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MY SACRIFICE A LAYMAN THINKS



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MY SACRIFICE

A LAYMAN THINKS!

In a city church many years ago an appeal for flowers for the Forty Hours' Adoration, due to open the following Sunday, was made. "Flowers are scarce and very dear at this season," said the preacher. "May I suggest how, while at your work, you can participate and add your tribute of praise to Our Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Let two or three club together and send even one bunch of tulips for the decoration of the Altar: by doing so you will have done something to give Him honour and glory; your gift will speak for you before the Monstrance."

After devotions, a very old woman approached the priest. She put four pennies in his hand. "Father," she said, "I had to break my last sixpence and take one penny for milk and one for the gas. Could you just put one flower on the Altar for me!" What a magnificent interpretation of "Quid retribuam." Her mite, her tiny contribution, the offering of her last few pence, her sacrifice to give something, however small, to her Maker Who had done so much for her must have warmed the Heart of Christ.

The following Sunday, such was the profusion of flowers and candles that even the numerous steps of the Altar could scarce accommodate the offerings for this great occasion; and I am quite sure that many deprivations, many little sacrifices, were made to give something to Christ ever present on the Altar.

And, speaking of sacrifice, how often do we remember and think about the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass?

What is sacrifice? What is its purpose? Who offers it? And to whom is it offered?

AN ESSENTIAL PART OF WORSHIP

Sacrifice means giving, offering something we reverence and value, to show appreciation, make up for coldness or neglect, to appease anger, to obtain some favour. In other words, to establish union, friendship with the One to Whom we offer our gift.

It is an essential part of worship and is embedded in man's nature.

A belief in some god is almost universal; all normal people share it.

The ancients felt this need, as is shown by the sacrifices they offered to their various idols. They wished to establish union, a bond of sympathy with their god by the slaying of their victim, the pouring out of his blood. They imagined that by partaking of the sacrifice they pleased him, that this acceptance of the return gift created harmony with their god.

Worship, whether true or false, is based on human nature; it is natural, sincere and adequate; it is genuine sacrifice, even though the god is false.

If this is true, and it definitely is, do we need proof to make us realise and accept that we may and can give God true worship of a most perfect kind in the Mass, that it is true worship and most acceptable to Our Heavenly Father?

To many, the death of Christ on the Cross seemed a ghastly failure. Instead, it is a triumphant success, forging as it does an unbreakable link between God and the human race.

We see, therefore, what sacrifice means, how it binds us together; how, where and when we can offer this oblation for sacrifice is something offered to be made holy.

A priest stands at the Altar to offer Mass. We may, and can, join with him and offer our poor gifts, knowing that they will be acceptable because they are offered "Per Christum Dominum nostrum."

But!!! What does Mass mean to me?

A solemn function, a Sunday obligation, a duty performed perfunctorily, carelessly or even sometimes reluctantly?

Have I become accustomed to going to Mass? Do I just say prayers at random while the priest at the Altar celebrates the Holy Sacrifice? Have I nothing special to do, no share in it, no part to play? Do I consider the Mass and the redemption of souls the exclusive work of priests? Have the Rubrics no meaning, no significance? Are there no signs, no signals, no special words to hold my attention or direct me when I get lost, no signposts? In fine, does the Mass mean much, little or almost nothing to me personally? If my answer to any of these questions is in the affirmative, how wrong I am. I am wasting valuable, nay, precious time for I shall not pass this way again.

Is there any easy remedy? Yes, there certainly is. Study of the Mass. Mass is the Sacrifice of Calvary re-enacted in a different manner. Can I make my own of it, co-operate, collaborate with the Celebrant so that, not only do I assist at it, but offer Christ and myself with Him along with the priest at the Altar.

Few of us are capable of intelligently following all the prayers in the Missal: we find them too involved, we get lost, distracted, anxious, lose courage, give up and become useless spectators.

What is the cause of this seeming indifference? Once I find the key, I shall open the door to a better knowledge, a clearer understanding, a greater appreciation of the wonderful privilege I may enjoy daily.

Perhaps a few simple but outstanding points considered carefully may help. Each time I go to Mass I have a most important rôle to fill. Christ expects something from me;

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the priest, invested with the Personality of Christ, needs my help; souls I love depend on my help, and I need help myself to offer the Holy Sacrifice.

