The Spirit of the Liturgy

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Chapter 1: The Prayer of the Liturgy

An old theological proverb says, "Nothing done by nature and grace is done in vain." Nature and grace obey their own laws, which are based upon certain established hypotheses. Both the natural and the supernatural life of the soul, when lived in accordance with these principles, remain healthy, develop, and are enriched. In isolated cases the rules may be waived without any danger, when such a course is required or excused by reason of a spiritual disturbance, imperative necessity, extraordinary occasion, important end in view, or the like. In the end, however, this cannot be done with impunity. Just as the life of the body droops and is stunted when the conditions of its growth are not observed, so it is with spiritual and religious life--it sickens, losing its vigor, strength and unity.

This is even more true where the regular spiritual life of a corporate body is concerned. Exceptions play a far greater part, after all, in the life of the individual than in that of the group. As soon as a group is in question, concern is immediately aroused with regard to the regulation of those practices and prayers which will constitute the permanent form of its devotion in common; and then the crucial question arises whether the fundamental laws which govern normal interior life--in the natural as in the supernatural order--are in this case to have currency or not. For it is no longer a question of the correct attitude to be adopted, from the spiritual point of view, towards the adjustment of some temporary requirement or need, but of the form to be taken by the permanent legislation which will henceforth exercise an enduring influence upon the soul. This is not intended to regulate entirely independent cases, each on its own merits, but to take into account the average requirements and demands of everyday life. It is not to serve as a model for the spiritual life of the individual, but for that of a corporate body, composed of the most distinct and varied elements. From this it follows that any defect in its organization will inevitably become both apparent and obtrusive. It is true that at first every mistake will be completely overshadowed by the particular circumstances--the emergency or disturbance--which justified the adoption of that particular line of conduct. But in proportion as the extraordinary symptoms subside, and the normal existence of the soul is resumed, the more forcibly every interior mistake is bound to come to light, sowing destruction on all sides in its course.

The fundamental conditions essential to the full expansion of spiritual life as it is lived in common are most clearly discernible in the devotional life of any great community which has spread its development over a long period of time. Its scheme of life has by then matured and developed its full value. In a corporate body--composed of people of highly varied circumstances, drawn from distinct social strata, perhaps even from different races, in the course of different historical and cultural periods--the ephemeral, adventitious, and locally characteristic elements are, to a certain extent, eliminated, and that which is universally accepted as binding and essential comes to the fore. In other words, the canon of spiritual administration becomes, in the course of time, objective and impartial.

The Catholic liturgy is the supreme example of an objectively established rule of spiritual life. It has been able to develop "kata tou holou," that is to say, in every direction, and in accordance with all places, times, and types of human culture. Therefore it will be the best teacher of the "via ordinaria"--the regulation of religious life in common, with, at the same time, a view to actual needs and requirements.[1]

The significance of the liturgy must, however, be more exactly defined. Our first task will be to establish the quality of its relation to the non-liturgical forms of spiritual life.

The primary and exclusive aim of the liturgy is not the expression of the individual's reverence and

worship for God. It is not even concerned with the awakening, formation, and sanctification of the individual soul as such. Nor does the onus of liturgical action and prayer rest with the individual. It does not even rest with the collective groups, composed of numerous individuals, who periodically achieve a limited and intermittent unity in their capacity as the congregation of a church. The liturgical entity consists rather of the united body of the faithful as such--the Church--a body which infinitely outnumbers the mere congregation. The liturgy is the Church's public and lawful act of worship, and it is performed and conducted by the officials whom the Church herself has designated for the post--her priests. In the liturgy God is to be honored by the body of the faithful, and the latter is in its turn to derive sanctification from this act of worship. It is important that this objective nature of the liturgy should be fully understood. Here the Catholic conception of worship in common sharply differs from the Protestant, which is predominatingly individualistic. The fact that the individual Catholic, by his absorption into the higher unity, finds liberty and discipline, originates in the twofold nature of man, who is both social and solitary.

Now, side by side with the strictly ritual and entirely objective forms of devotion, others exist, in which the personal element is more strongly marked. To this type belong those which are known as "popular devotions," such as afternoon prayers accompanied by hymns, devotions suited to varying periods, localities, or requirements and so on. They bear the stamp of their time and surroundings, and are the direct expression of the characteristic quality or temper of an individual congregation.

