

WHAT THE MASS MEANS

For Converts and Others Interested.

By Rev. G. P. Flatley.

Davies' Fishing Holiday

It all began with a chance remark... a simple request for a little information.

John Davies was sitting in the shade of a large rock, sharing his flask of hot coffee with his fellow fisherman, a weather-beaten priest from "the back of beyond". Both were on their annual holidays. They had arrived at the quiet fishing resort strangers, but now, through the magic of rod and line, were on the friendliest terms.

Davies was talking. "Father," he said, "as I told you, the wife and kids are Catholics. I'm not. I drive them to church every Sunday. They all troop in to Mass and I go off to get the papers and have a read until it is time to pick them up again."

He sipped his coffee and continued, "The kids began to say to me every Sunday, 'come on Dad, come on in... it won't hurt'. I could see they wanted me with them. The wife just smiled her own quiet smile. Anyhow, I always said 'not today, kids... off you go... see you later'. Then one Sunday recently I surprised them. I went in."

COMPLETELY BUSHED

John Davies stopped. The priest, wise man, said nothing, but from his cup came an encouraging "huh-huh"—an invitation to continue.

"They got me to a seat and Joanie gave me a book. I looked at it and looked at the people: saw a lot of fellows I knew. Then the Father came out all dressed up in ceremonial clothes, preceded by a team of altar boys. My lad, Pete, was among them... And then began the biggest puzzle I ever saw in my life.

"The priest didn't bother about us. He kept his back turned to us... and the people didn't seem to mind. They were all occupied with something that escaped me completely. Father preached a right good sermon and then went back to the altar. He seemed to read prayers out of the big book... did something or other... he bowed and that... bells rang a few times... the altar boys gave him something once or twice. Then came what I recognized must be the communion part of the service. But honestly, Father, as regards the Mass, I was completely bushed. There is either something in it, or nothing. I have a feeling that there must be something, but what it is — well, don't ask me."

There was silence: only the noise of the surf. John Davies stirred himself more deeply into the sand. "Father," he asked, "would you tell me simply what is the Mass all about?"

The priest spoke for the first time. "I'd be delighted," he said.

SACRIFICE?

"If you asked your lad, Pete, what the Mass was, the first thing he'd say would be 'the Mass is a sacrifice'. And he would be right. So we might as well begin with clearing up what we mean by sacrifice."

Davies was lighting his pipe while the priest spoke. Through the rising clouds of smoke he nodded... "good idea".

"Tell me, Mr. Davies, do you ever give a gift, a present, to your wife?"

Davies held his pipe at arm's length and answered in a surprised tone. "I do, certainly I do, but why change the subject so soon?"

"Hold on now," suggested the priest. "I'm not changing it. When you gave some present to your wife, I suppose you meant the gift to be some kind of outward expression of your affection and appreciation, or maybe at times, a kind of peace-offering to make up for something or other you did that upset her. You see, it is very natural for us to express our inner feelings and dispositions by some external visible act — like you giving your wife a box of chocolates: they tell her of your perhaps unspoken love. Right?"

OUR GIFTS SPEAK

"That has been going on since the beginning of the world. People have expressed their feelings of loyalty, for example, or submission to overlords by giving them gifts of one kind or another. The giving of the gift, a herd of

cows, maybe, was an outward statement of their inner attitude of submission. Not giving the gift would be taken as a declaration of rebellion: just like saying ‘I will not serve’.

“Then, when men in the beginning began to think of God and of their submission to Him they felt the need of expressing externally how they felt. They naturally thought of expressing their submission in the only practical external way they knew... they thought of giving a gift to God.” Davies blew a quick mouthful of smoke to comment: “They set themselves a bit of a job, didn’t they? How were they going to hand over a herd of cows to God! There’s no stock route to heaven.”

“WHERE THERE’S A WILL...”

“No, there is not,” agreed the priest, “but they found a way. The inspired law-givers of the Hebrews directed that a rough and ready stone altar be built. This altar would be God’s agent to receive gifts in His name. They would then take it for granted that the gifts offered on the special altar and burned to the glory of God were accepted by God as long as there was not a definite sign of non-acceptance. You see, it was very important that the gift should be received. Otherwise, the sacrifice was a failure.

MAKING A THING “SACRED”

“When the gift was placed on the altar it became sacred: it became a sacred thing which now belonged to God completely. The gift was made sacred by being offered on the altar to God. In a word, the gift was ‘sacrificed’. That’s what it means. But like all giving of gifts, the sacrificing of the gift to God would be worse than useless unless there was suitable internal disposition in the soul and heart of the person offering. It would be worse than useless because it would be a lie.”

