

HEAD AND HEART IN COMMON CATHOLIC PRAYER

H. F. DAVIS

I THINK good Catholics *want* the common Christian life of prayer as much as ever. They know that Christians should love one another, and live and pray as a body, but they do not know how to set about it. Other Christians would want it, and thereby become better Christians, if they saw before them an example of the Christian common life of prayer.

From one point of view the big difficulty seems to be that our Christianity is heart without head; from another it seems to be head without heart.

It is heart without head in so far as in this twentieth century of Christianity, hundreds of Catholics seem to be insufficiently instructed in what it means. It is head without heart in so far as Christianity has become for many people a mere matter of creed and catechism without sufficient of the practical common action which bring creed and catechism to life. Religion is worship, common religion and common worship; and it can never be a mere creed.

Suppose we begin to see one way in which our worship is heart without head. The Council of Trent deplored the lack of understanding of the Mass, and desired priests to see that the faithful were well instructed. They were not merely to teach people the doctrinal significance of the Mass in sermons and instructions, but to find means of helping them to understand the rite at the actual moment of its offering.

It is not in sufficient harmony with the spirit of Christianity that people should attend Mass out of obedience and spend their time privately praising God and praying for their neighbour, excellent though these prayers must be. Something important is lacking until the people present realise that they are a community gathered round Christ's altar, sitting at God's table, present not only to hear and pray, but to give and receive. There should be an analogous feeling when a new member is being joined to Christ's body at Baptism, or when a dying member is being given Christ's

flesh and blood as his viaticum to heaven. On all these occasions the whole community gives and the whole community receives, and, in doing so, there should be conscious union with Christ, whom we offer, whom we receive, whom we give, who is increased.

The first and obvious reaction to Trent is of course to teach all this fully to the people. This teaching must be adapted to their capacity: historical and doctrinal treatises for the intellectual; simple historical and doctrinal explanations of the Mass, sacraments and liturgy for all the faithful; attractive, pictureful and dramatic instructions for children—perhaps also sometimes for their parents.

This method is being tried at present all over the world with considerable success; though on the whole one would say it has hardly noticeably influenced the mass of the faithful. The latter go to church out of obedience; they pray, they listen to sermons. The Mass is more for all of them than a prayer. Their faith tells them it has infinite value. It is a blind faith, joined to genuine charity; but not yet what it could be, and consequently does not give God as much external honour as it should; nor does it influence as it should either individual or community.

I am here reminded of an occasion when I was explaining the priesthood of the faithful to a group of non-Catholics, and telling them how all Catholics present at Mass were privileged to join with the priest in offering the sacrifice, when one of them remarked: 'This is wonderful; but my own impression from Catholics I have met is that few of them look on the matter in this way'. I felt that there was only too much truth in his statement. Catholics as a whole are much too little aware of the meaning of their faith.

Lectures and instruction can still do a great deal more, though they will perhaps never influence the mass of the people in the way that they influence priests and intellectual laity. To supplement the theoretical approach, it has long been the custom—approved by Trent—to arrange frequent Masses with a running commentary. At St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, I understand, there is one Mass each Sunday at which a priest in the pulpit comments on the Mass as it proceeds. This is done still more frequently at children's

Masses. Some instructors prefer the method of a commented 'dry' Mass in the afternoon or evening. This allows for interruption by questions, and so has some advantages over the real Mass with comments. On the other hand, it does not capture so many people; moreover, it misses the opportunity of inspiring in people the right reverence and understanding at the actual moment of sacrifice.

There exist also many modern 'dramatic' types of instruction. One of these is the film of the Mass, which in some cases not only explains the Mass itself, but also gives scenes from the Old Testament typifying the New Testament sacrifice. Then there are exhibitions with graphs and tableaux, symbols and pictures. It would be folly to deny the great amount of good which has been done by these methods.

As soon as the congregation as a whole know what the Mass really is, i.e. that we are all gathered round a common altar to offer Christ to the Father under the forms of bread and wine at his command, and that we are all sitting at the Table of the Lord to share our common victim, and that in all this we each have our part to play, there still remain difficulties.

We are now in danger of too much head, too little heart.

One way to remedy this is to try to make the symbolism real. Symbolism is not meant primarily to teach. It is rather to remind, impress, bring to life. The Mass and sacraments are at the same time symbols and mysteries. They are mysteries, and to some extent will remain such, because they contain more than can be understood by our human minds, even with the help of grace. Few mysteries are so deep as that of the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. But the Mass and sacraments are also symbols, that is, they are meant to reveal or signify, not merely to hide or mystify. Thus the Eucharist is in the form of bread and wine, i.e. food. It is a common meal, in which we all take part to signify that we are one body, one family, one group with Christ.

Made up as we are of soul and body, it is not enough that we should understand with our minds that the Mass contains Jesus Christ our victim, and that he applies to us the fruits of Calvary and unites us to him and to one

another. It is a sacrament which is meant to symbolise all this in a concrete way; not only do we know, we also *feel* that we are one body with Christ and with one another.

