

# MY MIND STILL WANDERS

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My Mind Still Wanders, Father. . . .

It does, eh? I told you once not to brag about it,\* though actually it is a sort of mental activity. What is it this time? Still, Mrs. O'Brien's hat?

No, I've got her (and it was Mrs. Williams', by the way) pretty well under control. I have solved the problem of women's hats so well that instead of distracting me during Mass, they make me think of the Mass wherever and whenever I see them. Like on the subway, for instance. A feather gets in my eye, or some hat that's more than ordinarily inadequate as headgear catches my attention, and immediately I say, Lord have mercy on us. That makes me think of the Kyrie Eleison in the Mass and then I remember that there's a Mass going on somewhere in the world and I immediately make the intention of sharing in the offering of that Mass. Naturally then I ask myself if what I am doing at the moment is being done well enough to offer it in the Mass. No, it's not hats, God bless both them and the ladies under them. Right now, I seem to have fallen a victim to uniform distractions.

Uniform distractions? I've studied a good bit of moral theology, but . . .

You see, it's this way. With so many people in uniform nowadays, and so many different kinds of uniforms, I got interested in the subject and bought me a book that explained all about insignia and stripes and bars and gold braid and the like. I found out what a gold bar means and a silver bar and a gold leaf and a silver leaf and all the different insignia of the different branches of service. Then it becomes sort of a game. You try to recognise every one you see. And do you know where I've been seeing most of them? You're right. At Mass. It must be a holy army we have. The only Major-General I've ever seen, I saw at Mass a few weeks ago. It's gotten so bad that every time I see a uniform walking up the aisle, I try to identify the service and the rank, and when I should be praying, my mind goes on: Cavalry? No. Engineers? No. Anti-aircraft? No, until I get it. If I don't get it, I'm tormented all through Mass, and I'm just waiting until I get home to look up the book. And now, they've added all those Women's Auxiliaries. Tell me, Father, is it just me, or are all people that way? I've tried to follow your former suggestions, following especially the Offertory, the Consecration, the Pater Noster, the Communion and then that last prayer, the highlights, you called them. But it looks as though I need more highlights. Help me out?

Maybe. Did you ever hear of the Alcoholics Anonymous?

The group of former heavy drinkers who try to help other heavy drinkers become former heavy drinkers?

That's them. Well, they have a rule they give to all who are sincerely trying to give up drinking. It's this: Stay dry only for twenty-four hours. Then for another twenty-four hours. Then for another twenty-four hours. And so on. I wonder if we couldn't apply that idea to your wandering mind. Could you possibly keep your mind on the Mass for five minutes?

I think I could.

Good. Well, let's see if there's any sort of a call to Attention occurring at five minute intervals during the Mass. Can you think of any?

You mean some phrase running through the Mass that seems to say, "Snap out of it and pay attention now for the next five minutes"?

That's what I mean.

Couldn't be Dominus Vobiscum, could it?

## DOMINUS VOBISCUM

Could be and is. You know, now that yours is a military problem, I think we've found a military solution. Dominus Vobiscum really is something like 'Ten-shun.' Or better still, it's a salute and you return the salute and stand at attention until the end of the Mass gives you the At Ease.

It's not too far-fetched either. The Dominus Vobiscum really is a salute, the salute of the priest to you. It's the  
\* *This refers to a previous pamphlet, "My Mind Wanders," by the same author.*

grandest salute in the world or, if you want, the grandest greeting. If you ever sat in an Irish cottage, you would have heard every new arrival greet the family with a "God bless all here." And "all here" would answer, "And you, too, kindly sir." I don't know if the Irish took that from the Mass, but it's a pretty good translation of the Dominus Vobiscum and its answer, Et cum spiritu tuo. Several times in the Mass, the priest turns to you, opens his arms wide and says, "God be with you." I think I can speak for all priests when I say that we put our heart and soul into that gesture and that greeting. I'd really like to embrace the whole gathering and by that embrace bring them closer to Christ in the Mass. With all my heart and soul I mean that "God be with you " With all my heart and soul I call down God's blessing and God's grace and God's love on you.

I know, too, that it's not an empty word. I know that it's through me as a priest that the Grace of God does flow into you. It's a meaningful gesture I use—hands outstretched so that the Grace of God may pour from my priestly hands into your heart.

### THE SAME TO YOU

It would be nice to think that every Catholic at Mass answers that greeting with all the fervour of his heart and soul. The altar boy answers for you, "Et cum spiritu tuo." It means "and with your spirit" or simply "and, with you too, Father," or "God bless you too, Father." It's a grand prayer for the priest. I have offered Mass often where the whole congregation answered the prayers of the Mass, and I can tell you it did my heart good to hear several hundred people shout their answer to my greeting. I know I carried on the Mass with a greater realisation than ever that we are one in the offering of the Mass, priest and people. There's a certain compelling warmth that flows out of a congregation that sincerely answers your greeting.

But I couldn't be the only one in Church to answer the prayer, could I?

No, I'm not suggesting that, but I do think that once you know what that prayer means, you'll be waiting for it, watching for it and putting your heart into your silent answer. You surely know that we priests need your prayers, your support, your backing. Backing isn't the right word. It really should be your "surrounding." That's the Latin phrase, anyhow, though it sounds tough in English. You are the "circumstantes"—those who stand around, those who surround priest and Altar in a holy circle. After all, we have to preach the full Christ—and we can't preach Christ complete unless we're trying our best to live Christ complete, to be really other Christs. It's through us that Christ is poured out on you, and for your own sakes you ought to pray that we be simply overflowing with Christ. We hold Christ in our hands. Our whisper brings Him into your midst, into your "surrounding," and you ought to pray that our breath be pure and our hands be spotless. Saintry priests, saintly people. We are priests for you. Think of all that at your Dominus Vobiscum and your mind won't wander. If you miss a single Dominus Vobiscum and its answer, you're missing an opportunity to sanctify a priest. You're failing all of us priests—and failing us, you're failing all the people, too.

That's kinda strong, Father.

Well, you asked for strong medicine, and those hats seem to have a strong grip on you . .

Not hats, please, Father. I've got them conquered. Uniforms.

All right, uniforms. That brings us back to our military note the "Tenshun" note of the Dominus Vobiscum . . . Oh, but just a minute, I've thought of something else. What you need is a tin helmet.

What I sometimes need Is a good clout on the head.

### A TIN HELMET

Perhaps, but seriously, the Church does provide a sort of helmet against distractions at Mass. You've seen a priest vest, haven't you? Then you've seen him put on the amice, that broad piece of linen that he drops over his shoulders, tucks into his collar and ties around him? I suppose originally it was a hat of sorts. The word "amictus" means "bound," and maybe it refers to the band around the head that Romans wore in place of hats. At any rate, it later developed into a head covering. The monks still wear it as a cowl. European priests often have a cowl on their cloaks, to slip over their hats in case of rain. The ladies adopted it on their raincoats a few years ago.

Now who's talking about ladies' hats?

Stop your nonsense and listen to me. Did you ever read the prayer the priest says as he puts on the amice? I thought not. Then here it is, "Lord, place on my head a helmet of salvation to ward off the attacks of the devil." Modernise the helmet and you've got a tin helmet as a protection against the aerial bombardment of distractions. At least that's what the prayer means in a practical way to me when I say it every morning

Do you mean to say a priest's mind wanders at Mass, too?

Of course it does, unless he so saturates his mind with a knowledge of the Mass and thoughts of the Mass that they crowd out all other thoughts. Now, soldier, put on that tin helmet and let's get going to the call to attention that occurs so frequently in the Mass.

Let's keep in mind that besides being a greeting and a salute, the *Dominus Vobiscum* really is a pedagogical way of saying, "Come on, pay attention now. There's something important coming up, something you just can't miss." Could you tell me offhand when the *Dominus Vobiscum* occurs in the Mass?

#### NINE SALUTES

Sure. There's one at the end of the Prayers at the foot of the Altar. There's another after the Gloria or after the Kyrie, if there is no Gloria, then another at the beginning of the Gospel. That's three isn't it?

Good. I can see how doing the children's homework helps your mathematics.

Thanks, Padre. Then there's a fourth after the Credo, or after the Gospel. There's a fifth to snap us to attention for the Preface. Let's see, is there one during the Canon? You're doing the counting.

Well, before the consecration, no. After the consecration . . . no, nothing during the canon, but there's one or something like one after the priest breaks the Host. Can we count that in? "*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum?*"

I think we can.