Davies butted in, “Something like giving a gift to a fellow as a sign of friendship while feeling anything but friendly towards him.”

SIN AND BLOOD

The priest nodded and continued. “Now the Hebrews had a special kind of sacrifice for making peace with God and satisfaction and atonement for their sins. They had a sacrifice which involved the shedding of blood. They believed that sin was a capital offence against God and carried a death penalty. The capital crime could be cleared up only by the shedding of blood: they reckoned blood the principle of life. So the sinner shed the blood of a sacrificial victim beast in order that his own life might be spared.”

“A nice convenient arrangement,” came Davies’ comment. “And I suppose they made a kind of big ceremony of it.”

TEMPLE CEREMONY

“That they did,” the priest agreed. “They brought the beast to the Temple and killed it... the technical term was ‘they immolated’, made a victim for sacrifice out of it. They drew off the blood in a container which they handed to the priest of the Temple. He then poured the blood on the altar. This was the actual offering or ‘oblation’. There were, of course, many prayers and hymns and ceremonies.

“The closing act of the rite was to decide what to do with the carcass of the slain and sacrificed beast. You see, it had been made sacred: it now belonged to God. The worshippers had no longer any ownership claim on it.

“What did they do?... Well, sometimes, they burned all of it ‘as a sweet odour to God’ as they said. Sometimes they burned only a portion of it, and with what was left they had a sacrificial feast. At this feast God was the Host, as the meat was His. The worshippers were His guests. They sat at His table and ate His food as a sign of their mutual friendship, their present loyalty, and God’s continued protection.”

“Do you know, Father, those Hebrews worked things out very well. They thought of every angle.”

WHAT YOU’D SEE

The priest had the coffee flask and the two cups standing in a line on the sand. He looked around and saw a large

shell a bit to the side. This he got and placed in line with the cups. Davies was puzzled but refrained from comment. He waited for the priest to continue.

“If you were in the Hebrew Temple, Mr. Davies, I mean during a sacrifice service, you would notice a sacrificial gift, the thing being offered. We’ll mark that with the flask. (He moved the flask out of line.) You would notice a priest, the minister of the sacrifice, having an official position as representative of the community before God. (Here he moved the cup in line with the flask.) You would see the actual act of sacrifice, the immolation of the beast and the offering of the blood. (He moved the second cup into line.) By this is expressed the inner disposition of submission and atonement of the offerers.”

As the priest took up the shell he said, “You wouldn’t see the fourth essential element of the sacrifice. But you would know that the purpose of the whole service would be to express the worshippers’ recognition of God’s absolute mastery and majesty, through adoration, thanksgiving, petition and reconciliation with God by making atonement for sin.”

The two men fell silent: Davies drawing slowly on his pipe, the priest looking at the shell he still held in his hand.

DAVIES COMES GOOD

Davies was the first to speak. “I believe I could say now what is meant by ‘sacrifice’. You let me have a shot at it by myself... it means giving to God a visible gift” (he picked up the flask) “...in an offering made by an official priest” (he picked up a cup) “in an act which has reduced the gift the state of being a victim, destroyed or changed in some way” (he took up the second cup). “And all this is done to acknowledge that God is our Supreme Master, to worship Him and thank Him, to ask Him for things, and to be reconciled to Him after sin.”

The priest threw him the shell. “John Davies,” he said, “you are the best listener I’ve ever had. I couldn’t improve on your effort. Keep all that in your head and we will go on from there at the tea-break this afternoon.”

The Blood Sacrifice of Calvary

The day’s fishing proved fruitful for both men. When they met again both glowed with the contentment that comes from profitable enjoyment.

Davies, who never smoked when actually “on the line”, was rummaging in his dilly bag for his tobacco when he remarked, “I’ve been thinking, Father, it is a mighty long step from the sacrifices of the Hebrew Temple to the Mass in the Catholic Church... from the colourful ceremony of slaying beasts and so on to the quiet ceremony I saw in your church.”

“Don’t you worry about that just yet,” Father advised. “At least we learned from looking at the Hebrew rites what exactly a sacrifice is. We can see, too, that the Hebrews would know from their own religious experience what St. Paul and the other apostles meant when they referred to the death of Christ on the Cross as a sacrifice. They would know that in same way Christ’s Blood was shed, and Christ was offered as a peace-offering to God for sin, to make atonement.” (See Hebrews, Chap. 9 ...e.g., v.14. “and shall not the blood of Christ, who offered Himself, through the Holy Spirit, as a victim unblemished in God’s sight, purify our consciences.”)