Although in comparison with the prayer of the individual, which is expressive of purely personal needs and aspirations, popular devotions are both communal and objective, they are to a far greater degree characteristic of their origin than is the liturgy, the entirely objective and impersonal method of prayer practiced by the Church as a whole. This is the reason for the greater stress laid by popular devotion upon the individual need of edification. Hence the rules and forms of liturgical practice cannot be taken, without more ado, as the authoritative and decisive standard for non-liturgical prayer. The claim that the liturgy should be taken as the exclusive pattern of devotional practice in common can never be upheld. To do so would be to confess complete ignorance of the spiritual requirements of the greater part of the faithful. The forms of popular piety should rather continue to exist side by side with those of the liturgy, and should constitute themselves according to the varying requirements of historical, social, and local conditions. There could be no greater mistake than that of discarding the valuable elements in the spiritual life of the people for the sake of the liturgy, or than the desire of assimilating them to it. But in spite of the fact that the liturgy and popular devotion have each their own special premises and aims, still it is to liturgical worship that pre-eminence of right belongs. The liturgy is and will be the "lex orandi." Non-liturgical prayer must take the liturgy for its model, and must renew itself in the liturgy, if it is to retain its vitality. It cannot precisely be said that as dogma is to private religious opinion, so is the liturgy to popular devotion; but the connection between the latter does to a certain degree correspond with that special relation, characteristic of the former, which exists between the government and the governed. All other forms of devotional practice can always measure their shortcomings by the standard of the liturgy, and with its help find the surest way back to the "via ordinaria" when they have strayed from it. The changing demands of time, place, and special circumstance can express themselves in popular devotion; facing the latter stands the liturgy, from which clearly issue the fundamental laws--eternally and universally unchanging--which govern all genuine and healthy piety.

In the following pages an attempt will be made to select from the liturgy and to analyze several of these laws. But it is an attempt pure and simple, which professes to be neither exhaustive nor conclusive.

The first and most important lesson which the liturgy has to teach is that the prayer of a corporate body must be sustained by thought. The prayers of the liturgy are entirely governed by and interwoven with dogma. Those who are unfamiliar with liturgical prayer often regard them as theological formula, artistic and didactic, until on closer acquaintance they suddenly perceive and admit that the clear-cut, lucidly constructed phrases are full of interior enlightenment. To give an outstanding example, the wonderful Collects of the Masses of Sunday may be quoted. Wherever the stream of prayer wells abundantly upwards, it is always guided into safe channels by means of plain and lucid thought. Interspersed among the pages of the Missal and the Breviary are readings from Holy Scripture and from

the works of the Fathers, which continually stimulate thought. Often these readings are introduced and concluded by short prayers of a characteristically contemplative and reflective nature--the antiphons--during which that which has been heard or read has time to cease echoing and to sink into the mind. The liturgy, the "lex orandi," is, according to the old proverb, the law of faith--the "lex credendi"--as well. It is the treasure-house of the thought of Revelation.

This is not, of course, an attempt to deny that the heart and the emotions play an important part in the life of prayer. Prayer is, without a doubt, "a raising of the heart to God." But the heart must be guided, supported, and purified by the mind. In individual cases or on definite and explicit occasions it may be possible to persist in, and to derive benefit from, emotion pure and simple, either spontaneous or occasioned by a fortunate chance. But a regular and recurrent form of devotion lights upon the most varied moods, because no one day resembles another. If the content of these devotional forms is of a predominatingly emotional character, it will bear the stamp of its fortuitous origin, since the feeling engendered by solitary spiritual occurrences flows for the most part into special and particular channels. Such a prayer therefore will always be unsuitable if it does not harmonize, to a certain degree at least, with the disposition of the person who is to offer it. Unless this condition is complied with, either it is useless or it may even mar the sentiment experienced. The same thing occurs when a form of prayer intended for a particular purpose is considered to be adapted to the most varied occasions.

Only thought is universally current and consistent, and, as long as it is really thought, remains suited, to a certain degree, to every intelligence. If prayer in common, therefore, is to prove beneficial to the majority, it must be primarily directed by thought, and not by feeling. It is only when prayer is sustained by and steeped in clear and fruitful religious thought, that it can be of service to a corporate body, composed of distinct elements, all actuated by varying emotions.

We have seen that thought alone can keep spiritual life sound and healthy. In the same way, prayer is beneficial only when it rests on the bedrock of truth. This is not meant in the purely negative sense that it must be free from error; in addition to this, it must spring from the fullness of truth. It is only truth--or dogma, to give it its other name--which can make prayer efficacious, and impregnate it with that austere, protective strength without which it degenerates into weakness. If this is true of private prayer, it is doubly so of popular devotion, which in many directions verges on sentimentality.[2] Dogmatic thought brings release from the thralldom of individual caprice, and from the uncertainty and sluggishness which follow in the wake of emotion. It makes prayer intelligible, and causes it to rank as a potent factor in life.