We seem to have lost much of this symbolism in actual practice. When we hear Christ's words, 'This is my body', we believe that it is the body of Christ, but we forget that (a) it is in the form of bread for a definite purpose, to remind us that it is a common food and common banquet, as St Paul tells us in I Corinthians 10, and (b) our Lord gives us his body to remind us that we are one body. Listen to St Augustine: 'What you see on the altar of God, you also saw last night: but what it was, what it meant, of how great a thing it contained the sacrament, you had not yet heard. What then you see is bread and a chalice: this even your eyes tell you: but what your faith needs to be taught (is that the) bread is the body of Christ, the chalice is the blood of Christ. . . . If you would understand (fully) the body of Christ, listen to the apostle saying to the faithful, 'but you are the body of Christ, and his members'. If then you are the body of Christ and his members, your mystery is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your mystery you receive; it is to that which you are that you answer 'Amen' (at the end of the Canon), and in answering you show your agreement. For you hear, '*Corpus Christi*', and you answer, 'Amen'. Be a member of the body of Christ, that your 'Amen' be true. Why then in bread? Let us contribute nothing of our own here, yet us listen to the same words of the Apostle, when he is speaking of this sacrament; '*Unus panis, unum corpus multi sumus*'; understand and rejoice: '*unitas veritas, pietas, caritas*'.

One can understand then how vividly St Augustine was able to bring home to his listeners that the Eucharist is the sacrament of peace and unity with Christ and one another, not just the secret communion between each one of us and Christ, as it so often tends to mean in these days of excessive individualism. It is our personal communion with Christ, but it is much more.

A more basic difficulty in the common life today is the lessening of the appreciation of the whole sacramental idea.

If we make sacramental symbolism live once more, we shall go a long way towards overcoming this difficulty.

When we have given life to the symbols, we shall, I hope, have brought heart and life back to our worship; but we must now beware lest it become heart without head. I am thinking of the language problem. At one time the symbolism of the sacraments was made clear to the people by the words, which they all understood. This was the main purpose of the words. St John Chrysostom reminds the people that they have no excuse for not understanding what is said or read before them, since everything is in Greek.

We know how an accident of history, combined with a laudable love of tradition, has led in many cases to the liturgical language becoming more and more separated from the living language of the people. Gradually the idea grew that it was meant to be so, or at least that it was best so. Since the sacraments were mysteries, it was good that they should be celebrated in a mysterious sacred language, not understood by the ordinary people. The Reformers, by protesting against this for the wrong reasons, made matters worse. They denied that the Mass was a sacrifice, or that the sacraments were instrumental causes of grace. Both Mass and sacraments were reduced to the role of acted sermons. Since they were then primarily sermons, or at the most protestations of faith, according to this view, anything about them which was unintelligible was nonsense. Trent had, of course, to reject utterly the Protestant error that sacraments were acted sermons or only acts of faith, and so did not admit that prayer and form in a dead language were unreasonable. To give way to the Protestants on the question of language would appear to be giving way to their false theology. So Trent was content to recommend that instructions and explanations of the Mass in the vernacular should supply what they lost through their ignorance of Latin or of theology.

Trent did not intend to close the matter of language finally, as has been made clear by the published researches of the Professor at the Gregorian, Father Herman Schmidt, published in the *Analecta Gregoriana*, 1950. The Catholic reasons for vernacular, at least in the many sacraments, are

of a different order from those used by the Protestants, as Father Schmidt points out. However, conditions differ in different countries. Whereas the hierarchies of some countries have thought that the time has come for the use of the vernacular in many of the Church's rites, those of other countries have preferred not to sacrifice the beautiful and traditional Latin liturgy for the sake of advantages which do not seem commensurate with the loss.

In the case of the Mass, the disadvantages of a foreign or dead tongue are not so great, since it is easy to accustom people to use missals with the vernacular opposite the Latin text. It is not so easy to accustom the laity to follow a vernacular ritual during the conferring of Baptism, for instance. Some priests try to overcome this by handing out leaflets with the ceremony in Latin and English; and others interrupt the ceremony with a brief explanation of what is being done. In Holland and Norway the whole Mass for the day, with all its common and proper parts in their true order, is sold at the church door each Sunday (price, in Holland, $\frac{3}{4}$ d.). In other countries, someone in the congregation is approved to read parts, or even the whole, of the Mass in the vernacular, while the priest says it in Latin at the altar.

The aim of all these methods, which of course differ in different countries, and which must depend upon the sanction of the local bishop, is to remove the difficulty of the symbolism becoming too mysterious, to make it more truly symbolical, and so more meaningful and affective, so as to appeal at once to both head and heart. Unmeaning symbols remind me of an experience of a priest-friend, who was talking to a non-Catholic who had a warm devotion to symbols of all kinds. My friend asked him: 'But of what are your ceremonies symbols?' 'What do you mean?' replied the non-Catholic. 'Why, they are just symbols.' Doubtless his symbols fulfilled some function, which the psychologist might be able to explain; but Christian symbols should be more rational.