Davies cut in, ‘As I see it, Christians believe that Christ is God Himself come on earth... that he is a Person who took on our human nature in addition to the God-nature He already had. He could have no sins to make atonement for.’

A TRUE SACRIFICE

“True... Christ had no personal sin. As you say, He couldn’t have. But, as the Bible says, He took upon Himself the sins of us all. It was for our sins, the sins of the whole human race that he made atonement. (See Isaias, 53.5 ...”it was for our sins he was wounded, it was guilt of ours crushed him down ...and God laid on his shoulders our guilt, the guilt of us all.” 2 Cor., 5.21 ...”Christ never knew sin, and God made him into sin for us, so that in him we might be turned into the holiness of God.”) He offered Himself on Calvary as a blood-sacrifice for our redemption.

“You apply to Calvary what you know about sacrifice in general... there was a visible victim, Christ... there was an official offering priest, Christ... there was the slaying of the Christ-Victim, reducing Him to the state of sacrificial

victim: really, the act of sacrifice on Calvary was that Christ permitted His enemies to kill Him although He, as God, could have wiped them out before they laid a finger on Him. In His immense charity, He freely underwent the suffering and death of the Cross for the honour of God and the redemption of mankind.”

DAVIES MAKES A POINT

When Father paused, Davies spoke, slowly, his eyes closed in thought. “I can see a likeness in outline between the old sacrifices and Christ’s sacrifice, but I can see more easily that there must be a tremendous difference. The offering of a Divine Person would give infinitely more honour to God than the offering of a million brute beasts... and, of course, Christ is infinitely more important than any Temple High Priest... and I suppose it would not be possible to find anywhere more perfect inner dispositions than those Christ had.”

“Yes,” agreed the Priest, “you’re right. The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was a perfect sacrifice in every way. It has offered to God on our behalf to make it possible for us to be restored to the friendship and family of God. It was completely successful in effecting what it intended, infinite honour to God and our redemption.”

“God, you must remember, gave a positive sign that He accepted the sacrifice of Christ. He raised up in glory, on Easter morning the body that had been crucified on good Friday. St. Paul used to make a big point of that sign of acceptance. “If Christ be not risen... our preaching and your faith are in vain... you are still in your sins. (1 Cor., 15.14 ...”and if Christ has not risen then our preaching is groundless, and your faith, too, is groundless ...all your faith is a delusion you are back in your sins.”) Thank God, the sacrifice was offered, the sacrifice was accepted, and we were redeemed.”

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE VICTIM?

After some minutes, Davies spoke. “I’ve a question, Father, but I just can’t frame it. You know in the old sacrifices, how after the offering was made, the question would arise what to do with the victim-body, now sacred to God. I can see, remembering who Christ is, that His human body and soul didn’t need to be offered on any special altar to become sacred to God... and there could be no question of burning the body or of having a sacrificial banquet. What really did happen for this part of Christ’s sacrifice?”

“What really did happen is very important: God Himself decided what was to be done. As you say, there could be no question of consuming the Body of Christ when taken down from the Cross, either by fire or by banquet.

“This is what happened. God took the Victim of Calvary to Himself in heaven. There He is now, and there He remains for ever, before God, ‘as a lamb, as it were, slain’ (Apocalypse, 5.6...”Then, I saw, in the midst where the throne was, amid the four figures and the ancients, a Lamb standing upright, yet slain (as I thought) in sacrifice.”) as St. John puts it. That means that Christ remains before God as the victim of Calvary. St. Paul puts it that the Victim of Calvary was taken to heaven at the Ascension to sit at God’s right Hand always living ‘to make intercession for us’. (See Hebrews, 9, e.g., v. 24. “He has entered heaven itself where he now appears in God’s sight on our behalf” and 7 25 ...”he lives on still to make intercession on our behalf.”)

“Christ’s very presence before God as the Victim of Calvary as the ‘lamb slain’, is an eternal actual intercession on our behalf. The glorified body of Christ, as we know from the incident of the doubting Thomas, wears the badge of His victimhood, the wounds of Calvary. (John, 20.24, etc., the wounds were retained on the glorified Body of Christ; the badge of His victimhood.)

ONCE FOR ALL

“And at this stage, St. Paul makes another point, a point we could have concluded from our knowledge of the nature of sacrifice.

“We know that a living thing can be slain (immolated) only once. We know that when a thing is presented to God and accepted by Him, we can’t take it back from Him and then give it to Him again. It has become God’s property and remains so. That is what St. Paul means when he says something like this... ‘Christ was offered once for all... he sits for ever at the right hand of God, offering for our sins a sacrifice that is never repeated.’ (Heb. 10)

Davies stirred and as he appeared to have something to say the priest nodded “Go ahead”.