Before beginning Mass, the priest in the sacristy washes his hands, symbol of the purity of soul required for the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, for not even the tiniest imperfection must remain.

Then preceded by the Church in miniature, the Altar boy, he goes to the Altar, sees that everything is in perfect order, then goes to the foot of the Altar and recites the prayers of preparation. The Server, my representative as well as that of the congregation, in fact the whole Church responds.

23/8/63.

SPEAKING TO GOD

Bowing down, the priest says the *Confiteor*, makes humbly, publicly his confession of unworthiness to offer Mass and in my name and all those present reiterates that we have all sinned exceedingly through our own fault; nevertheless, we depend on the help of the Blessed Virgin, the Apostles and all the saints to pray to Our Lord God for us. A General Absolution follows our Confession and I am ready to follow the priest and take part in this august drama.

As the priest mounts the Altar steps, he extends his hands, then joins them and says "Oremus," let us pray. Here at the very beginning I am invited to join my prayers with his; he does not want to be alone, so I offer myself in participation through Christ Our Lord.

Bowing over the Altar, he kisses it. Four times during Mass this mark of reverence, veneration, esteem, affection, love and atonement is repeated. May my greeting be one of tenderness and love to make reparation for the frightful kiss of Judas.

The *Kyrie* is a special plea for mercy and is repeated several times. Let me add my petition to that of the server

MY SACRIFICE

asking Christ to have mercy on me notwithstanding my infidelities, my shortcomings, my sins.

The priest now recites the *Gloria* standing at the middle of the Altar, but before doing so he extends his hands to draw us all together to join in this beautiful prayer of praise and petition. We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we adore Thee, we glorify Thee. We give Thee thanks for all Thy gifts and we ask Thee to take away our sins, for Thou only art holy; Thou only are the Lord. *Dominus vobiscum, et cum spiritu tuo*. The Lord be with you and with thy spirit. This salutation is repeated eight times during Mass. It has a double meaning, for it reminds me that there is no life without the presence of God; secondly, that I have a special duty to pray for the priest, without whom there would be no Mass.

Oremus, another invitation to pray, followed by a prayer beseeching God to cleanse our hearts so that we may worthily proclaim the Gospel. Do I realise that without God's unfailing help I am incapable of the smallest act; nevertheless, He asks, allows me, assist at this august sacrifice.

23/8/63

LISTENING TO GOD

The Gospel varies from day to day and is a message from the Scriptures. We can proclaim it by our example, our works. May no idle words, no disedifying comments, no harmful insinuations, no uncharitable remarks defile my lips so that I can truly say: "Praise be to Thee, O Christ. May I always extol Thy patience, Thy love."

The *Credo* follows. A wonderful and most comprehensive prayer. I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Nativity, the Redemption, the Ascension, the General Judgment. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection and life to come. In fine, I believe and accept all the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Does the tremendous import of this prayer strike me? It contains everything my mind can fathom, all my

imagination can gather in greatness, for it is a summary of all our beliefs, a glorious exposition, a magnificent act of faith and, to complete and seal it, the priest again kisses the Altar, token of his loyalty and ours. Lord, in this kiss I give all, my body, my soul, my life. 30/8/63.

GIVING TO GOD

Another *Dominus vobiscum* and *Oremus*, two most important prayers with a very special meaning, for I am now about to enter into the very heart of this great Mystery of Love. I have extra need of God's help to enable me to join in fervent prayer, to accept this new call to join with the priest at the beginning of the Sacrifice when he says: "Receive, Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God, this spotless host which I, Thine unworthy servant, offer to Thee.' Shall I not avail of this reminder to heap on the Paten, the host, myself, all mankind, the universe. Receive, O Lord, my host, my last sigh, my life.

I have full scope and I am free to let myself go, as it were, and choose all I want to offer to God; for now, not only may I, but if my Offertory is to be real, I must join with the priest.

Every thought, every word, every beat of my heart; my weaknesses, my cowardice, my imperfections; my anxieties, my fears, my hopes; my desires for myself and others, my gratitude, my love; all must be placed on the Paten with the host. What an extraordinary privilege to be allowed to offer my petty gifts at this solemn moment in the Mass!

