity—under each of the species of bread and wine. Hence there is no real separation of the body and blood of Our Lord in the Mass; there is only a mystical separation.

VIII. THE MASS ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AS THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS.

The Sacrifice of the Mass is not merely a commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross; it is essentially the same sacrifice, though differing from it in some ways. In both sacrifices the principal offerer is the same, viz., Jesus Christ; the Victim in both sacrifices is the same, so that essentially the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice on Calvary are the same. But the manner of offering is different.

1. On the cross Christ offered Himself a Victim to His eternal Father, but the sacrifice was one of blood and of actual death; in the Mass Christ also offers Himself as a Victim, but in an unbloody manner, and with a mystical death under the sacramental species.

2. On the cross the human nature of Our Redeemer was capable of suffering and death, but now He sits at the right hand of His Father, glorious, immortal, and He can no longer suffer. Hence the Sacrifice of the Mass is free from bodily pain.

3. On Calvary Christ offered Himself in His human form and without the aid of other priests; in the Mass He offers Himself under the veil of the sacramental species, and He uses other priests as His ministers.

4. There is as well another important difference. On Calvary Christ merited for us superabundantly once and for all, but now He merits no longer. The fountains of merit are full to overflowing since Calvary, but they are applied to our souls in the sacrifice of the Mass. The Scripture speaks of our "drawing waters in gladness from the fountains of the Saviour." The Mass, then, applies to our souls the graces and merits of the sacrifice of the cross. Hence it is sometimes called the "sacrifice of application" or the "applying sacrifice."

IX. CEREMONIES OF THE MASS.

If there is anything certain it is that the ceremonies of the Holy Mass go back to apostolic times. Some non-Catholics maintain that the Mass is a modern institution, due to the innovations of the Church of Rome. But the wooden altar used by St. Peter in Rome still exists, and the essentials of the Mass, can be proved to be the same now as they were in the earliest days of Christianity. In the writings of St. Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century, we have a description of the Mass as it was said in those times, and the same description could be given of the Mass as it is said at the present day. In the Mass, he says, there were lessons and readings from the Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists. The altar was covered with linen, the bread and the chalice of wine were offered; the Sursum Corda and the Preface followed. The words of consecration, accompanied with the sign of the cross, were pronounced. The Host was broken; there were prayers for the living and dead, and Holy Communion followed. This is the testimony of one of the earliest Fathers of the Church. The rites I have mentioned could be proved to have been used universally. The writings of the great Fathers of the Church are full of allusions to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. There is not a ceremony of the Mass, not an essential prayer, not a vestment worn, which has not been prescribed by ancient Saints, if not by the Apostles themselves.

X. THE MASS IS OFFERED TO GOD ALONE.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered to God alone. But you may ask, if this is the case why are so many Masses celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and of the other Saints? The answer is a simple one. Mass celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the other saints is always a sacrifice offered to God alone; but it is said to be celebrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and the saints to thank God for the gifts and graces He has given them, and to obtain from Him more abundantly through their intercession, the graces of which we stand in need. Hence the priest never says, "I offer sacrifice to thee, St. Peter or St. Paul." No! he offers sacrifice to God alone, and he gives Him thanks for the victory achieved by the saints over sin and the devil, and he implores their protection in order that they whose memory we celebrate on earth may vouchsafe to intercede for us in heaven.

XI. WHO OFFER UP THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS?

At Mass it is very desirable to accompany the priest throughout the whole sacrifice, and to offer it to God with him. For it is not the priest alone who offers the Mass, but the following are the offerers:

1. Christ, as already stated, is the principal offerer. Thus the Mass is a sacrifice of infinite value on account of the infinite merit of the Victim who is sacrificed and who offers Himself. There is an immeasurable difference between this sacrifice and the sacrifices of the Old Law, in which oxen, lambs, doves, the fruits of the earth, were offered up, and in which the priests, who were the principal offerers, were mere men. In the sacrifice of the Mass the principal offerer is Jesus Christ Himself, the only-begotten Son of the Father. Add together all the merits of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, the purity of the virgins, the sufferings of the martyrs, the penances of the saints, the labours of the Apostles—all these added together would not give as much glory to God as one Mass.

2. The priest offers the sacrifice as Christ's minister and in the name of Jesus Christ.

3. The faithful who are present at Mass can also participate in the offering of the holy sacrifice if they unite themselves with the priest. Hence the priest calls the sacrifice he offers not only his own sacrifice but also the sacrifice of all those who are assisting at it. In the prayers of the Mass he invites the people to join with him in offering up the holy sacrifice, and he uses language common both to himself and the people. It is of great importance to know that

when we assist at Mass we can all join in offering up the sacrifice with the priest. And the more devoutly and earnestly we assist at Mass, the more abundant will be our share in its fruits. Hence let us consider what are the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass.

