

The Liturgy as Prayer¹—II

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I want to turn, in the second part of this article, to the eucharist, which is prayer *par excellence*. And I first want to draw attention to the scholastic distinction between *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis*. Certainly this distinction has led to a very mechanical attitude to the sacraments; so long as one goes through the motions then God produces the results. The distinction has probably been responsible for a good number of abuses, but it is valuable as long as it is not misapplied. I mention this because I am going to deal with the eucharist as a sacrament and as the sacrament of prayer. In this context it is most important to remember what the distinction means. Because, putting it very briefly, the first part of the mass is really all done *ex opere operantis* and the second part of the mass is increasingly done *ex opere operato*; that is to say the effect of the eucharist and our participation will depend largely on the way we prepare ourselves. The first part of the mass is a preparation for the sacramental activity, and in the doctrinal formula which is very difficult to translate, the sacraments work, or produce or have their effect through the very activity of the sacrament, but only for those who do not place an obstacle in the way.

So in order that the sacrament of the eucharist should have its proper effect we have to be careful to remove the obstacles, the obstacles to prayer, obstacles to the grace of the eucharist. In this way all our efforts come in the first part of the mass where we are gradually removing the obstacles, and then we hope to be in a fit state to be worked upon by God. This paper then is divided into these two parts. First of all, and briefly, the first part of removing the obstacles to the sacramental effect of the sacrificial communion or the sacrificial meal. We must remember that the whole action of the mass is an action comprising the two main parts of the mass of the catechumens and the mass of the faithful, the eucharist. As far as we have the mass presented to us in this way we should try to treat it as one developing prayer, as one act of worship starting with the *introit* and ending with the blessing. This one action is common to us all; it is a shared action based on the shared life of grace as I have already tried to show. The action shared by us all

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through Christ our Lord, springs up from grace. The eucharist contains Christ himself and Christ our Lord brings us grace, which means our supernatural life and our life of charity and perfection. It is an action which is common to everyone in the Church as well as an action proper to each individual in his own particularity. This is because it is an action which is our Lord's action. From the very beginning we should remember that we are considering one action in the New Testament, or in the mass (whichever way you look at it)—the last supper, Calvary and the Resurrection (or the sacrament of the last supper, Calvary and the Resurrection) comprise one action and we cannot stop halfway. The last supper is meaningless without Calvary and the Resurrection. If the whole emphasis is placed on the sacrifice, on the death of our Lord on the cross, ignoring its relation to the new life, the new light shining on Easter Sunday morning, it is impossible to understand the work of redemption, or the action of the mass. This is one sacramental action. Since the reformation, with all the subsequent specialisation in trying to explain the mass, the action has tended to be much too chopped up. In the treatises on the eucharist there is now one section which is devoted to the sacrament of the eucharist and another entirely separate section on the sacrifice. When we refer to St Thomas on this point there is some difficulty because people will say that St Thomas was really going to treat of the sacrifice later, towards the end of the *tertia pars*, but that he died before the *tertia pars* was completed and therefore he never had a chance to do so. But there is no definite indication that he intended to do this, and what you might call the sacrificial aspects of the eucharist are to be found in his treatment of the sacrament of the eucharist. It is unnecessary to go beyond that to get a really living understanding of the sacrificial element in the mass. The trouble has been that as various aspects of the mass were pinpointed, this one action became divided just as in the history of the mass the one action of the mass became divided into a whole series of prayers which we now find very difficult to put into a single prayer. It was in origin a single prayer based on the Jewish prayer, the eucharistic prayer recounting the wonderful things God had done for the Jewish people, bringing them out of bondage into their own life, in their paschal meal. This in fact was what our Lord was doing; he was transferring it to the new law so that the early Christians began by carrying on in the same way recounting the marvellous things that God has done through our Lord, who took the bread in his hands and blessed the bread and so on. This was one wonderful hymn of eucharist begun with the preface and continued

in the same spirit of the preface right through to the end of the canon without any interruption.

