

Explanation of the Holy Mass

The Traditional Latin Mass
Dom Prosper Guéranger



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By Dom Prosper Guéranger

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Preface

The Great Bishop of Poitiers, Mgr. Pie, in his funeral Oration on our Father, Dom. Guéranger, said: "You have long been feasting at a royal board, where you were daily regaled with the most delicate and varied food. Those Conferences on the Christian Life and Virtues, and that incomparable Commentary on your Rule, - you have no right to keep them to yourselves."

Notwithstanding so pressing an invitation on the part of so competent a judge, as was this devoted friend of our Father, we have hesitated long before yielding up to public gaze the secret of our family treasure. It seemed to us that such notes as these would only do for his own sons, eager of paternal instructions and never likely to carp at either the simplicity of the form, or at the incorrectness of the language.

But so very many friends, assiduous readers of Dom Guéranger's *Liturgical Year*, by their repeated solicitations and earnest appeals, have succeeded at length in dissipating our first fears. They are fully aware that they cannot expect to find once more the eminent writer himself, in mere notes, jotted down at the time, almost on the sly, and afterwards hastily put together in a form, the faultiness and inexactitude of which can never be imputed to any one, save to the more or less faithful copyists. But there is one thing they are sure to find in these pages, - the Teacher and the Father, who in intimacy

with his friends or his monks, ever with lavish hand, distributed that sure and luminous doctrine which leads souls to God.

We here open our proposed publication, by a short commentary on the Ceremonies of Holy Mass, incomplete though we certainly know it to be, in many points, and characterised, as were all our Father's Conferences, by a total absence of all pretension to erudition: we have not, therefore, presumed to change or add anything. Yet, mere notes, as these are, they seem to us calculated to do good of no little importance.

In order to render them of more practical utility, we have given, in the Appendix, the *Ordinary of the Mass*, interspersed with the same paraphrase, which has already appeared in the *Liturgical Year* of Dom Guéranger.

Thus will the Faithful be provided, in this small work, with an efficient means of uniting themselves with the Priest in an enlightened manner, and be helped to derive more fruit from their assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

On the welcome accorded to this first attempt at giving publicity to our family treasures, will depend our future decision as to the opportuneness of continuing the proposed series of this *Collection of Notes*.

JUDICA

Ps. XLII

H aving made the sign of the Cross, the Priest says the Antiphon: *Introibo ad altare Dei*, as an introduction to the 42nd Psalm. This Antiphon is always said, both before and after the Psalm, which he at once begins: *Judica me Deus*. He says the whole of it, alternately with the Ministers. This Psalm was selected on account of the verse *Introibo ad altare Dei*: I will go unto the altar of God. It is most appropriate as a beginning to the Holy Sacrifice. We may remark here, that the Church always selects the Psalms she uses, because of some special verse which is appropriate to what she does, or to what she wishes to express. The Psalm, of which we are now speaking, was not in the more ancient Missals: its usage was established by Pope Pius the Fifth, in 1568. When we hear the Priest saying this Psalm, we understand to whom it refers:- it refers to our Lord, and it is in his name, that the Priest recites it. We are told this by the very first verse: *Ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me*: deliver me from the unjust and deceitful man.

The verse here used as an Antiphon, shows us, that David was still young when he composed this Psalm; for, after saying, that he is going to the Altar of God, he says: *Ad Deum, qui laetificat juventutem meam*: To God, who giveth joy to my youth. He expresses astonishment at his soul being sad; and, at once, cheers himself, by rousing his hope in God; hence, his song is full of gladness. It is on account of the

joy which is the characteristic of this Psalm, that holy Church would have it be omitted in Masses for the Dead, in which we are about to pray for the repose of a soul, whose departure from this life leaves us in uncertainty and grief. It is omitted, also, during Passiontide, in which season, the Church is all absorbed in the sufferings of her divine Spouse; and these preclude all joy.

This 42nd Psalm is an appropriate introduction to the Mass, inasmuch as it is in our Lord whom it will bring among us. Who is He that is to be *sent* to the Gentiles, but He that is Light and Truth? David foresaw all this; and, therefore, he uttered the prayer: *Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam*. We take his prayer and make it ours; and we say to our heavenly Father: send forth Him, who is thy Light and thy Truth!