If, however, religious thought is to do justice to its mission, it must introduce into prayer truth in all its fullness.

Various individual truths of Revelation hold a special attraction for the temperaments and conditions to which they correspond. It is easy to see that certain people have a pronounced predilection for certain mysteries of faith. This is shown in the case of converts, for instance, by the religious ideas which first arrested their attention at their entry into the Church, or which decided them on the step they were taking, and in other cases by the truths which at the approach of doubt form the mainstay and buttress of the whole house of faith. In the same way doubt does not charge at random, but attacks for the most part those mysteries of faith which appeal least to the temperament of the people concerned.[3]

If a prayer therefore stresses any one mystery of faith in an exclusive or an excessive manner, in the end it will adequately satisfy none but those who are of a corresponding temperament, and even the latter will eventually become conscious of their need of truth in its entirety. For instance, if a prayer deals exclusively with God's mercy, it will not ultimately satisfy even a delicate and tender piety, because this truth calls for its complement-the fact of God's justice and majesty. In any form of prayer, therefore, which is intended for the ultimate use of a corporate body, the whole fullness of religious truth must be included.

Here, too, the liturgy is our teacher. It condenses into prayer the entire body of religious truth. Indeed, it is nothing else but truth expressed in terms of prayer. For it is the great fundamental truths[4]

which above all fill the liturgy--God in His mighty reality, perfection, and greatness, One, and Three in One; His creation, providence, and omnipresence; sin, justification, and the desire of salvation; the Redeemer and His kingdom; the four last things. It is only such an overwhelming abundance of truth which can never pall, but continue to be, day after day, all things to all men, ever fresh and inexhaustible.

In the end, therefore, prayer in common will be fruitful only in so far as it does not concentrate markedly, or at any rate exclusively, on particular portions of revealed truth, but embraces, as far as possible, the whole of Divine teaching. This is especially important where the people are concerned, because they easily tend to develop a partiality for particular mysteries of faith which for some reason have become dear to them.[5] On the other hand, it is obvious that prayer must not be overladen and as a result form a mere hotchpotch of ill-assorted thoughts and ideas--a thing which sometimes does occur. Yet without the element of spaciousness, spiritual life droops and becomes narrow and petty. "The truth shall make you free"--free not only from the thralldom of error, but free as a preparation for the vastness of God's kingdom.

While the necessity of thought is emphasized, it must not be allowed to degenerate into the mere frigid domination of reason. Devotional forms on the contrary should be permeated by warmth of feeling.

On this point as well the liturgy has many recommendations to make. The ideas which fill it are vital: that is to say, they spring from the impulses of the heart which has been molded by grace, and must again in their turn affect other eager and ardent hearts. The Church's worship is full of deep feeling, of emotion that is intense, and sometimes even vehement. Take the Psalms, for instance--how deeply moving they often are! Listen to the expression of longing in the "Quemadmodum," of remorse in the "Miserere," of exultation in the Psalms of praise, and of indignant righteousness in those denouncing the wicked. Or consider the remarkable spiritual tension which lies between the mourning of Good Friday and the joy of Easter morning.

Liturgical emotion is, however, exceedingly instructive. It has its moments of supreme climax, in which all bounds are broken, as, for instance, in the limitless rejoicing of the "Exultet" on Holy Saturday. But as a rule it is controlled and subdued. The heart speaks powerfully, but thought at once takes the lead; the forms of prayer are elaborately constructed, the constituent parts carefully counterbalanced; and as a rule they deliberately keep emotion under strict control. In this way, in spite of the deep feeling to be found in, say, the Psalms (to instance them once more), a sense of restraint pervades liturgical form.

The liturgy as a whole is not favorable to exuberance of feeling. Emotion glows in its depths, but it smolders merely, like the fiery heart of the volcano, whose summit stands out clear and serene against the quiet sky. The liturgy is emotion, but it is emotion under the strictest control. We are made particularly aware of this at Holy Mass, and it applies equally to the prayers of the Ordinary and of the Canon, and to those of the Proper of the Time. Among them are to be found masterpieces of spiritual restraint.

The restraint characteristic of the liturgy is at times very pronounced--so much so as to make this form of prayer appear at first as a frigid intellectual production, until we gradually grow familiar with it and realize what vitality pulsates in the clear, measured forms.