XII. THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY MASS.

1. In the Mass we give God honour and glory, and we honour the Divine Majesty with the homage He deserves.

We are all bound to pay Him honour because we are God's creatures; He created us from nothing; He preserves our lives, and all that we have comes from Him. But God is a Lord of infinite majesty and greatness, and we could not of ourselves render Him the homage He deserves. The Mass, however, has provided us with a means which far exceeds and surpasses all the homage that creatures of themselves could offer; it has provided us with a means of honouring the sovereign majesty of God as He deserves. The Mass may be called a sacrifice of infinite honour, because in it an infinite Person honours infinite greatness.

2. In the Mass we can appease the anger of God and give Him satisfaction for our sins. That God has reason to be angry with us is clear to anyone who reflects on the number and gravity of the sins continually committed by ourselves and others in every part of the world. Even if there was question of only a single sin, it would be so great an evil that no creature could adequately satisfy God's just anger. But we have a remedy in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In it Jesus Christ offers Himself to His Father, and asks pardon and mercy for us just as on the Cross He asked pardon for His executioners. If God today shows greater clemency to us than He showed in the days of old; if He does not now renew the terrible examples of rigor and severity with which He often treated the world, we owe it to His only Son, sacrificed on our altars. At sight of that Son God lays aside His anger and is appeased.

3. The Mass remits the guilt of our sins. It does not remit our sins immediately and directly, because this is the effect of the Sacrament of Confession, but it remits them in the way indicated by the Council of Trent. "By this oblation God is appeased, and remits even serious sins by conceding the grace and gift of penance." In other words, it obtains for us the grace of conversion and contrition. To those who assist devoutly at Mass, that often happens which happened to some of the crowd on Calvary who went down from the hill penetrated with sorrow and beating their breasts. Thus, if even great sinners assist at Mass with proper disposition, they will get the grace of repentance; they will be touched interiorly by divine grace which will enable them to cleanse themselves from their sins and to return to God.

4. The Mass also remits some of the temporal punishment contracted by sin. When sin is pardoned as to its guilt, there often remains a debt of temporal punishment. This temporal punishment may be lessened by various good works, but one of the most efficacious means is the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

5. The treasures of the merits of this holy sacrifice are so abundant that we can use them, not only for ourselves but for others also, and especially for the souls in purgatory. The souls in purgatory are unable to acquire merit for themselves, but by God's mercy we can always help them by the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. St. Thomas says that "by no other oblation can the souls in purgatory be more speedily relieved than by the sacrifice of the Mass." Hence we can help these holy souls either by getting Masses said for them or by assisting at Mass ourselves and offering up the holy sacrifice for the speedy termination of their sufferings.

6. The Mass is also a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Many indeed and great are the favours which God has bestowed on us, favours both of the natural and supernatural order. "What hast thou that thou hast not received" (1 Cor. iv. 7), says St. Paul. We are, therefore, bound to show Him our gratitude. But the offering of ourselves, of our heart, our liberty, our goods, our very life itself, would always be much inferior to the benefits He has given us. Thus, if left to ourselves, we could not perfectly show our gratitude. But the Mass is a sacrifice of supreme thanksgiving. By it we can offer to God an offering greater than all the benefits we have received from His liberality. In offering the Mass to God we offer a gift of infinite value, because it is Jesus Christ that we offer.

7. Lastly, in the Mass we pray to God for all graces and blessings we may stand in need of. Christ has told us that if we ask the Father anything in His name, the Father will infallibly grant our petition. "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you" (St. John xvi. 23). In the sacrifice of the Mass it is Jesus Christ Himself who intercedes for us. He it is who undertakes our cause, becomes our advocate, presents our supplications to His Father,

enforcing them with all the weight of His infinite merits and intercession. We can, therefore, pray during Mass, and ask for ourselves the temporal blessings of health, prosperity, success in our undertakings, and spiritual blessings, such as resistance to temptation, victory over some passion that is troubling us, the grace of avoiding sin and dangerous occasions, etc. Then let us pray also and ask for blessings for our relatives, friends and benefactors, for the poor, the sick and the dying, for those in sorrow, for those to whom we may have been an occasion of sin, and in general for all the needs of the Church, our country, and for all mankind, both living and dead.