The Psalm having been terminated by the *Gloria Patri*, and the Antiphon repeated, the Priest asks for God's assistance, saying *Adjuvatorum nostrum in nomine Domini*: Our help is in the name of the Lord: To which the Ministers reply: *Qui fecit coelum et terram*: Who hath made heaven and earth. In the Psalm just recited, the Priest expressed his ardent desire to possess our Lord, who is Light and Truth: but the very thought, that he, - a sinful creature, - is about to meet this Lord of his, makes him feel the need he has of help. True, - God has willed this meeting; he has even vouchsafed to prescribe it as one of our duties: and yet, notwithstanding, man is continually made to feel his unworthiness and nothingness. Before going further in the holy Sacrifice, he is determined to humble himself, and confess that he is a sinner. He encourages himself to this, by making the sign of the Cross, and imploring God's aid. He then begins the avowal of his sins.

CONFITEOR

Holy Church here makes use of the formula of confession, which she has drawn up; it probably dates from the 8th century. We are not allowed to make the slightest change in the words. It has this prerogative, in common with all the other *Sacramentals*, - that its recitation produces the forgiveness of venial sins, provided we be contrite for them. Thus it is, that God, in His Infinite Goodness, has provided us with other means, over and above the Sacrament of Penance, whereby we may be cleansed from our venial sins: He, for this end, inspired His Church to give us her *Sacramentals*.

The Priest, as we were saying, begins the confession; and, first of all, he accuses himself to God. But, he is not satisfied with that; - he as good as says: "I not only desire to confess my sins to God, but to all the Saints; in order that they may join their prayers with mine, and obtain pardon for me." Therefore, he immediately adds: "I confess to the Blessed Mary ever Virgin." Not that he has ever committed any offence against this holy Mother; but he has sinned in her sight; and the very thought of it urges him to make his sins known to Her also. He does the same to the glorious St. Michael, the great Archangel, who is appointed to watch over our souls, especially at the hour of death. In like manner, he confesses to St. John the Baptist, who was so dear to our Lord, and was His precursor. Lastly, he desires to own his sins to Saints Peter and Paul, the two Princes of the Apostles.

Certain Religious Orders have permission to add the name of their Patriarch or Founder. Thus, the Benedictines insert the name of St. Benedict; the Dominicans, St. Dominic; the Franciscans, St. Francis. After mentioning these and all the Saints, he would have even the Faithful, who are present, know that he is a sinner; and he therefore says to them: *And to you, Brethren!* because, as he is now humbling himself on account of his sins, he not only accuses himself before those who are glorified in God, but moreover, before those his fellow-mortals who are there visibly present, near the sanctuary. And not satisfied with declaring himself to be a sinner, he adds in what way he has sinned; and confesses, that it is by all the three ways, wherein men commit sin, namely, by thought, word, and deed: *cogitatione, verbo, et opere*. Then wishing to express, that he has thus sinned and through his own freewill, he utters these words: *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*: through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. And, that he may, like the publican of the Gospel, outwardly testify his inward repentance, he thrice strikes his breast, whilst saying those words. Conscious of the need he has of pardon, he once more turns towards Mary and all the Saints, as likewise to the Faithful who are present, begging that they will all pray for him. In reference to this formula of Confession, which has been established by our holy Mother the Church, it may be well to remind our readers, that it would, of itself, suffice for one who was in danger of death, and unable to make a more explicit Confession.

The Ministers answer the Priest by wishing him the grace of God's mercy; they express their wish under the form of prayer, during which he, the Priest, remains bowed down, and answers: *Amen*.

But, the Ministers themselves stand in need of God's pardon; and, therefore, they repeat the same formula as the Priest, for the confes-

sion of their sins; only, instead of saying: *Et vobis, fratres*, and to you, Brethren, they address the Priest, and call him Father: *Et tibi, Pater*.

It is never allowable to change anything which holy Church has prescribed for the celebration of the Mass. Hence, in the *Confiteor*, the Ministers must always use the simple words: *Et tibi, Pater; Et te, Pater*; they must add no further title, not even were they serving the Pope's Mass.

As soon as the Ministers have finished the Confession formula, the Priest says the same prayer for them, as they had previously made for him; and they, also, respond to it by an *Amen*. A sort of blessing then follows: *Indulgentiam, &c.*, whereby the Priest asks, both for himself and his brethren, pardon and forgiveness of their sins; he makes the sign of the Cross, and uses the word *nobis* and not *vobis*, for he puts himself on an equality with his Ministers, and takes his share in the prayer that is said for all.