Well, that makes six. The seventh is after the Communion prayer. There's one more just before the Blessing. That's eight, and the last and ninth at the beginning of the Last Gospel. Pretty good, eh? But, say, Father, you've got something there. Nine in all in a Mass that doesn't take more than a half hour—at the rate of one every three minutes. I'd have to be an awful scatterbrain not to be able to concentrate for those short intervals. And then I suppose even if I did start moping, unless I went completely asleep, I'd hear the next *Dominus Vobiscum* and I'd come to again. It ought to work.

It will work unless you're a mental sluggard.

But maybe I am. What is it?

A sluggard—a mental lazybones; a man with a mind as lively as a cold pancake.

We'll skip that. Go on with what you were going to say.

#### ATTENTION

Take the first *Dominus Vobiscum*. It comes just as the priest is about to mount the Altar after the prayers at the foot of the steps. He's really going to start the Mass. The prayers he has been saying used to be part of his private preparation though they are grand prayers, too. "I will go unto the Altar of God, of God Who gives joy to my youth."

Whoa up, Father. I've often wondered about that. Why the joy to my youth? Are us old fellows left out completely—fellows like me, say—and you?

No, you old fellows are not left out. A man's youth is the period of growth, isn't it? You're young as long as you're still growing, until you reach your prime. You're still young until you start going down hill and your legs give out and you can't work as hard as you used to. Right?

Guess I was born old . . .

But spiritually, is there any such thing as growing old? I don't like that phrase "growing old in the service of the Lord." We're all, as long as we keep in the state of Grace, growing young. We're continually building up, developing the Life of Christ in us with the food of the Sacraments and the exercise of all the virtues. If we are sincerely trying to serve God, we can't grow old. There's no period of decline. We reach our prime and then we go on being perpetually young in heaven. You don't think of Our Lady as two thousand years old, do you? You don't think of the Little Flower as eighty years old, do you? So buck up, youngster, the joy of God is for you, too. But don't get me started on every

little prayer in the Mass, or we'd never finish. You've got the Confiteor, for instance, in those prayers at the foot of the Altar, all of us putting ourselves, as it were, in the dock before the whole court of heaven, before God and the Blessed Mother and all the Angels and all the Saints and, with them looking on, we say very simply that we are sinners. Then we turn to them all and we say, "Pray for me to the Lord, our God."

They will, all of them, and just when you are liable to lose yourself in the pleasant picture of all heaven down on its knees before the throne of God for you, the priest shouts out "Dominus Vobiscum," the Lord be with you. The Lord is with you. So come on now and let's offer Mass together. If you need special help to keep your mind on the Mass, all those people in heaven will get it for you. Just to be sure they will, read the two little prayers the priest says as he walks up the steps and kisses the Altar.

"Take away from us, O Lord, all our sins, that pure of heart and mind we may enter into the Holy of Holies." I've told you before that we ought to be trying to be as spotless as Christ, if we want to offer Mass with Christ.

And the next little prayer, as the priest kisses the Altar: "We beg Thee, O Lord, by the merits of the saints whose relics are here and of all the saints, graciously to pardon all my sins." If you memorise those prayers and say them with the priest, your mind won't wander.

### THEME SONG

Did you ever watch an orchestra leader snap his musicians to attention just as they are about to start the entry march, say at a political gathering. They're going to play the theme song of the hopeful candidate. The orchestra strikes up, the audience rises and they all sing together "Happy Days Are Here Again," or "The Sidewalks of New York," or "Maryland, my Maryland." It's the same thing when the bridal procession starts, the organist's hands fall on the keys, the people rise and the theme song of the wedding march swells through the church.

Well, there's your Introit at Mass, the first prayer the priest reads over at the side of the Altar. It really was and still is a processional hymn. The people used to sing it while the priests were entering the church. Too bad we have given up the custom of singing it together. The least we can do is get the singing spirit of it and the theme song idea. The Introit does give the key of the Mass. It is the theme song of the Mass and for that matter the whole day. Your little bride keeps humming the wedding march to herself all day long. The followers of a political candidate are always whistling their theme song. I'll bet you can't tell me now what was the theme song of this morning's Mass.

No bet, Father. That's a sure thing.

But look, wouldn't it help you to concentrate on the Mass if you were to look for some phrase in the Introit that would stay with you all day long? Could you tell me the theme song of the Easter Mass, for example?

No again, Father. I'm sorry.

It's one of the most inspiring of the whole liturgy, "I have arisen and am still with you." What a battle song! I can imagine the Apostles going through life with that song in their hearts. In discouragement and fear and work and doubt, "I have arisen and am still with you." When the whips of their enemies were whistling about their bared backs, when the executioner's axe was about to fall, when the hammer poised above the first nail made crucifixion a reality, "I have arisen and I am still with you."

That's O.K. for Easter, Father, but we're just in the beginning of Lent.

Bright boy. Take a look at your Lenten Missal. In the Introit for the first Sunday of Lent you have these phrases from God's own lips, "He shall call upon Me and I shall hear him. . . . He that dwells in the aid of the Most High shall abide under the protection of the God of heaven." Appropriate? On the second Sunday of Lent, "Deliver us, O God of Israel, from all our troubles. . . . In Thee, O God, I have put my trust; let me not be disappointed." On the beam? You know, it's an amazing thing, once you get this theme song idea of the Introit, you'll be startled at the aptness of the theme-phrases you can find.

But the main point is this: start noticing them. Once in a while during the day, ask yourself what you remember from the morning's Mass. You'll have to give yourself a zero quite often in the beginning, but I'll guarantee that after a while you'll be following the Mass more closely and your mind won't wander so much.

Guarantee, eh? You wouldn't be using personal experience?

## LORD HAVE MERCY ON US

I certainly would be. Now your Introit doesn't take a minute. The Kyrie which follows takes even less. The Gloria not much longer. That makes our first period of concentration not more than three minutes. Your mind capable of that much diligent application to a job in hand?

Yes, I think so, especially since I've already come to love the Kyrie. It's so simple and profound, isn't it? The whole Church praying the prayer of the publican, "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

You're learning. Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy on us. Christe eleison, Christ have mercy on us. Son of David, have mercy on us. God knows, it's a grand prayer for our days, for all days for that matter. It must have been an inspiring thing when all the Church answered the priest in that litany!

Litany?

Yes, I thought you knew that the Kyrie was once the beginning of a long litany. If you've ever attended the ordination of a priest, or the consecration of a Bishop, or the coronation of a Pope, you've taken part in that Litany. When Pius XII was crowned a few years ago, those who were assisting the Pope walked in procession down the steps in front of the main Altar that leads to the tombs of the Popes. (Pius XI's body had travelled those steps for the last time just a few weeks before) . There over the spot where rests the body of the first Peter, they started the Litany. It sounded rather ragged at first, but then the forty thousand people in the Church—Cardinals and Bishops and nobles and government representatives and peasants and priests and nuns—all took up the responses, Lord have Mercy on us . . . Christ have Mercy on us . . . Pray for us . . . Pray for us. It became, what really it always should be, the united prayer of the whole Church.

It's easy to keep your mind on such a prayer, and just as easy to be alive to the strong, powerful, joyful Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Glory be to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of Good Will. Some day, we'll go through the Gloria, phrase by phrase. The angels' song over Bethlehem. The meaning of the peace of Christ, a peace "that has no earthly reason." The perfect unselfishness of adoration in the phrase, "We give Thee thanks for Thy Great Glory." The militant enthusiasm, the almost cheering- section insistence on "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we glorify Thee." You can meditate on that prayer the next time you take a ride in the subway. You'll get more out of it than out of memorising subway ads., or ruining your eyes on a newspaper. All right, soldier, At Ease.

## AT EASE

But that's just the first three minutes of the Mass. You're not going to stop now, are you?

No, but still there is an At Ease command there. Can you pick it out?

'Fraid not, Father.

How about the sign of the Cross at the end of the Gloria? Actually, there is a relief of tension in it. The Gloria is such a keen prayer, such an intense prayer that it is just a trifle exhausting. The priest has been standing at attention all through it and now the movement of the sign of the Cross, the kissing of the Altar, the turning around to face the people, there you have your At Ease. But get this, it's a very short At Ease and doesn't give you permission to study Mrs. Murphy's . . .

Please . . .