XIII. THE WAY TO ASSIST AT HOLY MASS.

The Catechism of Pope Pius X. has the following useful hints for the devout assistance at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. To assist at Mass well and profitably two things are necessary:-

- (1) Modesty of person.
- (2) Devotion of heart.

I. Modesty of person consists especially in being modestly dressed, in observing silence and recollection, and as far as possible to remain kneeling during the Mass except at certain times, for instance, during the two Gospels, which are heard standing.

II. The best way to practice true devotion is the following:-

1. From the very beginning to unite our intention with that of the priest, offering the Holy Sacrifice to God for the ends for which it was instituted.
2. To accompany the priest in each prayer and action of the sacrifice.
3. To meditate on the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, and to heartily detest our sins, which have been the cause of them.
4. To go to Communion, or at least make a spiritual communion when the priest communicates. A spiritual communion is a great desire to be united sacramentally with Jesus Christ, saying for example, "My Lord Jesus Christ I desire with my whole heart to be united with Thee now and for ever," and making the same acts that are to be made before and after sacramental Communion.

PART II.—THE OBLIGATION OF HEARING MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS.

The Church has always highly valued the holy sacrifice of the Mass, and in her anxiety that her children should not be deprived of its great fruits has laid down a special Commandment on this matter. The first Commandment of the Church obliges us to hear Mass on all Sundays and holidays of obligation. It will not be out of place to give some instructions here on this Commandment.

I. WE MUST HEAR ONE MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS.

We must be present at one Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation. No other church devotion, such as Vespers, Benediction, or an evening sermon, can be substituted for the Mass. The Mass we are bound to hear need not be a High Mass or a Mass with a sermon. At the same time it is advisable that Catholics, especially those whose knowledge of their religion is imperfect, should make a point of hearing sermons and instructions sometimes, in order to get a better idea of their holy religion.

II. WE MUST HEAR THE WHOLE OF MASS.

(A) It is a mortal sin to miss the whole of Mass through our own fault on Sundays and holidays.

(B) But not only is it a mortal sin to miss the whole of Mass, it is also a mortal sin to miss through our own fault a considerable portion of the Mass. One-third of the whole Mass or even a smaller part of the middle of the Mass would be regarded as a considerable portion of the Mass. Let us take a few practical cases. A person does not satisfy the obligation of hearing Mass in the following cases:

1. He arrives after the Offertory.
2. He is absent from the end of the Preface until the end of the Consecration.
3. He is absent from before the Consecration until the priest says the Pater Noster.

However, if through sickness or some other reason a person has to leave the church just before the Consecration and returns immediately after it, he may still be regarded as one of the congregation, and he has fulfilled his obligation of hearing Mass.

If a person misses a considerable portion of the Mass what is he to do? Of course the best thing would be to hear the whole of another Mass later on in the day. However, he is not strictly bound to do so.

(a) Suppose he is late for the first Mass and arrives some time before the Consecration, at the Sanctus for instance. Strictly speaking he is only bound to hear up to the Sanctus in a later Mass.

(b) But suppose he arrives at the first Mass, when the Consecration is over, would it suffice to hear up to the end of the Consecration in a later Mass? Some theologians consider that he would satisfy his obligation, but the commoner opinion by far holds that the Consecration and Communion must be in the same Mass.

(c) Let us take another case. A person arrives at the church and finds two priests saying Mass. One is already at the Sanctus and the other has only just begun. The person does not fulfil his obligations by hearing up to the Sanctus in the Mass which has just begun and by hearing at the same time from the Sanctus to the end of the other Mass.

(C) It is a venial sin to voluntarily and culpably miss even a small portion of the Mass. The last Gospel, however, is not included, because the Mass ends when the priest says "*Ite missa est*," just before the last Gospel. This does not mean that there should be a general rush for the door when the priest begins the last Gospel.

III. WE MUST BE BODILY PRESENT.

A person must be bodily present at Mass. In other words he must be so placed that he could be considered part of the congregation and be associated with it in worship. He must be able to follow the Mass, either by seeing or hearing, or watching the actions of the rest of the congregation. Hence he fulfils his obligation if he is in a corner of the church where he cannot see the altar, or if he stands outside the door of the church, or if he hears Mass in the sacristy or some room adjoining the church.