And how necessary this discipline is! At certain moments and on certain occasions it is permissible for emotion to have a vent. But a prayer which is intended for the everyday use of a large body of people must be restrained. If, therefore, it has uncontrolled and unbalanced emotion for a foundation, it is doubly dangerous. It will operate in one of two ways. Either the people who use it will take it seriously, and probably will then feel obliged to force themselves into acquiescence with an emotion that they have never, generally speaking, experienced, or which, at any rate, they are not experiencing at that particular moment, thus perverting and degrading their religious feeling. Or else indifference, if they are of a phlegmatic temperament, will come to their aid; they then take the phrases at less than their face value, and consequently the word is depreciated.

Written prayer is certainly intended as a means of instruction and of promoting an increased sensibility. But its remoteness from the average emotional attitude must not be allowed to become too great. If prayer is ultimately to be fruitful and beneficial to a corporate body, it must be intense and profound, but at the same time normally tranquil in tone. The wonderful verses of the hymn--hardly translatable, so full are they of penetrating insight--may be quoted in this connection:

Laeti bibamus sobriam
Ebrietatem Spiritus . . .[6]

Certainly we must not try to measure off the lawful share of emotion with a foot-rule; but where a plain and straightforward expression suffices we must not aggrandize nor embellish it; and a simple method of speech is always to be preferred to an overloaded one.

Again, the liturgy has many suggestions to make on the quality of the emotion required for the particular form of prayer under discussion, which is ultimately to prove universally beneficial. It must not be too choice in expression, nor spring from special sections of dogma, but clearly express the great fundamental feelings, both natural and spiritual, as do the Psalms, for instance, where we find the utterance of adoration, longing for God, gratitude, supplication, awe, remorse, love, readiness for sacrifice, courage in suffering, faith, confidence, and so on. The emotion must not be too acutely penetrating, too tender, or too delicate, but strong, clear, simple and natural.

Then the liturgy is wonderfully reserved. It scarcely expresses, even, certain aspects of spiritual surrender and submission, or else it veils them in such rich imagery that the soul still feels that it is hidden and secure. The prayer of the Church does not probe and lay bare the heart's secrets; it is as restrained in thought as in imagery; it does, it is true, awaken very profound and very tender emotions and impulses, but it leaves them hidden. There are certain feelings of surrender, certain aspects of interior candor which cannot be publicly proclaimed, at any rate in their entirety, without danger to spiritual modesty. The liturgy has perfected a masterly instrument which has made it possible for us to express our inner life in all its fullness and depth, without divulging our secrets--"secretum meum mihi." We can pour out our hearts, and still feel that nothing has been dragged to light that should remain hidden.[7]

This is equally true of the system of moral conduct which is to be found in prayer.

Liturgical action and liturgical prayer are the logical consequences of certain moral premises--the desire for justification, contrition, readiness for sacrifice, and so on--and often issue afresh into moral actions. But there again it is possible to observe a fine distinction. The liturgy does not lightly exact moral actions of a very far-reaching nature, especially those which denote an interior decision. It requires them where the matter is of real importance, e.g., the abjuration at baptism, or the vows at the final reception into an order. When, however, it is a question of making regular daily prayer fruitful in everyday intentions and decisions, the liturgy is very cautious. For instance, it does not rashly utter such things as vows, or full and permanent repudiations of sin, entire and lasting surrender, all-embracing consecration of one's entire being, utter contempt for and renouncement of the world, promises of exclusive love, and the like. Such ideas are present at times, fairly frequently even, but generally under the form of a humble entreaty that the suppliant may be vouchsafed similar sentiments, or that he is encouraged to ponder upon their goodness and nobility, or is exhorted on the same subject. But the liturgy avoids the frequent use of those prayers in which these moral actions are specifically expressed.

How right this is! In moments of exaltation and in the hour of decision such a manner of speech may be justified, and even necessary. But when it is a question of the daily spiritual life of a corporate body, such formulas, when frequently repeated, offer those who are using them an unfortunate selection from which to make their choice. Perhaps they take the formulas literally and endeavor to kindle the moral sentiments expressed in them, discovering later that it is often difficult, and sometimes impossible, to do so truthfully and effectually. They are consequently in danger of developing artificial sentiments, of forcing intentions that still remain beyond their compass, and of daily performing moral

actions, which of their very nature cannot be frequently accomplished. Or else they take the words merely as a passing recommendation of a line of conduct which it would be well to adopt, and in this way depreciate the intrinsic moral value of the formula, although it may be used frequently, and in all good faith. In this connection are applicable the words of Christ, "Let your speech be yea, yea,--nay, nay."[8]

The liturgy has solved the problem of providing a constant incentive to the highest moral aims, and at the same time of remaining true and lofty, while satisfying everyday needs.

Another question which arises is that concerning the form to be taken by prayer in common. We may put it like this: What method of prayer is capable of transforming the souls of a great multitude of people, and of making this transformation permanent?