Now I think I am right in saying that nobody has yet really quite discovered where these different bits and pieces in the present canon of the mass have come from. People have long tried to find out how one prayer after another entered and how the canon was broken up into bits. But when we are treating it as a prayer we must not be too foxed by all these various efforts in historical investigation. The emphasis must be on the mass as one single prayer ending with the amen at the end of the canon, with communion following the prayer. With the grasping of this idea of the movement then the other things can be fitted in as you like, your own prayers fitted into the action of the mass. This is of great importance in our own day because of the pragmatic way in which we are brought up. Everything has to be efficient, we don't do anything that isn't useful so that each prayer has to have its use in the liturgy. The result is that we are trained to use the missal and we try to follow the prayers as the priest is saying them. Personally, I feel that the daily missal can be a great hindrance to entering into the action of the mass, mainly because one becomes pre-occupied with prayers and to that extent withdrawn from *the* prayer. The priest is conducting you, you are with the priest and he is leading you through the prayers of the eucharist. You are taking part in this action on the altar. If your nose is buried in the missal and you are turning over the pages and seeing where the priest has got to, then your attention is withdrawn to a certain extent from the altar and is centred on your little book. Ideally the daily missal is best used as a preparation for mass; we should read our daily missal before mass begins so as to have a clearer idea of what the prayers are about, especially as they are in Latin and we cannot necessarily understand what the priest is saying. We should know in advance what the prayers are about, and the general themes of the lessons. We should not have to bother about the canon because we know all that by heart; but all the first part of the mass could be prepared with the help of the missal; then having some general idea of what the mass is to be about, we should allow ourselves to be drawn into the action of the mass without distractions from our missals. The daily missal is really a mixed blessing, because we get too tied down to these various, particular prayers and have less chance of abandoning ourselves to the work of Christ in and through the mass.

With these preparatory remarks we can now deal with the individual sections of the mass. The first part, the mass of the catechumens, puts in

a nutshell for us as religious, the whole of the divine office; in the mass of the catechumens the divine office is summed up. The lessons, psalms and hymns are spread out in the beginning of the day's office from matins onwards up to prime and terce. All this is then summarized in the introit psalm, the hymn of the *gloria*, the lessons of the epistle and gospel in the mass of the catechumens. The whole of the first part of the divine office is linked to this, the instructional part of the mass, training our minds and our wills together. If you use the modern mnemonic ACTS, you will find the ACTS are there—there is adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, supplication. Above all you will find the reading of scripture, the *lectio divina*, the whole discipline of meditation. All this is preparing your mind and your heart, removing the obstacles to the work of sacramental grace so that by the end of the mass of the catechumens not only is your mind instructed but your will is trained as well. Your mind is now centred on the altar; your mind has been opened, listening to what the epistle and gospel have to tell you, and your will is being trained to pray with the help of the prayer of the priest leading you. There you find the confession of faults and the *flectamus genua*, going down on your knees in individual supplication and then the priest summing up your prayers with the collect. All this is training you, training your mind and your will to the one point—what is going to happen in the mass of the faithful. We should remember that although this is the instructional part of the mass, instruction is not simply a question of informing the mind, it is really training the whole person. The mass of the catechumens is a form of training our personality, deepening our understanding of the faith, keeping our mind on the Word of God, who is our Lord himself, and keeping our will on him too. Prayers like the *Kyrie eleison* and the *gloria* and the collect, the verses from the psalms, are ways and means of drawing our mind and our will to one point. And our daily office is obviously an extension of this instructional part of the mass.

Coming now to the central part of the mass, the mass of the faithful, we must refrain from dividing these two parts, and their individual prayers. We distinguish (not separate) in order to unite in a greater unity. If you dichotomise you separate and sort out things piecemeal, whereas if you keep these distinctions clear you find that they end up by giving you a greater unity and a greater and more explicit whole thing in the end. After distinguishing the mass of the catechumens from the mass of the faithful we then distinguish in the mass of the faithful three steps in one sacramental movement. First of all the offertory, then