The Confession having been made, the Priest again bows down, but not so profoundly as he did during the *Confiteor*. He says: *Deus, tu conversus vivificabis nos*: Thou, O God, with one look, wilt give us life; to which the Ministers answer: *Et plebs tua laetabitur in te*: And thy people will rejoice in thee. Then, - *Ostende nobis, Domine, misericordiam tuam*: Show unto us thy mercy, O Lord; *Et salutare tuum da nobis*: And grant us the Saviour whom thou hast prepared for us.

The practice of reciting these Versicles is very ancient. The last gives us the words of David, who, in his 84th Psalm, is praying for the coming of the Messias. In the Mass, before the Consecration, we await the coming of our Lord, as they, who lived before the Incarnation, awaited the promised Messias. By that word Mercy, which is here used by the Prophet, we are not to understand the Goodness of God; but, we ask of God, that He will vouchsafe to send us Him, who in His Mercy and His Salvation, that is to say, the Saviour, by whom Salvation

is to come upon us. These few words of the Psalm take us back in spirit, to the Season of Advent, when we are unceasingly asking for him who is to come.

After this, the Priest asks of God, that He would vouchsafe to grant his prayer: *Domine, exaudi orationem meam*: Lord, hear my prayer. The Ministers continue, as though in his name: *Et clamor meus ad te veniat*: And let my cry come unto thee. The Priest salutes the people, saying: *Dominus vobiscum*: The Lord be with you. It is as though he were taking leave of them, now that the solemn moment is come for him to ascend the Altar, and, like Moses, enter into the cloud. The Ministers answer him in the name of the people: *Et cum spiritu tuo*: And with thy spirit.

Whilst going up to the Altar, the Priest says *Oremus*: he stretches out his hands, and joins them again. As often as he uses this word, he observes the same ceremony. The reason is, that it immediately precedes some prayer which he is going to make; and, when we pray, we raise our hands up to God, who is in heaven, and to whom we are about to speak. It was thus that our Blessed Lord prayed on the Cross. In the prayer, which the Priest says, whilst ascending the Altar-steps, he uses the plural, because he is not alone; for the Deacon and Sub-deacon go up together with him, and minister to him. The thought which is uppermost in the Priest's mind, at this solemn moment is, to be all pure; for, as he says, he is entering into the Holy of Holies: *Ad Sancta Sanctorum*, meaning to express, by this Hebrew superlative, the importance of the act which he is going to fulfil. He prays, therefore, that his sins, as well as those of his Ministers, may be taken away. The nearer we approach to God, the more we feel the slightest sin to be an intolerable blot upon our soul; so that the Priest redoubles his prayer, that God would cleanse him from his sins. He has already prayed this *merciful* Lord to *turn* and give him life; *Deus tu conver-*

sus vivificabis nos. - Ostende nobis Domine misericordiam tuam. But, having drawn nearer to that God, his fear increases, and his desire of pardon is more ardent; he repeats this same prayer again now whilst going up the Altar-steps. Having reached the Altar, he puts his hands upon it, first joined, and then separated, so that he may kiss it. This kissing the Altar is prompted by a sentiment of respect for the Saints' Relics, which are there. Again, another prayer for pardon of his sins: in it, he says: *peccata mea*: my sins; although he began it by: *Oramus Te, Domine*: We beseech thee, O Lord; nor is there any inadvertency in this; for, all those who assist at the holy Sacrifice should entertain, for the Priest, a sentiment of filial respect, and pray with and for him.

INCENSING THE ALTAR

The Altar represents our Lord Jesus Christ. The Saints' Relics which are there, remind us that the Saints are His members. For, having assumed our human nature, He not only suffered His Passion, triumphed in His Resurrection, and entered into His glory by the Ascension, - but He, also, founded the Church upon earth, and this Church is His mystical Body; He is its Head, and the Saints are its members. From this point of view, then, our Lord has not the fullness of His mystical Body without His Saints; and it is for this reason, that the Saints, who are reigning with Him in glory, are united with Him, in the Altar, which represents Him.