The model of all devotional practice in common is to be found in the Divine Office, which day after day gathers together great bodies of people at stated times for a particular purpose. If anywhere, then it is in the Office that those conditions will be found which are favorable to the framing of rules for the forms of prayer in common.[9]

It is of paramount importance that the whole gathering should take an active share in the proceedings. If those composing the gathering merely listen, while one of the number acts as spokesman, the interior movement soon stagnates. All present, therefore, are obliged to take part. It is not even sufficient for the gathering to do so by repeating the words of their leader. This type of prayer does, of course, find a place in the liturgy, e.g., in the litany. It is perfectly legitimate, and people desirous of abandoning it totally fail to recognize the requirements of the human soul. In the litany the congregation answers the varying invocations of the leader with an identical act, e.g., with a request. In this way the act each time acquires a fresh content and fresh fervor, and an intensification of ardor is the result. It is a method better suited than any other to express a strong, urgent desire, or a surrender to God's Will, presenting as it does the petition of all sides effectively and simultaneously.

But the liturgy does not employ this method of prayer frequently; we may even say, when we consider divine worship as a whole, that it employs it but seldom. And rightly so, for it is a method which runs the risk of numbing and paralyzing spiritual movement.[10] The liturgy adapts the dramatic form by choice to the fundamental requirements of prayer in common. It divides those present into two choirs, and causes prayer to progress by means of dialogue. In this way all present join the proceedings, and are obliged to follow with a certain amount of attention at least, knowing as they do that the continuation of their combined action depends upon each one personally.

Here the liturgy lays down one of the fundamental principles of prayer, which cannot be neglected with impunity.[11] However justified the purely responsive forms of prayer may be, the primary form of prayer in common is the actively progressive--that much we learn from the "lex orandi." And the question, intensely important today, as to the right method to employ in again winning people to the life of the Church is most closely connected with the question under discussion. For it is modern people precisely who insist upon vital and progressive movement, and an active share in things. The fluid mass of this overwhelming spiritual material, however, needs cutting down and fashioning. It requires a leader to regulate the beginning, omissions, and end, and, in addition, to organize the external procedure. The leader also has to model it interiorly; thus, for instance, he has to introduce the recurrent thought-theme, himself undertaking the harder portions, in order that they may be adequately and conscientiously dealt with; he must express the emotion of all present by means of climaxes, and introduce certain restful pauses by the inclusion of didactic or meditative portions. Such is the task of the choir-leader, which has undergone a carefully graduated course of development in the liturgy.

Attention has already been called to the deep and fruitful emotion which is contained in the liturgy. It also embraces the two fundamental forces of human existence: Nature and civilization.

In the liturgy the voice of Nature makes itself heard clearly and decisively. We only need to read the Psalms to see man as he really is. There the soul is shown as courageous and despondent, happy and

sorrowful, full of noble intentions, but of sin and struggles as well, zealous for everything that is good and then again apathetic and dejected. Or let us take the readings from the Old Testament. How frankly human nature is revealed in them! There is no attempt at extenuation or excuse. The same thing applies to the Church's words of ordination, and to the prayers used in administering the sacraments. A truly refreshing spontaneity characterizes them; they call things by their names. Man is full of weakness and error, and the liturgy acknowledges this. Human nature is inexplicable, a tangled web of splendor and misery, of greatness and baseness, and as such it appears in the prayer of the Church. Here we find no carefully adapted portrait from which the harsh and unpleasing traits have been excluded, but man as he is.

Not less rich is the liturgy's cultural heritage. We become conscious of the fact that many centuries have co-operated in its formation and have bequeathed to it of their best. They have fashioned its language; expanded its ideas and conceptions in every direction; developed its beauty of construction down to the smallest detail--the short verses and the finely-forged links of the prayers, the artistic form of the Divine Office and of the Mass, and the wonderful whole that is the ecclesiastical year. Action, narrative, and choral forms combine to produce the cumulative effect. The style of the individual forms continually varies--simple and clear in the Hours, rich in mystery on the festivals of Mary, resplendent on the more modern feasts, delightful and full of charm in the offices of the early virgin-martyrs. To this we should add the entire group of ritual gestures and action, the liturgical vessels and vestments, and the works of sculptors and artists and musicians.