the sacrificial part and finally the meal, the feeding. First of all, then, the offertory. The bread and the wine are placed on the altar and this bread and this wine are in fact the congregation, you and I. If we could offer our little breads as they used to and bring our little phials of wine and pour them into the chalice it would be more obvious than the present custom of placing our sixpences and shillings in the collection plate. It has lost a good deal of its meaning. If there were an offertory procession you could bring up your own host—if only we were able to bake our own bread. In the east they have a deaconess in some of the rites who selects the best wheat in the locality and she directs or oversees the baking for the eucharist; this is brought to the altar, the basic material of life from the countryside, the material life of the people brought now to the altar. We must bear this idea in mind as clearly as we can when the priest is at the altar with the ciborium full of small hosts and one large host. These breads and the wine in the chalice do in fact represent ourselves. This is important from the sacramental point of view and as we shall see later it will help overcome some of the difficulties already stated, such as what happens after holy communion at thanksgiving. This bread is now handed over to God, and this is as far as our activity *ex opere operantis* goes. We have tried to clear away all the rubbish out of our minds—our distractions and our venial sins—by directing our minds and our wills in the right direction and placing them on the altar. Now this bread is in fact representing our material life, our being, our well being. And this is *our* action. After that the action becomes more and more the divine action, the sacramental action. If you could introduce some sort of offertory procession in which you leave the mass of the catechumens behind you and come forward to put yourself on the altar in some active way, then your actions have been completed. That is what is so moving in an episcopal mass when at first all the action takes place away from the altar until the moment when everything is brought up to it; the host and the wine are brought, and then the bishop rises up and moves to the altar and everybody moves with him and they start the mass of the faithful. The bishop, representing the clergy and all the people, carries us all towards the altar where he places us as victims prepared for the sacrifice. This bread and this wine are ourselves as far as we can go in making our part of the sacrifice.

The next movement in the action is the divine action when the bread, which is us, is turned into our Lord, but into our Lord as the victim of Calvary. St Thomas says that the mass is a sacrifice because it represents the passion, because it is offered and (this is the final and the ultimate

reason) because it contains *ipsum Christum passum*. Sacramentally our Lord is presented to us, is made present on the altar, not in any other way but precisely as dying on Calvary, pouring out his blood for us, so that this host is the victim of Calvary. *Continet ipsum Christum passum*. That is why it is a memorial of the passion, but a living memorial, the re-presentation of Christ on Calvary. The important thing here is that it is a sacramental action and the bread which is us is turned into *Christum passum*. So all the theology about dying with Christ, all that Pauline teaching about 'dying with', 'suffering with', becoming fellow victims with our Lord, all that first part of the purgative way, all your meditations through the purgative way and purgative prayer, is achieved by a divine action as long as we have not put anything in the way. We are at that moment turned into the victims of Calvary. The sacraments are *propter homines* and the sacrament is not *propter panem*. It is not for this bread that the work has been done, not simply that this bit of bread should be the body of Christ and should be placed in the tabernacle to be given us to adore. This is not the primary purpose of the sacrament; it is a marvellous secondary activity but entirely secondary. Our Lord gave us this bread to eat. This bread which was originally an ordinary bit of wheat and water baked and produced by ourselves to represent ourselves in the order of signs, of sacraments, is in fact ourselves being turned into Christ so that already the sacramental action has begun. We cannot therefore think of the mass up to this point as simply our action in offering ourselves with our Lord, and our Lord as it were standing for us. We are not merely offering all our prayers through Calvary to heaven, waiting for the moment when God comes to us in the form of holy communion. That would be an oversimplification because even if we are unable to go to holy communion we are already communicating in the passion of Christ as long as we are not placing obstacles in the way. The divine action will work; it is a sacramental activity which is descending on us and achieving the result in us. The things that we may put in the way are wilful distractions when our mind is not opened to the word of God, and venial sins (excluding mortal sin because that is dealt with previous to mass by the sacrament of penance). But if we clear our minds of distractions and clear our wills of venial sins as far as we can then this sacramental action will already begin to work on us. It is good to remember the account of the mass of the Holy Spirit celebrated by the English Carthusians, when they finally decided not to take the oath of supremacy. When they came to the consecration they heard a sound like a breath of the

Holy Spirit going round the church where the mass was being said and they were all at that moment united in their decision, which was a sacrificial decision. It was at that moment that they were determined to be martyred with our Lord, co-victims with our Lord; an action which was not really measured by time because one of the lay brothers who was there was actually only martyred about twenty years later. He languished in prison and steadfastly refused to give way for that long period, and this determination, this grace of the martyr's sacrifice was established in him at this moment in the mass. That is a marvellous example of a martyrdom which was inaugurated at the moment of *the martyrdom*.