The advisability of making the Mass more meaningful suggests it would be a good thing if we made people more conscious that Mass is being offered for the community. It would be excellent to point this out as often as possible.

Would it not also be good if not all the Masses announced were for private intentions of individual members? How rare it is to hear Masses announced for the Catholics of Eastern Europe, for vocations, for a true spirit of charity among nations, and so forth. Priests could offer such Masses occasionally without being asked; and they could encourage members of the congregation to have Masses said for those intentions.

Both head and heart call for as much active sharing of the Mass as is possible for all. Most dioceses allow some of the new forms of active co-operation, such as dialogue Mass.

In parishes where nothing on these lines has been attempted, changes should only be introduced very gradually. The reason for this is that, as Christianity is a religion which respects tradition, people can be disturbed by any appearance of a break in the past. Changes must be made in such a way as to make people realise that they are going back to the original tradition, rather than starting something entirely new.

For this reason it has been recommended that changes should begin with the evening services, where people are more conditioned to admit such changes. But even here they must not be looked on as novelties. Their purpose is to restore, not to innovate. The principles underlying evening services in general should be those underlying the liturgy. First should come the duty of divine praise, and secondly those of meditation, instruction and contemplation. Petitions should only come in the third place, and the attempt should be made to develop the community idea through the type of petitions encouraged. Incidentally, when petitions are admitted into public services, they should be principally for matters of community concern.

On these lines, evening psalm services can be of great value, whether they are genuine parts of the liturgy or modern forms of service, like the Blessed Sacrament Guild service. Many Catholic parishes now admit liturgical evening services with readings from scripture, prayers and psalms to suit the different seasons of the Church's year. Thus an Advent service would contain readings from the prophecies, especially Isaias, prayers from the Advent

liturgy, and special Advent hymns. In some countries there are many paraliturgical services to introduce people to the spirit of the various festivals. Others help to explain the sacraments.

In all these services, part of the aim is to accustom people to join in their own responses. If they overcome their shyness by their activity at these evening services, they will be more ready to take part in a dialogue Mass in whatever form it is permitted in any particular diocese. In some countries the authorities allow lay lectors to read the epistle and gospel, and members of the choir to recite the *proprium* (even at a low Mass). The object of all this is to increase people's sense of co-operation by making them as active as possible.

At a sung Mass more training is needed. If priest, choir, lector and people can all be given a part, it is easier for people to realise the great common offering. The object is always to get as far as possible away from mere passive attendance of the people, as though they are watching something performed at the altar in which they are not involved.

Another rite recommended in some parts is the revival of the ancient offertory procession; but with the adaptation that each one going to communion drops his own altar-bread in the ciborium to be consecrated at that Mass. The Holy Father, it will be remembered, recommended where possible that people should communicate from altar-breads consecrated at the Mass they have just offered. The Holy Father also expressly favours the revival of the congregation's joining in the 'Amen' before the 'Pater Noster', signifying the assent to the Canon, or eucharistic prayer.

A final obstacle to the association of head with heart is the general lack of sympathetic acquaintance with the Scriptures. It is clear from the writings of the Fathers that the Scriptures were the background which made it possible to explain the Mass. When they were told that the Mass was the Christian Pasch, they thought of the ancient sacrament of the Covenant, the free election of the chosen people, and God's gracious deliverance of that people from Egypt. It is a difficulty in all our prayers that our mind has so little food for thought. When they thought of the ancient Pasch,

the minds of early Christians were ready to see in the Eucharist the Christian pasch, with our free election from all the nations of the world, and our unmerited redemption to form one body, one people, one nation.

It may have been this connection with the Jewish pasch and with their own sense of thanksgiving to God which was mainly responsible for the name 'Eucharist'.

When they remembered the 'Manna', they would think of the new Manna with which God feeds his people.

This ready recalling of the Scriptures, with their story of God's providence watching over his people, and their application of this to Christianity, formed a close bond between them, helping their sense of unity. For it is a psychological fact that the bond which unites people into a nation is above all that of common interest and history. We recognise this in the natural, political sphere; but not always sufficiently in the supernatural order. It has not of course ever been entirely neglected; we should not be human if it had. The early Christians were held together by their remembrance of their common struggles; and the English Catholics owe much of their sense of unity to the history of their martyrs and their forefathers' sufferings.

To have then both head and heart in our Christianity, we must bring back to the people a more living memory and understanding, first, of the Scriptures, and afterwards of our Christian history. A method of doing the former, much used in the early Church, was to go through entire books of scripture in a course of consecutive sermons. To the use of this method we owe some of the finest sermons of St John Chrysostom and St Augustine. Without some such systematic exposition people make little progress in their understanding of God's word. Another method, widely adopted today in some Catholic countries, is to have Catholic Scripture study-circles in each parish. Something akin to this is achieved in many Catholic Action societies in Gospel-inquiry classes.

Such are some of the suggestions which occurred to the writer with the object of helping our Catholic congregations to grow both in their Christian understanding and in their Christian life of worship.