The Priest, having finished the prayer, which he said bowing down, and his hands joined on the Altar, prepares for its Incensing. Twice will this take place during the Holy Sacrifice, and both times with much solemnity, out of respect for our Lord, who is signified by the Altar, as we have already said. Nevertheless, the Priest does not recite any prayer during the first Incensing; he merely thurifies every portion of the Altar, in such wise as that the whole of it is thus honoured. We learn from the Book of Leviticus, that Incense was used, at a very early period, in the divine worship. The blessing, which the Priest gives it in the Mass, raises this production of nature to the supernatural order. Holy Church has borrowed this ceremony from heaven itself; where St. John witnessed it. In his Apocalypse, he saw an Angel,

standing, with a golden censer, near the Altar, on which was the Lamb, with four-and-twenty elders around him. (Apoc. viii. 3.) He describes this Angel to us, as offering to God the prayers of the Saints, which are symbolised by the incense. Thus, our holy Mother the Church, the faithful Bride of Christ, wishes to do as heaven does; and taking advantage of the veil of its mysterious secrets being even thus partially raised up by the Beloved Disciple, she borrows, for our earth's imitation, the tribute of honour thus paid, yonder above, to the glory of her Spouse. At this part of the Mass, the Altar alone, and the Priest, are thurified; the incensing of the Choir is reserved for the second time of the ceremony, which is at the Offertory. - It is one of the customs of the Church to expose, on the Altar, images and relics of the Saints, which then are incensed at the same time.

INTROIT

The ceremony of the Incensing completed, the Priest says the Introit. Formerly, this was not done. The *Ordo* of St. Gregory tells us, that the Priest vested in the *Secretarium*, and then went to the Altar, preceded by the Cross and Torches; during which time, the choir sang the Introit, which was longer than we now have it, for the entire Psalm was sung, and not merely one or two of its verses, with the *Gloria Patri*, as at present. In like manner, it was the choir alone that took the remaining portions, which were to be sung during the Mass. The custom of the Priest's reciting these several portions, originated with that of Low Mass, which custom was, at last, introduced into High Masses.

These remarks will explain how it is, that the ancient Missals differ considerably from those which are now in use. They simply contain the Prayers: Collects, Secrets, Postcommunions, Prefaces, and the Canon. They were called *Sacramentaries*. Whatever was sung by the choir was inserted in the *Antiphonarium*, which now goes under the name of *Gradual*. (Most of the chanted portions of the Mass are, really, nothing more than Antiphons; only, they have more notes than what ordinary Antiphons have.) In more modern times, ever since Low Masses were introduced, our Missals contain everything that used, formerly, to be sung by the Choir; as also the Epistles and Gospels.

Both the Priest and the Choir make the sign of the Cross at the beginning of the Introit, because it is considered as the opening of the Readings. In Masses for the Dead, the Priest makes the Cross over the Missal only.

KYRIE

N ext follows the *Kyrie*, which, at a High Mass, is said at the same side of the Altar, where the Introit was read. The Priest is accompanied by his Ministers, who do not go to the middle of the Altar, until he himself does; meanwhile, they stand behind him, on the steps. In a Low Mass, the Priest says the *Kyrie*, in the middle. This prayer is a cry of entreaty, whereby the Church sues for mercy from the Blessed Trinity. The first three invocations are addressed to the Father, who is *Lord: Kyrie, Eleison*; (Lord, have mercy). The following three are addressed to Christ, the Son incarnate: *Christe, eleison*. The last three are addressed to the Holy Ghost, who is Lord, together with the Father and the Son; and therefore, we say to Him also: *Kyrie, eleison*. The Son, too, is equally Lord, with the Father and the Holy Ghost: but, holy Church here gives Him the title of *Christ*, because of the relation this word bears to the Incarnation. The Choir, too, takes up the same nine invocations; and sings them. Formerly, it was the practice, in many Churches, to intersperse them with words, which were sung to the same melody as the invocations themselves, as we find in several old Missals. The Missal of St. Pius the Fifth did away, almost entirely, with these *Kyrie*, called, on account of these popular additions, *Farsati*, (in French, *farcis*). When the Pope celebrates a Solemn Mass, the singing of the *Kyrie* is continued during the act of homage which is paid him on his throne: but this is an exception to the

present observance throughout the Church. The three invocations, each repeated thrice over, (as now practised,) are like a telling us of our union, here below, with the *nine* choirs of Angels, who sing, in heaven, the *glory* of the Most High. This union prepares us to join them in the Hymn which is now to follow, and which these blessed Spirits brought down to this our earth.