Army uniform. For the priest snaps you right back to attention with the second Dominus Vobiscum of the Mass. And he follows it with an order, Oremus, Let us pray. That's an order and an invitation. And by the way, did you ever notice that at a Solemn Mass, we always come to our feet when the priest sings Dominus Vobiscum? You see, that idea of coming to attention has a liturgical foundation.

## LET US PRAY

But to come back to the Let us pray, and the prayer of the day. It's frequently called the Collect, I suppose, because it used to be a sort of collection of all the things people should want to pray for on a particular day. If you follow your missal, it's easy. You read with the priest and you put a lot of energy into it, because you're not praying for yourself alone, you're praying for and with the whole Church. If you're not following your missal for some reason or other, you can at least mentally unite yourself with the prayers of the Church, think of all the needs of the Church today, think of

all who are in need of prayer and collect them all into a prayer that Christ can carry to His heavenly Father. For, remember, it's all Through Christ Our Lord. "If you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it to you." Through Christ Our Lord, so that He may wash the specks and the dirt and the dust off our prayers before presenting them to God. Through Christ Our Lord, so that He may wrap our prayers in His own blood and His own suffering to make them pleasing to His Father. Through Christ Our Lord, so that we may use the very lips of Christ to speak our petitions, so that our prayers really become His Prayers. Amen to all that?

I should say so. You make me feel like shouting Amen at the end of the prayer.

#### THE LESSON

All right. Now come the Orders of the Day. You've often seen that representation of the Mass in the form of an arch, a small arch from the prayers at the foot of the Altar to the Credo, a large arch from the Offertory to the end of Mass? Well, we've just finished the up side of the small arch. "We speak to God" in the Introit, the Kyrie, the Gloria, the prayer. Now we start the down side of the arch. God speaks to us in the Epistle, in the Gospel, in the sermon. They are His Orders of the Day. And you remain at attention as you listen to the orders.

Have you ever closely watched the hands of the priest in different parts of the Mass? For the Dominus Vobiscum, they are open in greeting or open to give you Christ. During the prayer they are open in supplication. If you ever had even one lesson in elocution, you know that outstretched hands are begging hands. Remember the Old Testament story—Moses standing on the mountain with hands outstretched in prayer while the army fought below? As long as he held his hands outstretched, his army was successful. As soon as he let his arms drop, the army was driven back. Poor Moses didn't know what to do. It's quite a penance to keep your hands outstretched for a long time. Finally, he got two of his friends to hold his arms up for him. Not a bad thought for the Mass. During the prayer, you are supposed to be holding up the arms of the priest—and once again, let's be strong—in the prayer that is supposed to be the prayer of the whole Church you're failing the priest, you're failing the Church, you're failing Christ, if you let . . .

Soldiers' uniforms . . .

Soldiers' uniforms distract you from the important task of supporting the arms of the priest in prayer. For the epistle, or lesson, you notice he drops his hands down to the book. I wonder why?

Maybe, like Moses, he's getting tired of holding them up?

Or maybe, unlike Moses, he has "supporters" or "surrounders" who are more interested in chevrons or bars than in the job they have to do? An army officer holds the chart in his hands, when reading orders of the day, doesn't he! In olden times when a letter from Paul arrived for one of the churches, the priest held the letter in his hands to read it to the people. Well, that's what the priest is doing at this part of the Mass. He's reading you a small part of one of Paul's letters, or Peter's or James' or John's, or some worthwhile lesson from the Old Testament. His hands on the book say to you: "Pay attention, now. This is good for you." Read the lesson with him in your Missal and try to understand it. That's not always easy, for St. Paul had a very condensed, concentrated style. He could say an awful lot in a few words. He wrote the language of the day, probably put into his letters now and then a little bit of mild slang, so that he's hard reading today.

I've found that out, Father.

You have? And having found that out, have you ever thought of studying your Mass a bit the night before so as to be sure to understand it in the morning?

Well, I've thought of it.

Do it some time. It works wonders. But, what I wanted to say is this: Even though you don't understand the whole lesson, couldn't you try to pick out a phrase or a sentence, or a few sentences that you could keep in mind during the day? What was this morning's epistle about?

Sorry, Father, I've forgotten, but to-morrow . . .

To-morrow I hope I meet you somewhere and I'll ask you about the Introit and the Epistle and the Gospel, and the next day and the next day and the next day, and I'll bet...

Sorry, Father, I'm not a betting man.

## AGAIN AT EASE

Fortunately. Anyhow that closes our second period of Attention. How long is it? Not much more than a few minutes. That mighty mind of yours should be able to stay put that long. Now another At Ease. Actually, that's the mind of the Church. The Epistle is followed by a Gradual or a Tract and this used to be sung while the people sat quietly and thought over the lesson they had just listened to. A little bit of morning meditation in the Mass, if you will. And notice the moving around with this At Ease, too. The book is carried over to the other side of the Altar. The priest moves over after it, stopping at the centre of the Altar to say a few little prayers. They're good ones, too:

"Cleanse my heart and my lips, O Almighty God as you cleansed the lips of the prophet Isaias with a burning coal. In your loving kindness so purify me that I may worthily proclaim your Holy Gospel. Through Christ Our Lord."

That purifying with a burning coal seems rather harsh at first, but then when you were young, didn't you ever get your mouth washed out with soap for saying naughty words? Certainly it gives us some idea of the purity of lips and heart that should be the priest's if he is going to preach the Gospel of Christ. And the laity's too, for that matter, since every Catholic is supposed to preach, at least by example, the Gospel of Christ. There's one other little prayer:

"May the Lord be in my heart and on my lips that I may worthily and effectively preach His Gospel." That's a prayer for a lifetime.

It's a grand prayer, isn't it, Father?

## GENERAL ORDERS

Yes, and one that leads us right into the Gospel of the day. There's another call to Attention as the priest sings out *Dominus Vobiscum*. This time it's very easy to carry out the comparison of soldiers standing to attention for the reading of orders. The general orders of any Catholic are: Be like Christ. As you make the sign of the Cross on forehead, lips and breast, you give your whole-hearted obedience to those general orders. Christ in your mind. Christ on your lips. Christ in your heart. Christ in thought and word and desire and deed. Or to put it another way, you are dramatically reminded at the beginning of the Gospel that you, as a good soldier of Christ, must try to make every thought of your mind worthy of the mind of Christ, every word that passes your lips worthy of the sacred lips of Christ bruised on Calvary, every love and desire and ambition of your heart worthy of the Sacred Heart of Christ, every action of every day of your life worthy of the Captain whose cross is your only insignia. A rather high ideal in your general orders. Is it any wonder that to help you live such an ideal, the priest prays, *Dominus Vobiscum*. May the Lord be with you.

Pretty hard ideal, too, isn't it, Father?

Of course, but you don't expect a soldier's life to be easy, do you? Yet, it's not too hard. Of course, you'll never reach the ideal. You'll keep struggling and striving after it every day of your life, until Christ decides you're enough like Him to be recognised by St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.

How's Peter's eyesight?

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

Rather keen, I'm afraid. He was a fisherman, and professional fishermen have pretty good eyes. He spent three years at Our Lord's side, so that even though he was rather slow in recognising Our Lord once, he'll insist on seeing a pretty fair picture of Christ in you before he lets you into Christ's eternal home. But don't let that worry you. In the Gospels of the daily Mass throughout the year you have a pretty complete account of the life of Christ, a gradual portrayal of the character of Christ. If you try to do the whole thing in one lump, it's pretty tough, almost impossible. But suppose you look on the daily gospel as Orders of the Day. There you have usually one incident in the life of Christ, one quality, one virtue of Christ described in action, not a naked virtue, but Christ being patient in practical circumstances, Christ being kind, Christ actually forgiving a particular individual, Christ praying. Christ in sorrow, Christ in disappointment. You could run down the whole list of virtues, and day by day, as you listen to the Orders of the Day in the Gospel of the Mass, you hear Christ saying, "Today, be like me in cheerfulness, or patience," or whatever it may be.

Start with your Lenten Gospels. They are among the best of the entire year. Do you really want to be sincere about

it? You do? Then, make up your mind that you'll offer Mass every day during Lent. Every night, take your Missal. Read over the Gospel of the next day's Mass. Study it. Think over it. Picture the whole scene very vividly before your mind. Bring Christ to life for yourself, and then ask yourself, what practical lesson is there in this Gospel for me tomorrow? In the Gospel of Ash Wednesday, for example, how about drawing the lesson of cheerful penance? Here's what Our Lord says: "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that you appear not to men to fast, but to your Father who is in secret." That's practical, isn't it?