I cannot be too generous: there is ample room for all; for, when the priest raises the Paten with the host, he does so with both hands. He includes all our offerings with his own, so let nothing of my day be lost to Thy glory, O Infinite Majesty. May my offering be generous, loving, all embracing, for it will soon fall into the unfathomable depth of the Consecration.

Going to the side of the Altar, the priest puts wine and a drop of water into the chalice. He reminds Almighty

God that, not only did He create, but ennobled and renewed man, and he asks that this symbol, this union of water and wine, may bring us into the companionship of the Godhead as He shared our human nature. My tiniest thoughts, the tiniest breath of my life must be added to this water and wine, soon to become the blood of Christ, to add something, not to the essential value of the Sacrifice, but to its efficacy. I must pour into the chalice my whole heart and soul; my joys, my sorrows, my disappointments, my whole self; my year, my day, my life, asking God to accept my offering and make it pleasing to Him.

The priest, throughout his whole person, his attitude, his gestures, his words, is the Grand Director of the Prayer. He collects our prayers and gifts to mass them together into one, that of Christ and the Church; hence, the Mass is not alone his, it is ours, it is mine.

We notice he does not say *I*, but that *we* all be sharers, and in offering the Chalice he prays that it may rise up before the Divine Majesty for *our* salvation and that of the whole world beseeching God that we may be received and our offering made pleasing to Our Lord, Our God.

May my sacrifice be a full immolation, an offering of my whole being to Almighty God. May the greatness of this oblation be strengthened in me, may it increase every day, in every Mass.

I have poured into the Chalice all the actions of the twenty-four hours of each day, all the days of the year, of my whole life. I have kept nothing back. "Dear Lord, I wish I could give You more, something greater, but my God, it is my poor all." 10/10/63

The *Lavabo*, or washing of fingers, in preparation for the great sacrifice so near now is followed by a prayer to the Holy Trinity that our offering may be received in remembrance of the Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Our Lord and in honour of the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, of the Apostles and all the saints. Here the gathering together of all the Church Triumphant begins. The hosts of Heaven

with Mary at their head assemble to join and intercede for us in the Holy Sacrifice.

The priest again kisses the Altar, turns himself towards the people, extending and joining his hands, he raises his voice a little and says *Orate Fratres*. Why this added intensity? To rivet our attention and gather us all together so that no one shall be left out of this mark of affection and love, so that when he asks Christ that his Sacrifice and ours may be accepted; that we all be included; that we be all one, all members of one family, all joined in this glorious oblation at this sacred moment. May each word of Thy prayer, O God, have an added meaning. Do not let one syllable pass unnoticed. I may, if I wish, participate in every Mass all over the world. All day and every day this sublime tribute of love, adoration and praise is being offered to the glory of His name, to our benefit and that of the whole Church.

Sursum Corda! Lift up your hearts. What an extraordinary challenge! Notwithstanding my unworthiness, my coldness, my neglect, I may lift up my heart without fear or even misgiving, for You have offered my poor gifts to the Father at the Offertory. I can find nothing more to add; there is nothing left but my loving and most grateful thanks. What could be more just, more natural, more fitting. You have given me life, understanding, health, strength, the sun, the flowers, all the beauties of nature. What have I without You, O my God? Have You not bestowed enough benefits on me? No, You instituted the Sacraments to help and comfort me. You gave Yourself in the Mass. Surely it is just and right that my unending thanks should penetrate to all places, at all times; therefore, I join with all my heart with the Heavenly Army in saying again and again *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus!* I add my feeble voice with all the holy people throughout the Universe as well as the Celestial Choirs to chant this grand hymn of praise.

18/10/63 All through the Mass there is an air of expectancy, of hope, of awe. Not a single act, not a step that I take, not a breath I draw, not a pulsation of my heart but will

be for me and for those for whom I pray a mint of salvation.

Have I said my Confiteor with deep contrition and humbly and sincerely joined with the priest? If so, I am on the right road because in order to say Mass well it is essential that union exists between the priest and people, but the Apostles slept when asked by Christ to keep vigil with Him. Many times I, too, would like to sleep and leave Him for some flimsy trifle, some imaginary duty. I allow my mind to wander while the priest blesses the offerings, and mine are amongst them.