SO, WHY THE MASS?

“Now you have got me really puzzled, Father. Put it this way. Christ was offered once for all. He can never be really sacrificed again, I mean can’t be slain again, can’t be brought to a new state of victimhood which would be necessary for a new sacrifice. He can never be offered to God again as victim who has not already been offered and already been accepted by God. (‘Right’ — from the priest.)

“I have an idea that you will soon be getting on to the Mass and calling it a sacrifice. I’ll be very interested to see how or where you get a victim for it, so as to be able to call it a sacrifice in any real sense... and I’ll be very interested to see how you can explain why the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is not enough for you, so that you must have another one.” “Good,” said the priest. “That is exactly what we’ll talk about next time. We will see that the Mass is a real sacrifice because it has a real victim: and we will see that the Mass is not ‘another’ sacrifice independent of Calvary.”

A Tale of Two Farmers

John Davies had invited the priest to dine with him at his hotel, and after an enjoyable meal they sat smoking on the terrace overlooking the little harbour. Conversation was just a quiet sentence now and again. Father seemed in no hurry to continue the discussion begun that morning. But when his companion gave him an opening hint he began.

“I want to tell you a story... not really a story that actually happened, more a kind of example or illustration.

“Once upon a time there were two farmers living on adjoining properties. Let’s call them, as usual, Smith and Brown. One night Brown’s kids went over to Smith’s place and did all the destruction they were capable of doing - pulled down fences, chased the cows off into the mountains, set fire to the ripening corn crop, burned down the barns, and so on. In the morning, Smith viewed the damage and knew who did it. He sent word to his men to come, armed, to the homestead. He planned to ride over and wipe the young Browns off the face of the earth

BROWN’S OFFER

“However, before Smith’s vengeance campaign got going, Brown became conscious of the situation. He knew his kids had done wrong and would suffer for it. He rode over to Smith’s place and said to Smith... ‘Look, Smith, before you do anything, will you please listen to me for a minute. I have a proposition to make to you. I realise that my kids have wronged you seriously. They are powerless to undo adequately the harm they have done. I will take their place. I will bind myself to you as your slave, to work for you for nothing to fix your fences, look after your cattle, sow your corn, build your barns, and anything else that needs to be done, I’ll be your slave for as long as you like, if you will only spare my kids.’”

THE GUILTY ARE SPARED

“After much talk and thought, Smith agreed to the proposition: Brown became his slave, and Brown’s kids were saved from death. Brown had offered himself as a sacrifice for his kids... Smith accepted the sacrifice... and the young Browns were spared.

“We can apply all that to the case of ourselves and God. We, the human race, had offended God by sin, and as a result were in line for punishment. There was nothing we could do to make adequate satisfaction to God. But Christ offered Himself as Sacrifice for us: God accepted the sacrifice, and we were redeemed.

THE KIDS WAKE UP

“Let us go back to Brown. After some time, his kids wake up to themselves. They realise what they have done, and they realise that they are helpless to remedy things. They want to do something themselves that will appease Smith, but they cannot. Their father sees their good intentions and their difficulty. He comes to them and says: ‘The most you kids can do by yourselves would not be enough to satisfy Mr. Smith. I have already offered myself, sacrificed myself to him for you, and he has accepted. The best you can do is to come with me and offer me again. You are my children and you can join your offering of me, your father, with the offering I have already made myself. This will be your

offering of the sacrifice that saved you. With your offering of me to Mr. Smith you will contribute your own personal internal dispositions of sorrow and atonement.’

THE GUILTY NOW OFFER

“And, so, once again Smith receives the sacrifice of Brown, offered this time not just by Brown himself personally, but by Brown’s children who now make their offering of their father, joining it to the still-standing principal offering made by him already.

“And that,” said Father as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, “brings us to the Mass.”

“That’s what I expected,” commented Davies. “I have an idea I can see what you are driving at. You are going to tell me that the Mass is something like the Brown kids joining their father in the offering of him to Smith.”

“You are right again,” complimented the priest. “I was going to tell you that the Mass is, simply, our offering of the sacrifice by which we were redeemed.”

“Now take it easy, Father. The sacrifice by which we were redeemed was the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. You can’t mean that you stage Calvary all over again just as it happened two thousand years ago. You cannot slay Christ again and make a new Victim of Him. And unless you have a real victim in the Mass, you can’t really call it a sacrifice.”

A REAL VICTIM

“That is just the point, the extraordinary point. In the Mass we have a real victim... not just an ordinary ritual victim... not just a metaphorical victim. We have a real victim... the only one that really counts. We have the Victim of Calvary Himself.”