But I do comb my hair and wash my face during Lent.

Wise guy. It means more than that. If you're giving up cigarettes for Lent, don't take it out on your fellow workers or, worse still, on your family. Don't tell people all the hard things you're doing, so that they'll think, "Isn't he a great Catholic?" Does that hit home?

Can't I even groan, when Mary serves fish three times a week?

"When you fast, be not like hypocrites, sad." There's your answer, as you'll find answers to so many problems in the Orders of the Day in the Gospel of the Day. Do this for a whole year, and you'll know Christ much better. More than that, you'll be much more like Him. You're forgetting about your uniforms by this time, I hope.

Nope, I'm deliberately thinking of them. 'Fraid I'm ahead of you, Padre. I'm thinking of uniforms and that phrase of St. Paul's, "Put ye on Christ." That's my uniform and that's what every Gospel from now on will keep shouting at me.

You're doing well, but I sincerely hope that you won't get ladies' hats and uniforms mixed up. Never mind, never mind, let's keep going. So far we've covered the Dominus Vobiscum before the Introit, before the Collect and Epistle, before the Gospel. And that, by the way, closes the preparatory arch of the Mass, the "We speak to God, God speaks to us" part.

How about the sermon?

I forgot. Yes, the sermon in the Sunday Mass is part of the down sweep of the Arch. God speaks to us through the lips of the priest. And think of this: God can speak to you in the language of a priest who may not be a brilliant writer or a brilliant orator. God may even speak to you through the words of a poorly prepared sermon.

#### WE OFFER

Now, there shouldn't be any half measures about the next Dominus Vobiscum or about your answer to it. This is one part of the Mass where you must be on your toes—the offering to God in the hands of the priest of the bread and wine that are to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Did I ever remark that there's something psychologically wrong about our present "manner of assisting at Mass?" Look. All through the preparatory prayers from the foot of the Altar to the end of the Gospel or Credo, we kneel or stand. Now, with the Mass actually beginning, now that we are to offer the Holy Sacrifice, we suddenly sit down, almost as though it were a rest period, a time of relaxation, an extended At Ease, rather than a big, tense, dramatic, important part of the Mass.

You wouldn't want me to be the only one in church standing or kneeling for the Offertory, would you?

I'm not so sure that I wouldn't. Then, at least, some people would ask you why you're "peculiar," and you would have a chance to explain the importance and meaning of the Offertory. But, kneeling or sitting or standing, I'd want you to be on your toes for this part of the Mass. Put aside your Missal now (you ought to have the Offertory prayers memorised) and follow every gesture the priest makes. Watch him as he puts the chalice to one side and takes up the paten with the white Host resting on it. That's a piece of bread he's offering, a piece of bread that's going to become Christ. Say the prayer with the priest, "Accept, O Holy Father, this spotless Host," and as you say the prayer, remember to have something of your own to offer every day at Mass. Put yourself, your life, your work, your troubles, all of you, on the paten to offer to God with the Host. Just a moment ago, I said the bread that is to become Christ. Could we add also, offer to God the you that is to become Christ?

#### THE GRAPE OF THE VINE

No, don't interrupt for a moment. Follow the priest as he takes the Chalice and moves to the side of the Altar. He takes the cruet, pours in the wine, the wine that is to become the Blood of Christ. The priest says no prayer as he pours. It takes only a moment, but lest your mind wander in that moment, you might think back to the night when

Christ Himself filled the Chalice, and you might think of all the holy hands of holy priests, confessors and doctors and martyrs who, day by day, hour by hour, from the earliest days of Christianity, have filled the Chalice with the wine that was to become the Blood of Christ. You might think of all the millions of people who like yourself have watched the wine flowing into the Chalice, eager as you are eager, to offer it to God. You might think of all the churches and all the chapels throughout the world, all the camps and all the battle stations, in the jungle, behind the battle line, in the snows of Alaska, all the hospitals and all the persons—for wherever man is or goes there, too, go Christ and the priests of Christ. And all these Masses are one Mass, the unending Sacrifice of Calvary.

The main thing, however, at this point of the Mass is the offering. You don't want to be a mere spectator. You don't want to be just "hearing Mass." You don't want to be just "present at Mass." Even in talking about Mass, I'd suggest that you always try to use the phrase "offer Mass." With Christ and the priest and the whole Catholic world, you, too, are offering to God the bread and wine that will soon be Christ.

### IT'S OUR MASS

Get the universal idea of the Mass. It's not the priest's private prayer. It's not your private prayer. It's the offering of the whole Church. As you offer the bread you say,

"for all the Christian Faithful, both living and dead, that it may help both them and thee to gain eternal life." When you offer the wine, you say, "for our salvation and for that of the whole world." There's nothing small or selfish about that prayer.

Yet, if you want, it's highly selfish. If it's true that every time you offer Mass, you are offering Mass for the entire world, then it's equally true that every Mass that is offered anywhere in the world, at any time at all, is being offered also for you. All day long, all night long Christ is being offered up for you. Your work may be hard, your surroundings difficult, your troubles vexing. You may be lonely, discouraged, blue, sick, in pain or just feeling depressed by the monotony of your life. Yet all that is bearable in the strength of the Mass that is offered for you twenty-four hours of every day. All that is bearable if you think of Christ, Our High Priest, perpetually interceding for you, perpetually presenting Himself as an offering for you to His and Our heavenly Father. With the Grace of the Mass perpetually upon you, your life cannot be too hard.

Remember, too, that you, as a part of the Church, as a member of the Body of Christ, of the Complete Christ, have a right to offer every single Mass that is ever offered. Right now as we talk together, there is Mass being offered somewhere in the world. You can offer that Mass. You can say, with every priest in the world, "Accept, O Holy Father, this spotless Host," and with every priest in the world, "We offer Thee, O Lord, this Chalice of Salvation." That's part of the meaning of living the Mass, offering Mass all day long, consciously and deliberately recalling and recalling frequently that you are offering Mass around the clock. That will mean, of course, that you will always keep yourself in shape to offer Mass; and keeping in shape to offer Mass, means keeping close to Christ, keeping Christ-like, being Christ.

### LIVE THE MASS

Sometimes we talk about the futility of life, about the unimportance of this or that piece of work or kind of work. Tell me, is any life futile that is spent continually and perpetually doing the greatest thing that man can do—offering Mass with Christ? Or can any work, any word, any thought be unimportant if it can be offered at Mass, if it can be united with the Body and Blood of Christ and offered to God in the hands of Christ?

I've said that at the Offertory we must have something of our own to offer. That's weak. We must have everything of our own to offer. But don't let the offering stop with the Mass at which you are present. Offer everything you have to offer in every Mass you may offer, and that is every Mass throughout the world. This conversation can be offered in a Mass that's going on now—and, of course, that means that you and I have to try to make this conversation worthy of being offered with Christ. You can offer the work you do in Mass; you can offer your reading, your hours of leisure, your meals with the family at home, your prayers. It's a powerful motive for Christ-like living, living in such a way that everything you say or do or think will be worthy of being offered in the Mass. That, too, is living the Mass, making your whole life a living of the Mass

I've told you before that the little drop of water the priest puts into the Chalice can represent you. Believe that, believe it unto realisation, and you'll be trying to put as many drops as possible into as many Chalices as possible all day, every day.

### IT WORKS

One story was told to me of a Catholic lady who gained a practical understanding of this offering of herself in the Mass and in it found peace. Just before she went up for a serious operation, she was chatting with her husband and almost worrying him by her apparent unconcern. "Aren't you worried at all about this operation?" he finally asked.

"No," she replied very gently, "You see I know how serious it may be, but I'm not worried. Just before you came in, I was trying to unite myself with some Mass being offered somewhere in the world, and I told the Lord that, if He wants me to suffer, I'll put my suffering into the Chalice to be offered up with His Blood; if He wants my death, I offer my death in union with His; if He wishes me to live, then I drop my whole life into the Chalice and I know I can't do anything better with it than offer it to God through Christ and with Christ."