To bring back my roving thoughts, the priest once again stretches out, lifts up and then joins his hands, unfolds and spreads them over the Altar asking Almighty God to bless these gifts, these presents, these unspotted sacrifices which we offer for the Church, the Pope, our bishops and all believers in the Catholic Faith, for the living, their families and friends, for the redemption of souls and their salvation.

The warning bell rings to tell me Christ is so near! Will this Mass be the one in which I shall love Thee to the point of forgetting self, submitting unreservedly my whole will, of loving Thee so that I give thee all, of losing myself in Thee.

Through the Mass may I fulfil my sacrifice generously, retracting nothing. May I understand it a little better, love it much more.

I may speak to You at this sacred moment, whisper my most intimate secrets, offer my whole heart through the hands of Thy priest at the Altar.

The *Commemoration of the Living* follows. The priest prays for those he particularly wishes to pray for, then continues with a general prayer for all, concluding with *Per Christum Dominum Nostrum!* What could be more simple, more consoling! Through Christ Our Lord! Through Christ of the Mass. I may offer Him night and day, week day and Sunday. Shall I not try, by my love, to give a

warm welcome to the Babe of Bethlehem when His Mother, the Heavenly choirs, the Apostles and martyrs and all the saints are there to present me through Christ Our Lord.

Do I realise that the priest at the Altar and Mary are the greatest magnitudes among God's masterpieces? Without the ordained priest to consecrate the Host, the Sacrifice of Calvary could not be renewed, and without Mary there would be no Sacrifice of the Cross. Without the marvellous generosity and co-operation of Mary, her instantaneous submission to God's Will, the Immaculate Conception would not have been enacted. She never hesitated a moment when approached by the angel; she accepted the deprivations, the difficulties of the tedious journey to Jerusalem. Her Babe was born amongst strangers, in want and discomfort and poverty. The beasts showed more sympathy than man. They shared their manger, they gave their heated breath to give a little warmth to the Divine Infant. The shepherds left their sheep. The Magi, attracted by the star, brought their most costly gifts and offered them in love and adoration to the Christ Child. They knew and acknowledged Him as their God whilst the Jews stubbornly refused to accept as king a Babe born in a stable, placed in a manger. They would not admit sovereignty unless surrounded by pomp; they refused to see the Messiah without the outward trappings of grandeur. They ignored His coming. It was not their idea of kingship, so they repudiated Him.

Shall I do likewise or, like the Magi, shall I bow down and offer my adoration and love? 25/10/63

Christ is born again on the Altar. My Lord and my God! Words are inadequate, hollow, empty. My God, I love, at least I long to love You. I am an unprofitable servant but I do want to be, not worthy, but less unworthy to join with the priest.

After the Consecration, the priest bows profoundly and with joined hands placed on the Altar offers a special prayer of supplication that God receive and accept those gifts, that they be borne by the Angel to the throne of God;

and to give added efficacy he kisses the Altar, makes several Signs of the Cross over the Host and Chalice beseeching God that those of us who partake of this Sacrifice may be filled with heavenly grace and blessing.

Now the priest prays for all who have gone before us, making special mention of those he has been asked to pray for so that we have an opportunity to remember our loved ones and ask that all may come to a place of light and peace.

Nobis quoque peccatoribus! And to us sinners and to all who hope in Thy mercies, once again he asks pardon and participation with the Apostles and martyrs and the saints through Christ Our Lord.

How many times have I heard the priest say *Pater Noster*? Our Lord's own prayer taught by Him to his Apostles when they asked Him "Lord, teach us how to pray." Do I ever analyse it for myself? Ask myself what it means and what I should aim at when I say it?

In the Our Father I have a synopsis, a summary of all my needs.