“Father,” declared Davies, “you astound me. I could begin to ask you how you get the Victim of Calvary in the Mass, but I suppose you are going to tell me anyway.” “I am,” concluded the priest, “but not now. Tomorrow, please God. ‘Tis time early-rising fishermen were in bed.”

The Mass Victim... Who?... Whence?

The next day was very young when the two men arrived at the boatshed where their hired boat was waiting for them. This day would be spent some miles up the river where the water spread out into a small lake and the fishing was “always good”. As usual, conversation while they fished was limited to a few observations, half-sentences and “sounds without words”. It was not until the coffee flask appeared that the priest began.

“You were going to ask me last night why we believe that Christ, the Victim of Calvary, is on the altar at Mass. That question hits the very centre of the whole position.

“If Christ is not there really — not just spiritually or figuratively — but not really there, then the Mass cannot escape being somewhat blasphemous and to be condemned. If Christ does not become present there in a state of victimhood, then we have no sacrifice. It would be unthinkable and impossible for us to immolate or slay Him again. But we do believe that Christ becomes actually present, and present as the ready-made Victim of Calvary.

“And now I’ll tell you why... I recall that you told me one time you were fairly well familiar with the life of Christ as told in the New Testament. You may remember some things that are related round about chapter six in St. John’s Gospel. Our Lord was going to tell the people about something very wonderful. It was something so wonderful and unusual that He did not tell them about it straight away. He first prepared their minds for it, step by step.

TWO MIRACLES

“He began by working two miracles before many witnesses: He walked on the water of the Lake as if it were solid: and He multiplied a few little loaves of bread to feed some thousands of hungry people. Now, as well as showing His Divine power, these two miracles had a special point: one showed Christ’s power over His body — at His wish it ceased to be subject to the ordinary physical laws of gravity; the other showed His control over the substance of food which multiplied at His command. These two points were important because the wonderful thing He was going to reveal involved His own Body and the substance of food.

THE GREAT PROMISE

“When the people were fed they could talk of nothing else but this extraordinary prophet, Jesus, who gave them such excellent food to eat when they were dying of hunger. While they were in this frame of mind Jesus told them He intended to give them a much more excellent food later on. He didn’t at first say what exactly it would be. The people went off home wondering in their minds about it.

“It was sometime later, at the town of Capharnaum, that Jesus gave the details. While He was telling them about it, He would have had at the back of His mind the knowledge that every Hebrew had of the rite of sacrifice and the sacrificial Banquet. He would also have in mind His own sacrifice on the Cross to come. And He was directly hinting at the coming sacrifice of Himself for mankind when He told them that shortly now He was going to make it possible for Himself to be received and eaten — as sacrificial food is received and eaten. His own very flesh and blood, in some way, would be given to His followers as Food to be consumed.

WHAT DID HE MEAN?

“The listeners took Him up literally, took His words exactly as they were said. Their reaction was marked. ‘This is too much for anyone to accept’, they said. They turned and walked away from Him. He let them go, rather than change one word of what He had said. He couldn’t change it: He meant exactly what the words He used meant.

“So there you have the position: Christ is telling the people that in some way He is going to become their food, their sacrificial food, to be eaten by His faithful ones. And you will agree with me when I say that we can be safely sure of two things about any statement or promise made by Christ. He would not lie to us, He would mean to do exactly what He promised to do. And being God, Christ could always do what He promised. So we confidently expect to see that He made good His promise regarding the wonderful sacrificial food.”

Davies, who was leaning comfortably against the side of the boat, spoke quietly. “I haven’t interrupted, Father. I have been listening and following your line of thought. I’d say that you are now going to give the actual record of Christ doing what He had promised to do.”

PROMISE MADE GOOD

“You’re right,” said the priest. “And so we jump from the promise made at Capharnaum to the Last Supper Christ had with His disciples on the night before He died. It was then He made good His promise. The account given in the New Testament is very simple and very clear. Christ took bread and wine. Over the bread He said... ‘Take and eat... this is my Body which shall be given up for you’... Over the wine... ‘This is my Blood which shall be shed for you’.

“He couldn’t have used clearer or simpler words to signify what was happening. Here at last is the promised Food... here is Christ’s way of making it possible for us to receive Him as our sacrificial food. At Christ’s words, the substance of the bread and wine are changed into Him. In anticipation of the Sacrifice of the Cross He invites His apostles to take and eat the Body to be slain on Calvary and the Blood to be shed. The Apostles took and ate; they received their First Holy Communion.