Here then we have the first part of God's action, turning all our prayers, all our purgative prayers and all our aspirations to become fellow victims with Christ on Calvary, turning all our acts of offering with Christ into Christ's own offering on Calvary. Then moving on in this action of the mass we ought not to forget that the action of the Holy Ghost comes in at this point. This is the point of *epiclesis*. Unlike the Eastern rites the Roman mass has not preserved an invocation to the Holy Ghost. The rather mysterious prayers immediately after the consecration—the *supplices*—in which the offering is borne by the hands of the holy angel, has sometimes been interpreted as referring to our Lord carrying our sacrifices up and then asking God to 'vouchsafe to look with a propitious and serene countenance'. In our rather atomized view of the mass we tend to think that Calvary has now been achieved, the sacrifice has been offered, and that here is our Lord's own achieved action. Then we suddenly start asking God to look propitiously on this sacrifice as though for some reason or other he had not yet accepted it. This is *the* sacrifice, the holy thing; surely it is a bit out of touch to be asking him to look propitiously on it when we know that it is already accepted. But if you think of this prayer of the canon as one prayer in which all these various elements are being brought up into God then obviously it cannot all be done at once. We live in the temporal order and all these different aspects of prayer are spread out, to be achieved in one prayer. So that having entered into Calvary we turn towards the Holy Spirit. In Eastern thought particularly, it has been suggested that the sacrifice is not really fulfilled until the Holy Ghost has come down to ratify it. To our western ears this sounds a little heretical because we feel that everything has to be cut and dried. We think of the moment of consecration, of transubstantiation as the act of sacrifice, a completed act. But until transubstantiation was defined nobody pin-pointed the

moment of sacrifice and in a way the whole prayer is a *sacrificial prayer* bringing in all these various elements. This is brought out rather clearly in the *ordo romanus primus*, in that everyone comes up to the altar, makes his offering and then bows down and is silent while the priest recites the preface and the whole prayer of the canon. There is no genuflection, there is no elevation, the celebrant goes straight through the prayer reciting the wonderful things that God has done for us through the Son. In those days nobody tried to discover exactly at what point the bread ceased to be bread and became the body of Christ. The whole action was turning them into our Lord in this way and people did not bother too much about actual points of time. Obviously definition had to come in the development of the doctrine of the eucharist; it had to come but it is a pity if it breaks up the unity of the prayer too much, or makes us forget all these various aspects and what is actually happening at the mass. So you may think of all that you read in the manuals of ascetical theology about the illuminative way as being summed up in the second half of the canon where the Holy Ghost is descending and ratifying and drawing us all into the sacrifice. The illuminative way of prayer, the prayer of the Holy Ghost is preparing us for the final way of prayer, which is the prayer of unity, where we have handed ourselves over to the divine action.

This leads us finally to the conclusion, the completion of this divine, sacramental action which was begun at the offertory when we put ourselves on the altar. Now we are given back the bread turned into his body. We are given back ourselves re-formed into the body of Christ. This is food; our Lord has said 'Take ye and eat'. So, having offered our livelihood, our very being to God we are now given back our Lord as food. St Thomas says that just as food sustains, increases, and repairs and delights the ordinary physical life, so this spiritual food sustains, increases and repairs and delights our spiritual life. It is the very substance of our spiritual life. When St Thomas comes to discuss the actual reality, the final effect of the eucharist, he calls this the *res tantum*, ultimate reality of the real presence. He speaks of it in two ways: first he says that the ultimate reality of the eucharistic body is the mystical body, or otherwise it is the union of the mystical body of Christ; and just as grace is a shared life, so here not only are we given an individual sacrament, something for our own private possession to take with us and cherish, but we are all drawn together into the life of Christ. Feeding on Christ we become Christ. This is the reality, it is not simply the bread turned into the body of Christ on the altar or in