Christ now present on the Altar is my real Father. Not only has he created me to His own image, but he redeemed me, forgot my sins, makes excuses for me. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." He gave the last of His blood for me. Truly, no father could do more for his unworthy child, and this Father is in Heaven, the Author of life. He, without Whom I am incompetent to achieve anything, allows me, nay commands me, to call Him Father. My human respect, uncharitableness, all my shortcomings are forgiven when I kneel down humbly and say Our Father. He loves me with an everlasting love and so far reaching is this love that rather than leave us lonely, without a leader, without a friend, He invoked the ingenuity of the Divine Wisdom and devised a means to remain with us for ever. To be our comfort, our support. Do this for a commemoration of Me was His

command at the last supper, and the priest I see at the Altar has just obeyed.

Christ is waiting to give Himself to me, hence I bless His holy name and look forward to His real coming. Hallowed be Thy name. Is it enough to merely repeat it? Can I do nothing to enhance the glory of this name? Make some effort to prevent it being used irreverently, being profaned?

Nothing of merit is accomplished if it be not God's Will, so we ask that it may be done on earth as it is in Heaven. The angels and saints delight in doing His Will, giving Him honour and glory: let me join with them, forgetting my likes and dislikes, accepting His Will in all things.

In the next petition we ask and expect God to give us the grace and strength to carry out His commands, to give us the means to work out our salvation, and as we are composed of body and soul, we ask Our Father to give us our daily bread. He has provided the nourishment of our souls in the Eucharist and He knows we need food for our bodies too.

Have I nothing to substitute when I ask forgiveness of my trespasses? Is it too much to expect me to forgive others, that I bear no ill will, no hatred against those who have hurt me? That I forget their insults, their bitter words?

Finally, we ask Almighty God to help and strengthen us in temptations and to keep us from all evil.

What a comprehensive prayer, and it is Our Lord's own prayer. With what reverence and confidence should I say it daily.

The priest now repeats a number of prayers asking Christ, now present on the Altar, to protect us and keep us from sin and trouble; that God's peace be always with us and that the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ may avail us and bring us to life everlasting.

At the *Agnus Dei* we have a reminder and an added opportunity to ask pardon, not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world, that the gentle Lamb of God wash them away and that peace may descend upon us. Pardon my negligences, my laxity in prayer, my self love, my vanity. Wash my soul, for soon I shall possess Thee. May you saturate my soul, show me how I must live and die united to You. Grant me grace to say with the priest with deep contrition and real feeling: Have mercy on me, have pity on me! Never again let me offend You grievously nor even deliberately hurt You by the smallest venial sin. Grant that I may long for Thy love and Thy life within me.

RECEIVING FROM GOD

The prayers that follow are a renewed preparation for the Banquet, a cleansing of the slightest spot that remains, a final polishing of my soul before partaking of the repast, and now I join with the priest in saying *Domine, non sum Dignus*. Lord, I am not worthy, but say the words of absolution once again. I have honestly tried to prepare for Your visit. In the Confessional I have received Your pardon and now, with the priest at the Altar, I join humbly and sincerely in admitting my unworthiness. Nevertheless, I lift my hopes high. Have You not said "Do this for a commemoration of Me"? You invite me, You have prepared a feast for my acceptance, You long for me as if I were worth while. You have removed the barriers that keep me from You, and to prove Your love You come to me. What shall I offer in return for all this love? I have already given all at the Offertory; there is nothing left. My feeble efforts are Yours. I can only join with the priest in asking that the Body of Christ I have just received may preserve my soul unto life everlasting.

How often have I neglected You, refused Your invitation, closed the door of my heart to You. Lord, I am not worthy, I know. Mary, my mother, come to my assistance. Thank your Son for me. Tell Him I am weak, cowardly, unstable, foolish, an unprofitable servant, but I am also one of those puny humans entrusted to your care in His dying moments.

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St. Mary Magdalen, make room at the feet of Jesus for this poor sinner. Give me a place at the foot of the Cross so that even a tiny speck of His Precious Blood may make me less unworthy and that my sorrow added to that of all those present at this Mass may make up in some way for my share in His sufferings and death on the Cross. May this Communion be one of many in which I shall do my utmost to love You with my whole heart, to give and not to count the cost, to lose myself in Your love.

After the Post Communion prayers, the priest offers Our Lord our love and affection by the outward mark of a final kiss. Then he tells us Mass is ended, but before we go he calls down a special blessing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: he imparts a visible sign, a last reminder that in the Mass we have offered the Sacrifice of Calvary. It is a farewell, a word to keep me company so that I may walk in His footsteps.