CHRIST THOUGHT OF US

“At that moment, as was usual right through His life, Christ thought of the generations yet unborn, and made the wonderful arrangement whereby they, too, would be able to receive Him in Holy Communion, would be able to partake of the sacrificial Food of Calvary. He gave the Apostles, as officially ordained priests of His Church the power to do what He had done. And as well as the power, He gave them the command to use it.

“In the Mass, at the solemn centre part called the Consecration, the priest, as the ordained official of the Church, lawful successor of the first apostolic priests, re-enacts the Last Supper. He takes bread and wine, and speaking for Christ, says, ‘This is my Body... This is my Blood’. At these words, just as at the Last Supper, the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the Living Body of Christ.

“The Living Body of Christ is, of course, the living glorified Christ as He is now in heaven, the ‘lamb slain for our sins’, the eternal Victim of Calvary. That is why St. Thomas sings in one of his hymns that the priest at Mass consecrates the substance of the bread and wine, not into Christ ‘simply’, but into Christ the Victim of the Cross.”

DAVIES TAKES A HAND

When the priest paused, the only sounds on the quiet lake were the light slapping of the water against the side of the boat and the faint chug-chugging of a distant motor. Davies began to speak hesitantly. “Would it sound irreverent to you, Father, if I put it this way. Through a power left by Christ to His Church, He comes back again, something like Brown of your story comes back to his kids. Christ says more or less what Brown would say... ‘look, people, anything you can do by yourselves would not be worth very much to make up to the offended greatness of God. I have saved you by my sacrifice, and while I am still in this state of ‘victim’ you can take me and join me and offer me again. God, Who has already received My personal offering of Myself, will now be pleased to accept Me as now coming from you’.”

“That,” said Father, “is exactly what the Mass is. As I said at the beginning the Mass is our offering of the sacrifice by which we were redeemed. It is our offering of the Victim of Calvary: so you can see that the Mass is completely dependent on Calvary... somewhat as the offering of their father made by the Brown kids was completely dependent and subordinate to the offering made first by Brown personally. The mass is not a sacrifice independent of Calvary. Everything in the Mass, except one thing, is borrowed from the Cross... the Victim, the slaying, the value: the only new thing in the Mass is in the offering. On the Cross Christ offered Himself personally. In the Mass, Christ still the principal offerer, offers through the priest. The priest acts in the Mass through the power of Christ’s priesthood given to him for this very purpose. The priest, the official representative of the Church and the congregation present, is the immediate offerer of the Mass.

SYMBOLIC SLAYING

“On the Cross, Christ offered by a real slaying and shedding of blood. In the Mass there is no shedding of blood: the slaying is only symbolised or figured by the separate consecration of His Body and His Blood. Of course, there is not a real separation of the Body from the Blood: there is only what is called a sacramental or symbolic one.”

“You get a little beyond me at times, Father,” he admitted. “I can’t say that I have grasped all you have said, but I have held to your main line — that you believe that in the Mass you have the Victim of Calvary present on the altar, and while He is there, you offer Him, in a sacrifice, to God. I am beginning to see now a meaning in the service that had me bushed.”

Wasn’t Calvary Enough? Why the Mass?

When the two met again after dinner, Davies did not wait for the priest to begin. He took the initiative himself. “Granted all you have said about the Mass, Father — and I must admit that the idea is both wonderful and beautiful — but you did not get around to the second part of the question I asked the other afternoon. Why do you act as if the Sacrifice of Christ on Calvary were not enough for you so that you have to have another offering of that sacrifice going on all the time in your Church?” “When we continue to offer the sacrifice by which we were redeemed we do so for very good reasons,” the priest answered. “The main reason is that it is quite evident that it is the wish of Christ that we do so.”

THE HEAD AND THE MEMBERS

“It is His wish that the ever-changing body of His baptised members should be united with Him, their Head, in the continuous offering of this sacrifice. You may remember one of the great prophecies about the Messiah, the prophecy spoken by Malachy, where the inspired prophet tells the Temple priests that the time for their sacrifices is coming to an end. The time of the Messiah is coming, and in the Kingdom of the Messiah, i.e., in His Church, there would be a real sacrifice offered everywhere, at all times, from morning to night all over the world. That prophecy finds its only possible fulfilment in the Mass which is the only sacrifice ever offered in the Church. (See Malachy, 1.10, etc. “I have no pleasure in you saith the Lord of hosts”— He is addressing the Hebrew priests—and I will not receive a gift of your hand. For 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. For my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts.”)

“Christ’s offering of Himself on Calvary was made in one place and once for all. The offering of Christ, the Victim of Calvary in the Mass, by the ever-growing body of baptised members goes on day after day, hour after hour, all over the world. The Mass does not replace Calvary. The Mass is Calvary brought right down into our midst.”