IV. ATTENTION AND DEVOTION AT MASS NECESSARY.

We must be attentive during Mass, that is, we must in some way advert to the fact that Mass is being celebrated and we must abstain from any occupation that would exclude this attention. For instance, those who read novels or profane books during Mass, those who sleep soundly during a considerable portion of the Mass, those who hold long and earnest conversations during the greater part of the Holy Sacrifice—such persons do not fulfil the obligation of hearing Mass. However, the following satisfy their obligation:-

1. The organist and members of a choir if there is music during the sacrifice of the Mass.
2. Those who collect for the church during Mass.
3. Those who go to confession while Mass is celebrated.
4. Mass-servers, even though they have to go to the sacristy from time to time.

The Church does not demand too much from us in saying that we should be attentive during Mass. We fulfil our obligation if we have the intention of joining in the Holy Sacrifice, even though we attend to what is going on in a drowsy manner or allow ourselves to be willfully distracted. But we should not be content with the mere fulfilling of the obligation. Considering the great holiness of this august sacrifice, no degree of interior piety is too great. Hence we should try to assist at it with the greatest possible devotion, and use every means towards that end. Some prefer to use the missal or their prayer-books, others prefer to say the beads or to spend the time in mental prayer, meditating on the Passion of Our Saviour. But whatever method we use we should all aim at assisting at this greatest act of our religion as well as we can. The measure of graces and blessings, given us during Mass depends to a great extent on our own efforts and co-operation.

V. THE PLACE WHERE MASS MAY BE HEARD.

Mass may be heard on Sundays and holidays in the following places:-

1. In any public church.
2. In the oratories of religious, of colleges, of military barracks, of prisons, of hospitals, and in the private oratories

of Bishops and Cardinals.

The obligation is not fulfilled by hearing it in a strictly private oratory, except for certain persons who have this privilege. However, many theologians think that in Ireland, on account of a long-standing custom, a person fulfils his obligation by hearing Mass even in a strictly private oratory.

VI. WHO ARE OBLIGED TO HEAR MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS.

All who have attained the use of reason, unless excused by a good reason, are bound to hear Mass on Sundays and holy days. Children are considered to reach the use of reason at the age of seven; they are then quite capable of realizing that something very holy and to the glory of God is taking place when Mass is celebrated. Thus if those who have attained the use of reason knowingly and willingly miss Mass through their own fault, they commit a grievous sin. None of the following reasons for remaining away from Mass will be regarded as sufficient: The weather was so fine that I went for a ride on my bicycle and thus missed Mass. I was very sleepy and found it hard to get up for Mass. The weather was very cold. Under some circumstances this last reason might be sufficient, for instance, in the case of delicate persons or weak children, or children who have neither boots or stockings.

VII. REASONS EXCUSING US FROM HEARING MASS.

The following, may be regarded as sufficient reasons for staying away from Mass:-

1. Sickness or delicate health, especially in bad weather.

2. A long distance from the church. In this matter it would be very difficult to lay down a strict rule, because what would be a short distance for some might be regarded as a long distance for others. However, this is a safe rule: a walk of three miles each way on good roads and in fine weather (or a walk of six miles altogether), would be sufficient to excuse even people in good health from attending Mass.

3. Any business which is urgent and will not admit of delay or interruption, may be continued with an easy conscience, even at the price of missing Mass. For instance, a doctor may visit a patient during the time of Mass if the case is urgent; a fireman may labour on, undisturbed, at his work of rescue, even if it keeps him away from Mass. The duty of looking after the sick or of looking after young children. would also be a sufficient reason for staying away from Mass.

However, servants and others, if constantly hindered by their duties or by distance from hearing Mass on Sundays, are strongly advised to try and get another residence where they may more easily practice the duties of their religion.

4. Another safe rule is this: no one is obliged to take measures of an exceptional kind in order to fulfil their duty of hearing Mass. For instance, we are not obliged to take a journey of some miles by train in order to hear Mass on Sundays or holy days.

If there is doubt about the sufficiency of the excuse, it would be well to seek the counsel of a priest or of some well-instructed and good-living Catholic.

So far I have spoken only of strict duty, and have endeavoured to explain what a Catholic is bound to do under pain of mortal sin. But the principle guiding our lives should be one of generosity towards God, and we should not be content with merely doing what we are strictly bound to do. As a matter of fact, many good Catholics go far beyond the limits of strict obligation in the matter of attending Mass. Some rise early, not only on Sundays but on week-days as well, and walk long miles in order to secure for themselves the great privilege of being present at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Even if Mass can be omitted without sin, its constant omission has very serious effects on an individual. Through living constantly without the aid of the holy sacrifice people become careless and indifferent in religious matters. In this way their faith becomes cold, and they may finally give-up the practice of their holy religion.