The Gospel of St. John concludes the Mass. It is the last Gospel of every Mass and it summarises the life of Christ. He is the light of the world, the Creator of all things, the beginning and end of our beings.

May it not be true in my case that "His own received Him not." May I not cut short the few remaining minutes but join with the priest and people in reciting the last prayers. I may leave my heart to burn with the lamp before the tabernacle; may each breath be an act of of reparation and petition for my own soul, for the souls in Purgatory and for all who are to die this day. Following Mass thus, I may, united with the priest, offer Almighty God something really worthy.

At the *Confiteor* I admitted my transgressions, expressed my sorrow, humbly asked for forgiveness. At the *Kyrie* I remembered God's mercy. My loyalty and praise I renewed at the *Gloria*. I listened to the Gospel to see what lesson it taught and how I could utilise it in my own life. At the *Credo* I reaffirmed my faith in God and the teachings of His Church. At the *Offertory* I made my offerings with the priest, prayed for him, for those I promised to pray for. I included relatives, friends, the Church, the souls I wanted

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to help, the souls in Purgatory, and I asked Mary and the assembled choirs of angels as well as the saints to offer their homage to the Eternal Father for me.

At the *Consecration* I joined my adoration with that of the angels and asked Mary to offer her love with my poor gifts of the Offertory.

At the *Pater Noster* I recalled to mind that Christ on the Altar is our loving Father, that I may confidently use His own prayer; that is a pledge, a solemn promise that He will give me the necessary graces to attain salvation if I ask properly for them, and to crown all He comes to me Himself in Holy Communion. That Host we see the ordained priest take in his anointed hands is the same tiny Infant of the crib, the Christ of Calvary, and He is truly God. He comes to strengthen me, to comfort me. He loves to be with the children of men.

How I should love Him! How easy it should be to try and prove my love, to show my gratitude, my appreciation of this wonderful gift! If I realised what He has done for me, the graces He has showered on me, could I have the heart to hurt Him. Would my life not seem all too short to thank Him, to do something to make up for my neglect. And now He gives me a special blessing, a final send off before leaving His presence. I joined with the priest offering Mass, received Holy Communion. I may with Our Divine Lord go my way, live my day.

"Let me conspire with Thee each day that all my Masses may be for the last." 15/11/63.

An awareness that I was not getting all I should from my Mass suggested the thoughts embodied in these pages. I realised that I was taking for granted the prayers, ceremonies, rubrics, the details surrounding its celebration. I concluded that I said prayers, repeated words, but they had no definite meaning. Undoubtedly, I looked upon the Mass as awe-inspiring, solemn, something beyond my limited intelligence; so I just floundered around in a circle.

An opportunity arose which gave me time and an opportunity to consider the matter seriously. I read, thought

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and prayed a bit. I learned to see the Mass from a new angle; I began to love it.

I tried to follow the priest, not in detail (I could not use the Missal), but I picked out the principal parts, added those that appealed to me as most helpful and used them as points to build on. As my understanding developed and my knowledge grew, cold, aloof stilted awe was replaced by close, warm, reverential intimacy.

Appreciation of the incomprehensible goodness of God, His remedies for our ills through the Sacraments, His intense love expressed in the Holy Sacrifice suggested greater effort. I began to see the depth, the beauty, of the prayers; their sequence led to a whole so perfect as to be indescribable in words. The priest's part, my part in the Mass, took on a new meaning and I know now and accept fully the fact that though the Sacrifice of Calvary took place thousands of years ago, Christ is indeed more Christ of the present than Christ of the past and that we are mediocre Christians because our Mass is mediocre.

PRAYER

Perpetual Sacrifice of the Mass, I unite myself to you. Pay what I owe to Heaven, to earth and to Purgatory, for the past, the present and the future.

Nihil Obstat,

JEREMIAS HAYES, S.J.,
Censor Theol. Deput.

Imprimi Potest,

* JOANNES CAROLUS,
Archiep. Dublinen.,
Hiberniae Primas.

Dublin, die 10 Junii, 1957.

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