CHRIST’S WISH

Davies interrupted: “When you say that it is evident that Christ wished you to have a daily sacrifice in your Church do you mean that He did or said something to give that impression?”

“I do,” said the priest. “If you recall what we said about the Last Supper He had the night before He died, you will see that He both did and said things that clearly show He intended the Blessed Eucharist to be a sacrificial Food to be received in association with a sacrificial offering.

“In the very words of institution Christ designated His Body a ‘sacrificial’ Body, and His Blood, ‘sacrificial’ Blood: He said... ‘This is my Body which shall be given up for you’... This is my Blood which shall be shed for you’. He deliberately used two phrases, ‘which shall be given up for you’ and ‘which shall be shed for you’, that are two technical sacrificial terms expressing the oblation of a true and proper sacrifice.

“Also, by making His Body and His Blood present in the form of sacrifice, under separate forms of bread and wine, Christ pointed to the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist. The Living Christ, of course, is not divided between the two forms of bread and wine: He is completely present in both. The separate forms symbolically represent the real separation of the Body and Blood of Christ which was made in the sacrifice of the Cross.

“Very early in the life of the Church St. Paul pointed out to his Corinthians that the Holy Communion is a sacrificial food because it followed on the offering of a true sacrifice — the sacrifice of the Mass.” (1 Cor., 10.)

CALVARY—MASS—US

“So you believe that you can really and truly identify yourself with Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary through your offering of the Mass, even though when Christ died you did not even exist?” Davies questioned.

“True,” admitted Father, “we did not exist when Christ died on Calvary for us. But we exist now, nearly two thousand years afterwards, and through our faith and baptism we are members of Christ. And as members of Christ we unite and formally identify ourselves with our Head in the sacrificial act by which we were redeemed... remember the illustration of Brown and his kids.

“As far as the full and perfect satisfaction Christ made for sin is concerned, we do not, and cannot improve on it in anyway. But by our interior disposition... by bringing our wills into line with the sacrificial will of Christ at Mass, we draw on the rich treasure of grace won for us by Christ on the Cross. It is through the Mass that this ‘power of Christ’s sacrifice’ is applied to our individual souls.

“Remember, too, that satisfaction for sin is only one purpose of sacrifice. On the Cross Christ gave infinite adoration, thanksgiving, and made equally perfect petition. In the Mass, Christ our Victim, expresses our adoration and our thanksgiving and our petition as well as our sorrowful apology for our sins. The offering of Christ in the Mass is the greatest act of worship we can give to God.

CATHOLICS ON SUNDAY

“That is why Catholics are bound to go to Mass every Sunday... they don’t go just to hear a sermon, or just to sing hymns, or to say personal prayers... all these things can happen at Mass. But the main, the essential act is the offering of Christ. The Church wishes that all members should, at least once a week, assist in the offering of the sacrifice by which we were redeemed. At least once a week they are expected to avail themselves of the wonderful privilege Christ has given them of being co-offerers with Himself of the sacrifice of the Cross. When they assist at Mass they are not mere spectators: they are active offerers of sacrifice to God. The priest reminds them of that fact when he calls the Mass ‘my sacrifice and ours... the priest is the official representative of the people, specially ordained to carry out the sacrificial rite in the name of all.’”

THE VICTIM AGAIN

Davies drew on his pipe abstractedly, as if he were there from memory only. He gave the impression of a man

chasing an illusive idea around his mind, trying to pin it down. He began to talk hesitantly... “In the old Hebrew blood-sacrifices there was always some beast who was slain and made a victim. in the Mass, as you tell me, you have a Victim who is already slain, being now in a state of eternal victimhood. (The priest nodded.)

“In the old sacrifices,” Davies continued, “the people’s contribution to the ceremony—apart from providing the beast—was their internal disposition of soul... submission, adoration and the rest. It was the victim-beast who was actually the victim of the sacrifice. The worshippers did not offer themselves except in spirit and internally. In the Mass, the Victim offered is Christ, the Victim of Calvary. The worshippers’ contribution is their internal disposition of soul. They do not offer themselves as a sacrifice in the Mass except figuratively, in spirit uniting themselves with Christ.”

ONE AND THE SAME

“That is correct,” said the priest. “There is only one Victim of the sacrifice of the Mass. The same Victim who died on the Cross. You may read in some devotional booklet, now and again, that we offer ourselves with Christ, or, that we are offered with Christ in the Mass. In one way that is true: but we do not offer ourselves in the same way we offer Christ. For a start, Christ alone is the real Victim: we are not. It is the offering of Christ that makes the Mass. Our contribution is, as you say, a very real contribution but an internal and spiritual one.