the tabernacle—that is not the ultimate reality. The consecrated host is itself a sacrament, a sign, a symbol of something further, of the actual effect which God is producing in us, turning us into himself; turning us into himself by feeding us on himself in this marvellous way. So the unity of the body of Christ is to be paralleled again with the unity of prayer, the prayer of unity, the final unitive way. This is where heaven has already begun on earth.

Perhaps this might seem to be a little remote from our personal spirituality; so we turn to a place in St Thomas's *Summa* a little further on where he is talking about the same reality, the same ultimate effect of this sacrament. He speaks of it here in terms of charity which of course is the same as the unity of the body of Christ; but he speaks of it in terms of individual charity. This sacrament gives us the act of charity, the fulness of charity, the fire of love—the very burning force of his love. Now every sacrament in fact gives charity because it gives grace and with grace comes charity; but this is the only sacrament that gives it specifically as an act, and as an act of God. We are made into lovers; we are made into actual lovers not simply to enable us to do penance or to go out and give alms to the poor. These acts are gifts of God or special acts of divine grace working in our souls. But this sacrament has set us on fire with the actual love of God and therefore with the love of our fellow beings. These two ways of expressing the reality of the real presence are in fact the same; the unity of the mystical body and the fire of love in each individual heart. We must not therefore think of ourselves as making acts of love so much as of God living in us, God pouring through this sacrament, which works *ex opere operato*, his own love into our very being. He makes us lovers. He makes us love him. This is very much the opposite of the film of the mass which finishes up with all the people leaving church separately and in the usual rush, having been to holy communion, all individuals distinct from one another and having no contact, no association with each other, no real fellowship. This is the *koinonia*, the common life, the life of Christ made effective and alive through the sacrament.

This is why it is so important that the host which we have offered on the altar should be given back to us. Not simply some host which has been consecrated at another mass. I used to wonder why so much insistence was placed nowadays on the need to use the hosts which are actually offered at the mass and converted into the body of Christ at the consecration. It would seem at first that as it is the body of Christ anyway and we have been given the body of Christ to be fed on, that

is all we need. But in fact there is more to it than that. We have put this particular bread on the altar and it is ourselves, our life and well-being. It is not just a question of any bread; but the bread that we have offered on the altar is now turned into the body of Christ and given back to us. It completes the symbolism of the sacrament and the sacrament is a symbol. Of course if we receive holy communion from the hosts consecrated at another mass we are receiving our Lord, yet we may perhaps not have received the full sacramental effect of it in the same way. We are not drawn in together into the unity of the life of our Lord in quite the same way as when we have received the actual bread consecrated at this mass, because these breads are ourselves and we who are partaking in the mass, are made into his body. The eucharistic body becomes the mystical body and we are joined into him in this way. This means that it is indeed the sacrament of prayer because it is given the very breath of prayer which is love and gives us the very heart and apex of all the prayers that we have read of in the mystics, the unitive way, the unitive prayer, the prayer of love, which is not my love, my active love, my giving myself actively all the time to our Lord, but our Lord giving his love to me and thereby bringing me to life and giving me the voice to pray. We say 'Abba, Father' not because we can do it of ourselves but because he has given us the power; he is giving us the power now to love. So people sometimes complain that whereas at other times of the day they feel they can talk to our Lord and be actively engaged with him, when it comes to the time of thanksgiving this period is dry and they do not seem to be able to say anything to our Lord. That is the whole point. Surely at this time we should be more passive, more receptive rather than active and we should not try to reserve all our spiritual efforts to make at this moment an act of thanksgiving, an act of love; but we should be opening our hearts throughout this work of the mass in such a way that we receive his love and we receive the eucharist, the thanksgiving, into our hearts by his grace. It does not mean a purely passive prayer all the way through, a sort of quietism. On the contrary all the first part of the mass, as we have seen, is fairly active on our part, but we cannot go on being active all the time and not allowing our Lord to do anything for us. When we think of what happens when the sacred host is placed on our tongues we have to remember that it is quite unimportant now what happens to the host after that; the great importance is that we are eating Christ and becoming him and that the fulfilment of the consecration is the consecration of ourselves. If we try to think of our Lord