Another time during a retreat a man approached me just as I was going into the chapel for the last meditation of the retreat. He was worried. "You haven't kept your guarantee, Father," he said. I knew what he meant. I have, as you know, an almost blind faith in retreats, and at the start of every retreat I give, I guarantee that if the retreatants make the retreat earnestly, and sincerely, they will find somewhere in the retreat the specific help and grace they must need. Naturally, this man's remark worried me. "Honestly, Father," he went on, "I've done my best in this retreat. I came to find some new approach or some stronger motive against definite and constant temptations. I still feel just as weak as ever. I just haven't found what I need." All I could do was ask him to wait for me after the meditation, and then for the next half hour or so, I forgot all about him. As I was leaving the chapel later he came running up, all smiles. "I've got it, Father. I've got it. That last idea you gave about making every action worthy of being offered in a Mass actually going on. That's it. That was just for me. If the thought of constantly offering Mass and my actions in the Mass can't help me, then I must be hopeless, but I'm sure it's going to work."

We could go on and on and on and never exhaust the prayers of the Offertory or the thoughts they suggest. Say them day by day, memorise them, think over them and, as You follow the priest day by day through the offering of the bread and the wine, your mind won't be wandering. Your only complaint will be that the Mass moves so fast, too fast for all the thoughts crowding into your mind

How about another '*At Ease*', Father?

Getting weary?

No, but I'd like time to digest some of those thoughts.

You have a lifetime to do that, a lifetime of living the Mass. I don't know if I can find an *At Ease* for you in this part of the Mass. If anything, the movement of the Mass is speeding up as we reach a climax. It's almost like the Life of Our Lord Himself. It moved at a slow, rather uneventful pace throughout the years at Nazareth, then the pace suddenly became fast through the years of His Public Life. There seems to be a furious speed-up in the week before the passion, reaching its climax in all the events crowded into the very short space between the Last Supper and Our Lord's last sigh on Calvary.

### PRAY, BROTHERS

It's not hard to understand the speeding up of the movement of the Mass at this part. You have offered to God the bread and wine that is to become Christ, and you can hardly wait for the miracle that will bring Christ down to the Altar, the miracle that will make it possible for you to look on Christ and offer Christ Himself to God. Still if you insist on an *At Ease*, you have the moment when, with all the materials of the Sacrifice ready and waiting, the priest seems to hesitate a moment, before rushing on, turns around to his "surrounders" and begs them to pray that "my sacrifice and yours will be acceptable." It's almost as though he says, "Look now. This is not only my Sacrifice. It's yours, too. Offer it with me. Back me up while I offer it. Hold up my hands, while I offer it. Pray with me that God will find our sacrifice pleasing." That prayer comes back time and again from now on, and you can easily see why the priest needs your prayers. There's no fear that God will not find the offering of Christ acceptable. He accepted it two

thousand years ago, and He sealed the acceptance by the Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord. That's the reason we remind God more than once that we are offering this Sacrifice in memory of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension. No the constant prayer for acceptance has meaning for us, rather than for Christ. We pray that the Sacrifice be acceptable for us, that God will accept our union of ourselves with Christ, that God will accept the offering we make of ourselves and our work and our life with Christ. We have to pray hard for that, and our every prayer becomes a reminder for us to be sincere and generous in our offering. Have you noticed that at the Orate Fratres the priest turns all the way around?

Yes, I've noticed that, but I've never been able to figure out why. The Dominus Vobiscum turn is only a half turn, then back the same way. The Orate Fratres is a full turn around. Why?

I'm not sure, but I wonder if it couldn't be for somewhat the same reason that a speaker slowly turns his head to take in the whole audience when he wants to drive home a very impressive point. We are approaching a very impressive point of the Mass. The priest will not turn around for the next Dominus Vobiscum, so, it's almost as though he is making a slow, full appeal to all in the church to join in the prayer of acceptance, to come closer and really join the "circumstantes" as we enter the most solemn part of the Mass. And he seems to be satisfied, for when he faces the Altar again, he says a little prayer in silence, the Secret, which is only a carrying out of his invitation to all the people to pray that this Sacrifice may be acceptable.

### LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS

You'd think, then, that he would immediately hurry on to the consecration; but no—he's still anxious to marshal his "circumstantes" and he sings out another Dominus Vobiscum. You'll notice that it's a stronger, more vibrant Dominus Vobiscum than any so far. It's the most urgent in the Mass and the priest drives it home. "Lift up your hearts," he calls out to you. You'd almost think that were put into the Mass just for you. Lift up your hearts. Forget everything else. Forget about uniforms and hats and people and put your mind wholly on God and on the great mystery that is to take place before your eyes. And you answer, "We have them lifted up to the Lord." Then he invites you to join him in a hymn of thanksgiving. "Let us give thanks to the Lord, Our God." And you answer, "It is right and fitting."

But, Father, why a hymn of Thanksgiving here before the Consecration? Wouldn't it be more fitting after the Consecration or after the Mass?

The priest actually answers that question in the very beginning of the Preface. "It is certainly fitting and right, just and helpful to salvation that we should always and in all places give thanks to Thee, Holy Lord, Eternal Father, God of all power. . . ." At all times and in all places. We're too sparing of our thanks to God. We won't be, if we live the Mass, for the Mass is the Eucharist, a sacrifice of thanksgiving. The Mass reminds us continually to give thanks.

Like the old phrase, Thanks be to God for everything<sup>9</sup>

Then, too, didn't Our Lord at the Last Supper give thanks before He blessed, broke and gave to His disciples? And isn't the priest doing just what He did and isn't it right, too, just and fitting and useful to salvation to thank God for the Bethlehem and the Calvary that made our Mass of today a possibility? Thanksgiving, joyful, heartfelt, singing thanksgiving, that's the mood in which to approach this most solemn part of the Mass.

It's all, you note again, Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Through Christ Our Lord. Then very slyly you bring all the angels in. You're really trying to bring heaven down to earth with the angels and the song of the angels, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord ... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord . . . before you invite Our Lord Himself down.

Get the angels to do some of our praying for us?

That's not as far-fetched as you think. We actually do ask that our voices, too, may be joined to their hymn of Thanksgiving, so that I suppose our off-key singing may be covered up in angelic harmony. At least that thought is very much in my mind every time I have to sing a Preface. It's painful on me and painful on the people, but I hope the angels cover me up before God.

### THE SETTING

Anyhow, the stage is all set for Christ. You have the elements of sacrifice, the bread and wine already blessed and waiting. You have the altar with its memories of the table of the Last Supper, with its stone of sacrifice, with its

memories of the early Masses in the catacombs. You have Calvary in the crucifix that rises above the altar. You have the priest robed as the Apostles were robed when they offered Mass. You have the priest's lips, purified as by a burning coal, set to pronounce the words in the name of Christ that will change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. You have, all of you, the people, surrounding the Altar, backing up the priest, supporting the priest, united with him and Christ in the Body of Christ. You have the whole Catholic world offering the sacrifice for you. You have called upon the angels to come and stand around the Altar to give Christ an atmosphere of heaven to add to his human at-home-ness with us. In a moment you will say a prayer that puts us in union with Our Lady and the Apostles and the Martyrs and all the Saints. It's not too hard to keep your mind focussed on such a stage-setting, is it?

If it is, you have the bell which becomes something of a silvery echo of the *Dominus Vobiscum* that ushered in this part of the Mass. In addition, you have the prayers before the consecration so full of meaning that we should spend a long, long time going over them:

The very fervent, urgent, anxious appeal in the *Te Igitur*. "Therefore we humbly pray and beg Thee, O most kindly Father, through Jesus Christ Thy Son, Our Lord, to accept and bless these gifts, these offerings, these holy and unspotted sacrifices . . ." and you think not only of the bread and wine which will become the spotless Christ. You think of you and your own offerings and your own gifts that you have added to the bread and wine; and you pray that they may become spotless with the spotlessness of Christ, acceptable as Christ, the beloved Son "in Whom I am well pleased. . . ."

The all embracing breadth of your "intentions": "In the first place for Thy Holy Catholic Church that it may please Thee to guide and guard her in unity and peace throughout the world . . . for Pius, our Pope . . . for our Bishop . . . for all true believers in the Catholic and Apostolic Faith." That sort of an offering takes all the selfishness out of your prayer. It makes your prayer big and it makes you big. Use your imagination a bit just to help you realise the prayer. For the Catholic Church throughout the world, in every nation under the sun, in Catholic countries and pagan countries and secular countries. That's a missionary prayer, a prayer for the spread of the Faith, a prayer essentially for the ever-increasing development of the Body of Christ. For our Holy Father the Pope—father of children at war, father of English and American and Irish and German and Russian and French and Italian children; a father whose heart bleeds for a suffering world and who has told us that prayer is more powerful than armies; a father who leans upon the prayerful support of all his children. Yes, pray for him fervently at every Mass that his voice may be strong and that the world may listen eagerly to the principles of Christ that he speaks in the name of Christ. Pray for your own Bishop, the shepherd of the flock in your diocese, that God may guide and bless and strengthen him, that God may give him leadership and saintliness and courage.