In all this is to be learnt a really important lesson on liturgical practice. Religion needs civilization. By civilization we mean the essence of the most valuable products of man's creative, constructive, and organizing powers-works of art, science, social orders, and the like. In the liturgy it is civilization's task to give durable form and expression to the treasure of truths, aims, and supernatural activity, which God has delivered to man by Revelation, to distill its quintessence, and to relate this to life in all its multiplicity. Civilization is incapable of creating a religion, but it can supply the latter with a "modus operandi," so that it can freely engage in its beneficent activity. That is the real meaning of the old proverb, "Philosophia ancilla theologiae"--philosophy is the handmaid of theology. It applies to all the products of civilization, and the Church has always acted in accordance with it. Thus she knew very well what she was doing, for instance, when she absolutely obliged the Order of Saint Francis--brimming over with high aspirations, and spiritual energy and initiative--to adopt a certain standard of living, property, learning, and so on. Only a prejudiced mind, with no conception of the fundamental conditions essential to normal spiritual life, would see in this any deterioration of the first high aims. By her action in the matter the Church, on the contrary, prepared the ground for the Order, so that in the end it could remain healthy and productive. Individuals, or short waves of enthusiasm, can to a wide degree dispense with learning and culture. This is proved by the beginnings of the desert Orders in Egypt, and of the mendicant friars, and by holy people in all ages. But, generally speaking, a fairly high degree of genuine learning and culture is necessary in the long run, in order to keep spiritual life healthy. By means of these two things spiritual life retains its energy, clearness, and catholicity. Culture preserves spiritual life from the unhealthy, eccentric, and one-sided elements with which it tends to get involved only too easily. Culture enables religion to express itself, and helps it to distinguish what is essential from what is non-essential, the means from the end, and the path from the goal. The Church has always condemned every attempt at attacking science, art, property, and so on. The same Church which so resolutely stresses the "one thing necessary," and which upholds with the greatest impressiveness the teaching of the Evangelical Counsels--that we must be ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of eternal salvation--nevertheless desires, as a rule, that spiritual life should be impregnated with the wholesome salt of genuine and lofty culture.

But spiritual life is in precisely as great a need of the subsoil of healthy nature--"grace takes nature for granted." The Church has clearly shown her views on the subject by the gigantic struggles waged against Gnosticism and Manichaeism, against the Catharists and the Albigenses, against Jansenism and every kind of fanaticism. This was done by the same Church which, in the face of Pelagius and Celestius, of Jovinian and Helvidius, and of the immoderate exaltation of nature, powerfully affirmed the existence of grace and of the supernatural order, and asserted that the Christian must overcome nature. The lack of fruitful and lofty culture causes spiritual life to grow numbed and narrow; the lack of the subsoil of healthy nature makes it develop on mawkish, perverted, and unfruitful lines. If the

cultural element of prayer declines, the ideas become impoverished, the language coarse, the imagery clumsy and monotonous; in the same way, when the life-blood of nature no longer flows vigorously in its veins, the ideas become empty and tedious, the emotion paltry and artificial, and the imagery lifeless and insipid. Both--the lack of natural vigor and the lack of lofty culture--together constitute what we call barbarism, i.e., the exact contradiction of that "scientia vocis" which is revealed in liturgical prayer and is reverenced by the liturgy itself as the sublime prerogative of the holy Creative Principle.[12]

Prayer must be simple, wholesome, and powerful. It must be closely related to actuality and not afraid to call things by their names. In prayer we must find our entire life over again. On the other hand, it must be rich in ideas and powerful images, and speak a developed but restrained language; its construction must be clear and obvious to the simple man, stimulating and refreshing to the man of culture. It must be intimately blended with an erudition which is in nowise obtrusive, but which is rooted in breadth of spiritual outlook and in inward restraint of thought, volition, and emotion.

And that is precisely the way in which the prayer of the liturgy has been formed.

ENDNOTES

1. It is not by chance that "the religious Pope" so resolutely took in hand the revision of the liturgy. The internal revival of the Catholic community will not make progress until the liturgy again occupies its rightful position in Catholic life. And the Eucharistic movement can only effectually distribute its blessings when it is in close touch with the liturgy. It was the Pope who issued the Communion Decrees who also said, "You must not pray at Mass, you must say Mass!" Only when the Blessed Sacrament is understood from the point of view of the liturgy can It take that active share in the religious regeneration of the world which Pius X expected of It. (In the same way the full active and moral power of the Blessed Sacrament is only free to operate unchecked when Its connection with the problems and tasks of public and family life, and with those of Christian charity and of vocational occupations, is fully comprehended.)

2. A proof of this is to be found in the often sugary productions of sacred art--holy pictures, statues, etc.-- which appeal to the people. The people are susceptible to powerful art when it is national; the Middle Ages are a witness to this, and certain aspects of modern art. But the danger of lapsing into mere insipidity is very great. The same thing applies to popular songs, and holds good in other directions as well.