as being inside us, as distinct from us, separate from us as if we were living tabernacles carrying him around, then surely we have missed a great deal of the significance of the mass and consequently missed perhaps some of the effects of the mass, some of the effects of the eucharist. These questions about what happens to the host when we have swallowed it are all by the way. They have no importance whatsoever. The important thing is that we, you and I, body and soul, are moulded into Christ by his action and in that way we do not have to watch the time of thanksgiving. I do not mean that we should not remain in thanksgiving after mass, but that we should keep our hearts open to him and not our eyes on the clock thinking 'Now I have to make a quarter of an hour's thanksgiving'. The whole day flowing out from the mass is a thanksgiving, as long as we are set on fire with his love. Fire goes on burning, and we go around the day as eucharist, as Christ, living his life, loving his love and so conveying it to others. The whole day is thanksgiving. Therefore if you have to leave immediately after mass to go to the kitchen and prepare the breakfast or to school, this is not an interruption of the mass, it is not breaking into thanksgiving. It is the continuation of thanksgiving in the particular life to which our Lord has called us.

That being so, one final word from the point of view of our religious life. This is the sacrament of prayer and we are consecrated to the state of perfection. When our Lord says 'Be ye perfect as your heavenly father is perfect', we know that this means the perfection of charity and perfection is something actual and active and not just a state. We are in a state of perfection but we have to make that state really dynamic, a living thing and this dynamic, living thing is given to us in the sacrament of perfection, the sacrament of charity, so that if we are living the religious life obviously it centres round the daily eucharist because that is where we find the fulfilment of our religious life. We have vowed it by our three vows which put us into a state of perfection and this is made into a life of perfection by the divine activity descending upon us. We have brought our gifts and placed ourselves on the altar, and God makes us perfect as he is perfect by making us lovers. Religion and perfection, these are the two main points in our life of prayer as nuns or priests or whatever we are in religious life. Religion is the virtue by which we offer the sacrifice, offer gifts, offer worship and honour and praise *per Christum Dominum*, through Calvary to the life of the resurrection. Or as our Lord says elsewhere: 'I no longer call you servants'. Religious life, religious worship, the act of worship is in itself the service

of God to which we are dedicated. But our Lord does not hold us simply to that; he leads us on. 'I no longer call you servants but friends'. He leads us on to the unity of mutual love where we give and take—the giving and taking and sharing in the mind and the will of our Lord by having the sacramental grace pouring into us. 'I no longer call you servants but friends'; not only religious but perfect religious or religious lovers, all those who are living our Lord's life not simply externally by dedication but internally by the fire of charity. This is surely the secret of our religious life and of our life of prayer. We know how to share in the action of the mass and how to be actively preparing throughout the first part of the mass and gradually leading ourselves on until we are over-powered by God through his sacramental activity, not only as individuals but as a community above all. It is the very life blood of the community. It is what draws the whole community together and makes it into one thing, this life of prayer and charity springing from our Lord in the eucharist.

Our Lady in Scripture—IV: Daughter of Zion

BENET WEATHERHEAD, O.P.

The infancy narrative of the third gospel, Luke 1. 5—2. 52, is very different in character from that of the first gospel, longer, richer in allusions, written from a somewhat different angle, and using a different series of events. It goes without saying that the main explicit purpose of both is the same, to introduce the gospel narrative with an account of the origin of the Messiah: Jesus is the heir to the messianic kingdom, born miraculously of a virgin, and either by blood or by legal adoption a member of the royal line. But the divergences soon begin. In Matthew the principal actor is Joseph, in Luke, Mary. In Matthew, the story is one largely of danger and conflict, the infant Messiah is taken for