“Christ is our sacrifice: Him we offer as our sacrifice to God. And while we offer we make sure that our internal dispositions correspond to our offering. In spirit we unite ourselves with our Divine Victim, and in spirit offer ourselves to God with Him. This internal spiritual work each one must do for himself as he assists at Mass. No one else can do it for him. It is much the same, as you suggest, as the old Hebrews offering an actual slain victim to God and at the same time making their internal spiritual offering and dedication of themselves.”

Every Mass Brings Us Calvary

It was the last day of the fishing trip. The two men had spent a pleasant but not very successful morning beach fishing. Although both were leaving early next morning there was as yet no sign of packing. They seemed reluctant to remove from sight the usual paraphernalia of a holiday such as they had enjoyed. They sat and smoked and said nothing: quite content with their thoughts. It was Davies who first broke the silence. He suddenly chuckled to himself and said: “Do you know, Father, there wouldn’t be a more surprised woman in the world than my wife if she heard that during this fishing trip I had been, more or less, getting the ‘good oil’ on the Mass from a priest... I have been thinking a lot about what you have said. I think there is only one point left about which I am curious. Who benefits from the offering of the Mass? I mean apart from the honour and glory given to God.”

THE BENEFITS TO BE GAINED

“You mean,” began the priest, “who benefits from an individual Mass, say, like the Mass I offered this morning for the people at the little parish church here. Well, first of all, the whole Church in general benefits. The Mass is really offered by the whole Church: so the members of the Church living on earth and the members who are on their way to heaven through Purgatory benefit from every Mass said anywhere in the world.

“Then, every Mass is offered, or applied, for some particular or special person or intention: so, that person or intention would benefit in a special way from that particular offering of the Mass. “Of course, the priest as the minister of Christ and representative of the people, the altar servers and the choir, and the actual congregation assisting at the particular Mass, all have a special personal share in the fruits of the particular Mass.

“As you might expect, the Mass does not produce these fruits in the souls of the people mechanically. There must be in the worshipper the required dispositions of soul: what he will receive from the Mass will depend on the quality of these dispositions.”

THE CONGREGATION’S PART

“Now, here’s a point that struck me when I attended Mass that Sunday... and I asked the kids about it later. Is there any special way in which the ordinary congregation are trained to take their part in the Mass... I mean, the day I went I looked around a lot and noticed that some read from books, some just held the beads, some seemed to be doing

nothing but looking up at the altar. The kids told me that sometimes, too, they sing psalms or hymns, and sometimes they all say what the altar boys usually say by themselves... and so on.”

“Yes,” said Father, “there is a general direction for the congregation which says that those who are present should take part in the Mass in the manner which pertains to them. This is made more particular by saying that the participation by the congregation must be, above all, internal... meaning that they should be very conscious of their privilege of being co-offerers with Christ, through the priest, of the sacrifice by which they were redeemed. They must first see to a proper attention of mind, and disposition of heart suitable to the great action in which they are taking part. Certain external actions and words may be added to foster the internal disposition and express it.

“As you might expect from what we have said of the nature of sacrifice, the worshippers are encouraged to partake of the sacrificial banquet of Holy Communion, as completing their active participation in the Mass.

GOD BLESS YOU

“Mr. Davies,” concluded the priest, “I have a feeling that you are looking forward to airing your knowledge before the family... that you are planning some innocent questions for them, so that when, or if, they begin to stumble over the explanations, you will supply the words and phrases they are looking for.”

“You could be right, Father,” Davies admitted with a smile. “I can visualize Joanie’s face when I ask her why she believes that the Mass is a real sacrifice and what part she has in offering it. And before we finish — just in case the kids happen to drag me in again — is there any little book you could recommend that would keep me profitably occupied during the service?”

“There is one which I will give you right now,” said Father, as he bent down to a portmanteau at his feet and began to explore. He straightened up with a little booklet in his hand. (“How to Follow The Mass” by Canon F. E. Pritchard. Australian Catholic Truth Society.) “This is an illustrated booklet, originally published to help visiting non-Catholics follow Mass. You will find it very good, very helpful. And may I recommend to your special notice a little prayer on page five... here it is: ‘O God, I long to worship Thee as Thou wilt to be worshipped. Help me to do this. If the Church of the Mass be Thy true Church, give me the grace to know it, and the courage to do Thy holy Will’.”

“Thank you, Father... for everything... I’ll say that prayer.”

They shook hands.

“Goodbye, Mr. Davies, and God bless you always.”