#### BE MINDFUL, O LORD

Then in the next prayer, pray for your own. "Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants." . . . It's such a gracious thing to be allowed to place the names of those you love most into the sacred prayers of the most sacred section of the Mass—mother, father, wife, husband, children, brothers, sisters—all you know; all you work with, all you meet day by day, your friends and perhaps those not so friendly, your priests and every soul in your parish . . . "and all here present . . . for all near and dear to them . . ." In these days I'm sure you can't fail to remember all the men in service and all their lonely ones at home, all the boys who are rushing for the first time into action, all the wounded and all the dying, all the captured and all the lost, all the chaplains who are with the boys wherever they go. Pray for all the sufferers of war and pray, too, as Christ would have you pray, for our enemies.

All the uniforms I see could remind me to do that, I suppose.

They could and they should. Follow your missal at this part of the Mass, but follow it thoughtfully. Did you ever notice how very elementary and how very insistent is the short prayer of offering just before the consecration!

"We beseech Thee, O Lord, to accept this offering which we, Thy servants, together with Thy whole household (again the universal note) make to Thee. Dispose our days in Thy peace. Command that we be snatched (it's not saved, it's snatched, a violent word, a fighting word) from eternal damnation and numbered in the flock of Thy chosen ones. ("Fear not, little flock," maybe that's what the last phrase makes you think of, the affection, the tenderness, the love of Christ for His "little flock.") This offering do Thou, we pray Thee, O Lord, graciously bless in every way. Approve it.

Set Thy seal upon it. Make it perfectly acceptable that it may become for us the Body and Blood of Thy most dear Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord." If you are close enough to the Altar, you'll notice that the priest adds emphasis to each of those sharp phrases by making a sign of the Cross over the bread and wine. "Graciously bless." A sign of the Cross. "Approve it." A sign of the Cross. "Set Thy seal upon it." A sign of the Cross. "That it may become for us the Body . . ." A sign of the cross. "And Blood . . ." A sign of the Cross. "Of Thy most dear Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord." You are not bothered very much by distractions, at the actual moment of Consecration, are you?

Not usually, but sometimes even then.

### THIS IS MY BODY

I know. We're queer, aren't we? But after all, God made us queer.

The words of the missal put the scene of the Last Supper so vividly and clearly before us: Christ at table, surrounded by His Apostles. Christ taking bread. Christ lifting His eyes to heaven. Christ whispering a prayer of thanksgiving. Christ breaking bread. Christ by a word changing bread, bread, mind you, into Himself.

We as priests are privileged to imitate every gesture of Christ, to speak the words of Christ, to know that as we speak the words, "This is My Body," the bread we hold in our hands is no longer bread. It is the Body and Blood of Christ, Our Lord. Bread one moment. The next, the living Christ. Through my words. In my hands.

And your privilege. With your own eyes to watch this most amazing of miracles. You watch the priest bending over the Host. You strain forward to try to catch his whisper. It's too low. The moment is too fleeting. A piece of bread is there. Suddenly the priest is genuflecting. Then he's holding aloft, no, not bread, but Christ. Christ, yours to offer, yours to present to God, yours to give to God as your perfect gift, in the name of the whole Church.

Should I look up, when the priest holds up the Sacred Host?

By all means, look up and look on Christ. Look up and reach up your hands to offer Christ to God. I can't think of any moment of your life when you could be more pleasing, more acceptable to God than at this great moment, when you present to Him in love, in adoration, in thanksgiving, in reparation, in humble petition, His own Beloved Son. You need never feel afraid of appearing empty-handed before the Lord if you grasp the thought that you should be perpetually offering Christ to God, and with Christ yourself and all you are and have and think and say and do.

### THIS IS THE CHALICE . . .

It's the same with the Consecration of the Chalice. Again the priest acts the part of Christ. He takes in his hands "this glorious Chalice." Again he gives thanks. He blesses. He says: "This is the Chalice of my Blood." The colour of the wine does not change. The Chalice cup does not break with the divinity that is suddenly alive within it. There is no clash of thunder. No flash of flame. None of the radiance of Divinity. But the wine is no longer wine. In that instant it has become Christ. Once again, yours to offer to God. The Chalice that saves. In the Chalice the Blood of Christ and in the Chalice, too, all that you have offered to yourself, all that all the Catholics of the world have offered of themselves, all the Christly thoughts and Christly words and Christly deeds of the world, all the suffering of the world. In the Chalice, the Christ complete. And offering the Chalice, Christ Himself, the Eternal Priest, and at the Altar His anointed human priest, and about the Altar you and all the congregation and all the Catholic world. Offering the Chalice, the Christ complete.

### TAKE YOU AND EAT

Is the offering acceptable, pleasing to God? Remember the anxiety of our prayer? Of course, the offering of Christ is acceptable. Our Mass, remember, is in memory also of the Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord. But the offering from our hands? The offering, also, of ourselves. Acceptable? "Take you and eat, all of you." Acceptable? "Take you and drink, all of you." That's God's return for our offering. We offer Christ to God and God gives back to us, to be our food and drink, Christ. Remember in the early part of the Mass, I spoke of the Arch, "we speak to God, God speaks to us?" Here's the other Arch: "We give Christ to God." First we give to God the bread and wine (and ourselves) that are to become Christ. Then we give to God the bread and wine changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. In return and completing the Arch, "God gives Christ to us." The Arch is complete.

You're getting a bit ahead of yourself, now, aren't you, Father?

#### ALL OF YOU

A little, maybe. Yet it seems that the Church wants us to think of Communion even at the moment of Consecration, for the priest speaks those two phrases just before he consecrates. Besides, in season and out of season, ahead of time or behind time, I don't think we can too often insist on the idea that such is the Mass complete: We give Christ to God, God gives Christ to us. We can't insist too much that the receiving of Christ is the normal, natural, complete way of offering Mass. When we think of all the millions of Catholics, good Catholics, educated Catholics, loyal Catholics who don't seem to know this, who are present at Mass Sunday after Sunday, and never seem to realise that there is something incomplete about their offering of Mass, something essentially incomplete about their Mass, if they do not come forward, after offering Christ to God, to receive Christ from the hands of God.

I think I remember you saying that before.

And I think you'll hear me saying it again and again and yet again. It's almost incomprehensible, this neglect of God's greatest gift, or shall we say, even artistically, this failure to complete the world's greatest work of art. It's like building an arch with only one side to it. It's like taking up a 'plane and never bringing it down again. It's like playing over and over again the first two acts of a play and never completing the performance. It's like . . . oh, I can't think of the perfect comparison. . . .

Like preparing meals and never eating them.

Yes, if you want. What a difference it would make in our lives and in our world if every Catholic in the world were just to take it for granted that he is to partake of God's gift of Christ in every Mass he offers. Did I ever tell you the story of the old Irish lady?

Don't think so.

Strange. The priest was taking her Communion one morning in one of those picture card old Irish cottages, white-washed, thatch-roofed, roses by the door and all. In one of the little rooms the old lady lay in bed and as she saw the priest coming in with the Body and Blood of the Saviour, she tried to lift herself up in bed. She couldn't, and a tear ran down her cheeks as the priest approached the bedside. "Father," she said, "isn't it terrible? Here's my Lord Himself coming into my poor house and I can't even be on my knees to welcome Him. But, Father," and a smile lighted her face, "Father, will you tell Him for me that on the knees of my heart I welcome Him!" On the knees of my heart. . . .Grand phrase, isn't it, Father?

Grand phrase! That's poetry. Keep it in your mind the next time you approach the Communion rail. On the knees of my heart. . . .

But how about the next *Dominus Vobiscum*?