3. This does not mean that these truths are merely a mental indication of the existing spiritual condition of the person concerned. It is rather a proof of the saying, "grace takes nature for granted." Revelation finds in a man's natural turn of mind the necessary spiritual premises by which the truths, which are of themselves mysteries, can be more easily grasped and adhered to.

4. It is a further proof of Pius X's perspicacity that he made universally accessible precisely those portions of the liturgy--Sundays, the weekly office, and especially the daily Masses of Lent--which stress the great fundamental mysteries of faith.

5. By this we do not mean that specific times (e.g., the stress of war) and conditions (e.g., the special needs of an agricultural or seafaring population) do not bring home certain truths more vividly than others. We are dealing here with the universal principle, which is, however, adaptable and must make allowances for special cases.

6. From the Benedictine Breviary, Lauds (e.g., the prayer at daybreak) of Tuesday. [Literally, "Let us joyfully taste of the sober drunkenness of the Spirit."]

7. The liturgy here accomplishes on the spiritual plane what has been done on the temporal by the dignified forms of social intercourse, the outcome of the tradition created and handed down by sensitive people. This makes communal life possible for the individual, and yet insures him against unauthorized interference with his inner self; he can be cordial without sacrificing his spiritual independence, he is in communication with his neighbor without on that account being swallowed up and lost among the crowd. In the same way the liturgy preserves freedom of spiritual movement for the soul by means of a wonderful union of spontaneity and the finest erudition. It extols "urbanitas" as the best antidote to barbarism, which triumphs when spontaneity and culture alike are no more.

8. Matt. v. 37.

9. We do not overlook the fact that the Office in its turn presupposes its special relations and conditions, from which useful hints may be gained for private devotion, such as the necessity for a great deal of leisure, which enables the soul to meditate more deeply; and a special erudition, which opens the mind to the world of ideas and to artistry of form, and so on.

10. The foregoing remarks on the liturgy have already made it abundantly clear that the justification of methods of prayer such as, e.g., the Rosary, must not be gainsaid. They have a necessary and peculiar effect in the spiritual life. They clearly express the difference which exists between liturgical and popular prayer. The liturgy has for its fundamental principle, "Ne bis idom" [there must be no repetition]. It aims at a continuous progress of ideas, mood and intention. Popular devotion, on the contrary, has a strongly contemplative character, and loves to linger around a few simple images, ideas and moods without any swift changes of thought. For the people the forms of devotion are often merely a means of being with God. On this account they love repetition. The ever-renewed requests of the Our Father, Hail Mary, etc. are for them at the same time receptacles into which they can pour their hearts.

11. In earlier ages the Church practiced by preference the so called "responsive" form of chanting the Psalms. The Precentor chanted one verse after the other, and the people answered with the identical verse, or the partially repeated verse. But at the same time another method was in use, according to which the people divided into two choirs, and each alternately chanted a verse of the Psalm. It says much for the sureness of liturgical instinct that the second method entirely Supplanted the first. (Cf. Thalhofer-Eisenhofer, "Handbuch der kathalischen Liturgik," Freiburg, 1902, I, 261 et seq.)

12. The above remarks must not be misunderstood. Certainly the grace of God is self-sufficient; neither nature nor the work of man is necessary in order that a soul may be sanctified. God "can awaken of these stones children to Abraham." But as a rule He wishes that everything which belongs to man in the way of good, lofty, natural and cultural possessions shall be placed at the disposal of religion and so serve the Kingdom of God. He has interconnected the natural and the supernatural order, and has given natural things a place in the scheme of His supernatural designs. It is the duty of his representative on earth, ecclesiastical authority, to decide how and to what extent these natural means of attaining the supernatural goal are to be utilized.

Chapter 2: The Fellowship of the Liturgy

The liturgy does not say "I," but "We," unless the particular action which is being performed specifically requires the singular number (e.g., a personal declaration, certain prayers offered by the bishop or the priest in his official capacity, and so on). The liturgy is not celebrated by the individual, but by the body of the faithful. This is not composed merely of the persons who may be present in church; it is not the assembled congregation. On the contrary, it reaches out beyond the bounds of space to embrace all the faithful on earth. Simultaneously it reaches beyond the bounds of time, to this extent, that the body which is praying upon earth knows itself to be at one with those for whom time no longer exists, who, being perfected, exist in Eternity.

Yet this definition does not exhaust the conception of the universality and the all-embracingness which characterize the fellowship of the liturgy. The entity which performs the liturgical actions is not merely the sum total of all individual Catholics. It does consist of all these united in one body, but only in so far as this unity is of itself something, apart from the millions which compose it. And that something is the Church.