#### AGAIN WE OFFER

I did get a trifle side-tracked, didn't I? We had finished the Consecration, I think. There's no *Dominus Vobiscum* for some time now, I suppose because the Church thinks you shouldn't find it too hard to keep your mind on Christ Who has just come upon the Altar. Even after the Consecration, you'll notice that the prayers of the Mass keep insisting on offering Christ to God, and asking God to accept the offering. The prayer right after the Consecration, for instance: "Wherefore, O Lord, we who are both thy servants and Thy Holy people, calling to mind the Blessed Passion of the same Christ, Thy Son, Our Lord, His Resurrection from the grave and His glorious Ascension into heaven" (we've seen that phrase before), "offer to Thy August Majesty a sacrifice that is pure, a sacrifice that is holy, a sacrifice that is spotless, the Holy Bread of Eternal life and the Chalice of Eternal Salvation."

That's our offering, and that's the offering we beg God "to look upon with kindly and gracious eye." We remind Him of three sacrifices that from the Old Testament testimony we know were acceptable, the sacrifice that Abel offered Him, the sacrifice of Abraham so obediently willing to offer his own son, and the sacrifice of bread and wine that Melchisedech offered as a type of the sacrifice that we offer. We not only ask God to "look upon our sacrifice with kindly and gracious eye," but "to command that these offerings be carried by the hands of Thy Holy Angel to Thy Altar on High in the sight of Thy Divine Majesty. . . ."

Who is His Holy Angel?

## ALWAYS THROUGH CHRIST

Some say that phrase means Christ. He was, you know, the messenger supreme of God to man. He was the bearer of the Good Tidings, of the Gospel of Salvation; and as our Eternal Priest, it is He Who presents our sacrifice to God. We said before that that's Christ's eternal function as our Eternal Priest, to offer Himself continually to God for us, to stand between earth and heaven, one hand outstretched to receive our offerings, the other reaching into heaven to place our offerings in His own gracious way before God, the Father. Gracious? It is gracious of Him, isn't it, to take our offerings and present them to God for us? Is there any greater guarantee of acceptance?

But it's sort of unbelievable, isn't it, that Christ should be our messenger?

It would be, if He had not willed it that way. He Wished to be one of us, so that He might be our Priest. Look at the rest of that prayer: "so that as many of us as shall partake at this Altar of the Most Sacred Body and Blood of Thy Son shall be filled with every heavenly blessing and grace." Does that mean anything to you?

That, if we want to share the full grace and blessing of the Mass, we must partake of His Most Sacred Body and Blood?

## BE MINDFUL, O LORD

Precisely. And now here's a very thoughtful prayer following. The next prayer, you know, is a prayer for the Holy Souls in Purgatory. It's almost as though you suddenly think, "But there are all the Holy Souls in Purgatory. They cannot now partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, but I want them to share as much as possible in the graces and blessings of the Mass. So, let's say a special prayer for them. And you do: "Be mindful, O Lord, of Thy servants who have gone before us and sleep the sleep of peace. To them, O Lord, and to all who rest in Christ, grant, we beg of Thee, a place of refreshment, light and peace."

The next time you find yourself faced with thoughts of death, do your thinking in the spirit of the Mass. This little prayer tells you what death is, the sleep of peace, rest in Christ, a place of refreshment, light and peace. Certainly not the terrifying thing we so often picture it. You ought to intensify this Memento for the dead in all your Masses these days, for so many grand young fellows are facing death, and so many left behind feel keenly the loneliness and heartache of their death. Pray God to give to every fallen fighter "rest in Christ"; and pray God to give to those who mourn the full, deep Catholic understanding of death, a release, a going home, a completion, an entrance into eternal life, the door to life's only success.

## TO US, ALSO

Rather naturally after a prayer for those who rest in Christ, we think of ourselves, for in that, too, all men are one, that all of us one day must die. "Nobis quoque peccatoribus . ." to us also, sinners.

The priest says that out loud, doesn't he?

Yes. There hasn't been any open call to attention now for some time. This raising of the priest's voice may act as a gentle recall from any—what kind of distractions did you call yours?

Uniform distractions.

I remember one old priest who had developed the habit of slyly turning his head at this "Nobis quoque peccatoribus," as though to say, "See here, I mean all of you." What do we ask for us sinners? Depending on your point of view, it's either a very humble prayer or a very daring one. We ask merely "some part and fellowship" with the Apostles and the Martyrs, with John and Stephen and Matthias and all the rest of them. We ask to be "admitted into their company" rather more than company, into a sharing of their lot, a sharing of their closeness to God and their happiness. That's asking quite a bit. You know how hard it is to get into some select clubs, don't you?

I've been blackballed three times by one group.

You won't be blackballed by this group, the club of the saints, even though they are the aristocracy of the ages, the really great of all time. Don't forget, ever, the thing that makes them great, not money, not position, not genius, but one thing only, their Christ-likeness, the growth of the Christ-life within them, the modelling of their lives on the Life of Christ. Don't forget this either: no matter what anybody tells you, the Saints are all grand people, lovable people, the happiest of all God's children both on earth and in heaven. Some part and fellowship with them means making

their ideals your ideals, means that you have to develop a club loyalty, that you cannot do anything to give a black name to the club of saints. "Nobis quoque peccatoribus." I wonder if you know how funny it all is, in a way, Father. We're sinners, we're weak. A fellow like myself can hardly keep his mind on the Mass, and yet we're encouraged to aim so high and to get so high. And the funniest thing of all is that in spite of all our weakness, we know it can be done.

#### THROUGH HIM AND IN HIM

It can be—as this prayer also tells us—"through Christ Our Lord, through Whom, O Lord, Thou dost ever create all these good things, make them holy, bless them and give them to us. . . ."

What are all these good things?

I don't know. I guess just about everything that goes to make up human life. We are coming to the end of the Canon, to the end of the up-sweep of the Arch. "We Give Christ to God." We have included all men and all angels in the Mass and now in a broad, generous gesture we include all things. We're feeling grateful, we're feeling humble. We're in a spirit of deep reverence, and suddenly that reverence swings out to embrace all the grand things that God gives us and blesses in the giving. Food and clothing and homes and flowers and trees and the air we breathe and music and books and the company of friends and the companionship of animals—oh, all the million and one little things and big things that make life liveable, loveable, adventurous, complete. We feel a spirit of reverence for all created things, because they are God's and because they lead us to God. Take up the Roman Ritual sometime and see the prayers for the blessing of all created things. There's a blessing for water and wine and foods and flocks and fruits and crops, a blessing for machines, a blessing for every God-created and man-made thing. They are all included in this prayer.

Then with all God's goodness in mind the priest closes the Canon of the Mass with a grand hymn of praise—"Through Him and with Him and in Him is to Thee, God the Father Almighty, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory, forever and ever." As he says this prayer the priest takes the Host in his fingers and makes the sign of the Cross five times over and around the Chalice: "through Him"—a sign of the Cross; "and with Him"—a sign of the Cross; "is to Thee, God the Father Almighty"—a sign of the Cross; "in the unity of the Holy Spirit"—a sign of the Cross; "all honour and glory for ever and ever." And then the priest lifts up both Host and Chalice, as though to say to us: "Here in Host and Chalice are contained all the good things of life, all united in the gift of Christ."; and to God: "Here, God, is contained all praises, all honour. In no better way can we offer You the honour and glory that is Your due than by offering You the Body and Blood of Your own Son and with it the fullness, the consecration of every Catholic life." And you answer?

Amen with all my heart and soul.

#### GOD NOW OFFERS

Right. That Amen of yours is a big one. It's your way of making all the words and actions of the priest at the Altar your own words and actions. It's your way of putting period to the whole offering part of the Mass. It concludes the "We Offer Christ to God," and it's an opening into the "God Gives Christ to us" part which begins with the Our Father. It's the end of what some authors call the "Sacrifice- Offering" and the beginning of the "Sacrifice-Banquet." We've been offering Christ and now we certainly ought to want to receive Christ. That's the theme of the rest of the Mass from the "Give us this day our daily bread" to the words of the priest as He places Christ on your tongue, "May the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ keep your soul unto life everlasting. Amen." "May this mingling and consecration of the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ avail us, who receive it, unto life everlasting." Us who receive it—how meaningless is this beautiful prayer for those who just do not bother to gather about the banquet table that God Himself spreads for us. "Let not the receiving of Thy Body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I all unworthy dare to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation, but by Thy loving kindness may it avail to safeguard and preserve my health of body and soul." And yet another: "I shall receive the Bread of heaven and I shall call upon the name of the Lord." And certainly calling upon the name of the Lord will be much more effective when you have the very Son of God within you and the lips of the Son of God, speaking for you.

Even the "O Lord, I am not worthy" is so much more pleasing to Our Lord when spoken by one who, in spite of a keen sense of his unworthiness, still "dares to receive" the Body and Blood of Christ. It shows such a trust in the mercy and goodness of God. It shows such a reliance on the Grace of God. It shows such a love of Christ and such a desire to be one with Him, to be united with Him. It's such a Catholic thing to say: "Look not upon my sins but upon the Faith of Thy Church," and then go ahead to welcome Him "on the knees of our hearts."

All these prayers in the Banquet part of the Mass are rich, simple, beautiful, but they lose so much of their meaning if we are not partaking of the banquet, if we just stand outside the window and look in on those who are breaking the Bread of Christ with God. I'm going to pray every day for you that, if you ever do find yourself just standing outside looking in on the feast, that you'll be so filled with envy for the table-companions of God, so filled with longing for the Bread of Heaven that you'll just have to burst in and find yourself a place at table. Just look at these two thanksgiving prayers in the Mass:

"Into a pure heart, O Lord, may we receive the heavenly food that has passed our lips. Let it not be only the Gift of a day but the Eternal Medicine of our souls."

"May Thy Body, O Lord, which I have received and Thy Blood which I have drunk cling to my very heart, and grant that no stain of sin may remain in me whom the pure and Holy Sacraments have refreshed."

### PAX DOMINI . . .

Now let's get ourselves in focus a minute. We've already covered several Dominus Vobiscums. The first was a call to attention to take part in the Introit. The second brought us to attention for the prayer of the day and the lesson of the day in the Epistle. The third brought us to our feet for the Orders of the Day in the Gospel. The fourth called us to put all the energy of our minds on the Offertory prayers, the offering of the bread and wine and ourselves. The fifth at the beginning of the Preface was like a trumpet announcing the coming of Christ Himself. Now the sixth, just after the Our Father, is an invitation to gather around the table, to become one of the "familiares," one of the intimates, one of the family of God in the family banquet that only God could devise with Christ as our food.

That it's rather a special Dominus Vobiscum is clear from the change of form. This time it's "Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum." "May the peace of the Lord be always with you." Not only individual peace, but especially the peace of the sons of God, the peace of the intimate family of God.

### A FAMILY FEAST

You've often noticed that little cloth that hangs from the priest's left arm, haven't you? The maniple, it's called. Actually, it's a napkin, and now you can see why. The priest is preparing to serve at the banquet table of God. God Himself is the Host, sitting like a real and true Father, Our Father, at the head of the table. The priest, not as a hired servant, because it is too close and intimate a banquet for any outside the family to be present, but rather in the place of "the dearly Beloved Son," in the place of Christ, takes the Bread of Life, breaks and distributes, not to the guests, for there are no guests, but to the children of God, gathered around the family table.

That's a long sentence, I know, but I can't break it up for you. As you follow the priest through this part of the Mass, think of the love that should unite the children of our common Father. Think of all those who should be members of one family but have forgotten, or do not know their father. It's a sad thing to be an orphan, to have lost a father. It's a still sadder thing not to recognise your father, not even to know that you have a father who loves and will go on loving. It is a terribly sad thing once to have known and loved a father and then to wander from him, to have forgotten home and father. As you think these thoughts, pray that all may yet be one, one family with Christ in God.

### ONE WITH CHRIST IN GOD

Look around the table. You're a worker, and beside you, sits an employer. You are but brothers, children of the one Father. There's a coloured man across from you, there's a Filipino, a Chinaman, a Japanese. You are brothers, children of the one Father. You are American. Around the table sit those of all nations, and all are brothers, members of the same family, children of the same Father, feeding on the same Heavenly Bread. Look at the faces around about you and the hands—there's so much to be learned from human hands. You drink from the same Chalice. You eat from the

same dish. And the Body of Christ and the Blood of Christ make your souls strong with the same life, the Life of Christ; make your hearts beat with the same love, the Love of Christ. Look just a little more closely and, if your eyes are keen, suddenly you see every face light up with a new brilliance. Somehow or other, they are no longer black, or brown or yellow or white faces. They are no longer English or Irish or German or Russian or French. They are no longer rich or poor, educated or ignorant, labourer or employer. They are all the face of Christ. In every face you see Christ. You must, for that is the family resemblance. In every heart you see Christ. And Christ within you calls to Christ within all men, and you love all men, and you are one with all men, for you love the Christ within them, and all of you, all of us, are Christ.

There's your peace, peace through love, peace through Christ, a world peace that is a family peace, the peace and the love and the family unity that run all through the prayers of the Banquet part of the Mass. Still thinking about uniforms?

No. There's an awful lot to the Mass, isn't there, Father?

### THE VEIL

I should say so. We're just skimming through it and missing so much because we are skimming, but time is short. One more thought about Communion. Don't stop following the Mass after Communion. Just at this part of the Mass, the pace is rather leisurely. There's time to think as you say the few little prayers the priest has to say as he purifies the Chalice. You notice he puts the veil back over the Chalice before going on with the Mass. I wonder why?

Out of reverence?

Exactly. We do draw a veil over things we love and reverence, don't we? The veil over the Tabernacle because it's the home of Christ. The veil over the Chalice because it contained the Blood of Christ. The veil, the symbol of reverence for something sacred. Suppose I were to ask you which is more sacred, you yourself, or the Chalice, or the Tabernacle?

Well, Father . . .

For heaven's sake, say it, say it. You are. By far more sacred. You are a flesh and blood chalice, a flesh and blood tabernacle. And the same is true of every one who has been with you at the banquet table of God. I could actually genuflect in reverence before every one of you, and every one of you before every other flesh and blood tabernacle of the Most High. So reverence, reverence for yourself and every part of you, body, soul, mind, heart; and awe and reverence for every human being who becomes a Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Mass goes hurriedly now. There's a Dominus Vobiscum that calls you to take part in the last public prayer of the Mass, the post-Communion prayer. There's another Dominus Vobiscum that calls you to attention for the *Ite, Missa Est*, Go, the Mass is ended, and your fervent answer, *Deo Gratias*. Thank God. Thank God for Christ. Thank God for the Last Supper. Thank God for Calvary. Thank God for the Mass. Thank God for Christ within you. Thank God for the life of Christ that you are privileged to share. Thank God for the growth of that life within you. Thank God for your adoption into the family of Christ. Thank God for the name of Christ which you bear. Thank God for the Grace and help and strength of Christ. Thank God that you have been chosen to carry on the work of Christ, to complete the suffering of Christ, to live the life of Christ, to co-operate with Christ in Christ's work. Thank God for the knowledge that even though you must leave the church, you may still share in every Mass being offered everywhere throughout the world.

Then bow your head to receive the blessing of God that you may be strong to live the Mass. "*Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus.*" May the Almighty God bless you, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

### SONS OF GOD

Actually that should finish the Mass, but there's one last Dominus Vobiscum before the Last Gospel. To keep up our former comparison, the Gospel of the Mass is Orders of the Day. The Last Gospel, almost always the same first Chapter of St. John's Gospel, is your General Orders. In a few short sentences, "it's the whole history of the world, the astounding history of the love of the Omnipotent God for his unworthy children. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Before time began, before the world was, before there were trees

and mountains and oceans and lands, away back into the unmeasurable reaches of Eternity, God; and He Who was to become Christ was God, the Word of God, the Son of God from all eternity.

"All things were made by Him and without Him was made nothing that was made." The whole story of Creation, beautiful in God's generosity, sad in man's sin. And then the unbelievable story of Bethlehem, of God so loving the world that He gave His only begotten Son, the sad reflection of Calvary, and the strange indifference to Divine Love that is the mysterious blemish of mankind throughout the ages: "He was in the world and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and His own received Him not." And His own still do not receive Him.

"To as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us. And we saw His Glory, the Glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth." To as many as received Him He gave the power of becoming sons of God. Deo Gratias?

Deo Gratias. I'll mean it the next time I say it. And about those uniforms. . . .

Forget them. O rather thank God for them and the men who wear them, for they forced you to learn more about the Mass. And if you ever see Mrs. Murphy. . . .

It was Mrs. Williams, I tell you. . . .

Tell her thanks, too, for it seems her hat first made you realize that you have a mind good for something besides wandering. Good-bye or, rather, Dominus Vobiscum.

Good-bye or, rather, Et cum Spiritu tuo.

Nihil Obstat:  
P. JONES,  
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:  
✠ D. MANNIX,  
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.