Here we find an analogy with what happens in the body politic. The State is more than the sum total of citizens, authorities, laws, organizations, and so on. In this connection discussion of the time-honored question-whether this higher unity is real or imagined--is beside the point. In any case, as far as personal perception is concerned, it does exist. The members of a State are not only conscious of being parts of a greater whole, but also of being as it were members of an overlapping, fundamental, living unity.

On an essentially different plane--the supernatural--a more or less corresponding phenomenon may be witnessed in the Church. The Church is self-contained, a structure-system of intricate and invisible

vital principles, of means and ends, of activity and production, of people, organizations, and laws. It does consist of the faithful, then; but it is more than the mere body of these, passively held together by a system of similar convictions and regulations. The faithful are actively united by a vital and fundamental principle common to them all. That principle is Christ Himself; His life is ours; we are incorporated in Him; we are His Body, "Corpus Christi mysticum."[1] The active force which governs this living unity, grafting the individual on to it, granting him a share in its fellowship and preserving this right for him, is the Holy Ghost.[2] Every individual Catholic is a cell of this living organism or a member of this Body.

The individual is made aware of the unity which comprehends him on many and various occasions, but chiefly in the liturgy. In it he sees himself face to face with God, not as an entity, but as a member of this unity. It is the unity which addresses God; the individual merely speaks in it, and it requires of him that he should know and acknowledge that he is a member of it.

It is on the plane of liturgical relations that the individual experiences the meaning of religious fellowship. The individual--provided that he actually desires to take part in the celebration of the liturgy--must realize that it is as a member of the Church that he, and the Church within him, acts and prays; he must know that in this higher unity he is at one with the rest of the faithful, and he must desire to be so.

From this, however, arises a very perceptible difficulty. It is chiefly to be traced to a more common one, concerning the relation between the individual and the community. The religious community, like every other, exacts two things from the individual. The first is a sacrifice, which consists in the renouncement by the individual of everything in him which exists merely for itself and excludes others, while and in so far as he is an active member of the community: he must lay self aside, and live with, and for, others, sacrificing to the community a proportion of his self-sufficiency and independence. In the second place he must produce something; and that something is the widened outlook resulting from his acceptance and assimilation of a more comprehensive scheme of life than his own--that of the community.

This demand will be differently met, according to the disposition of each individual. Perhaps it will be the more impersonal element of spiritual life--the ideas, the ordering of instruments and designs, the objectives, laws and rules, the tasks to be accomplished, the duties and rights, and so on--which first arrests the attention. Both the sacrifice and production indicated above will in such cases assume a more concrete character. The individual has to renounce his own ideas and his own way. He is obliged to subscribe to the ideas and to follow the lead of the liturgy. To it he must surrender his independence; pray with others, and not alone; obey, instead of freely disposing of himself; and stand in the ranks, instead of moving about at his own will and pleasure. It is, furthermore, the task of the individual to apprehend clearly the ideal world of the liturgy. He must shake off the narrow trammels of his own thought, and make his own a far more comprehensive world of ideas: he must go beyond his little personal aims and adopt the educative purpose of the great fellowship of the liturgy. It goes without saying, therefore, that he is obliged to take part in exercises which do not respond to the particular needs of which he is conscious; that he must ask for things which do not directly concern him; espouse and plead before God causes which do not affect him personally, and which merely arise out of the needs of the community at large; he must at times--and this is inevitable in so richly developed a system of symbols, prayer and action--take part in proceedings of which he does not entirely, if at all, understand the significance.

All this is particularly difficult for modern people, who find it so hard to renounce their independence. And yet people who are perfectly ready to play a subordinate part in state and commercial affairs are all the more susceptible and the more passionately reluctant to regulate their spiritual life by dictates other than those of their private and personal requirements. The requirements of the liturgy can be summed up in one word, humility. Humility by renunciation; that is to say, by the abdication of self-rule and self-sufficiency. And humility by positive action; that is to say, by the acceptance of the spiritual principles which the liturgy offers and which far transcend the little world of individual spiritual existence.

The demands of the liturgy's communal life wear a different aspect for the people who are less affected by its concrete and impersonal side. For the latter, the problem of fellowship does not so much consist in the question of how they are to assimilate the universal and, as it were, concrete element, at the same time subordinating themselves to and dovetailing into it. The difficulty rather lies in their being required to divide their existence with other people, to share the intimacy of their inner life, their feeling and willing, with others; and to know that they are united with these others in a higher unity. And by others we mean not one or two neighbors, or a small circle of people, congenial by reason of similar aims or special relations, but with all, even with those who are indifferent, adverse, or even hostilely-minded.

The demand here resolves itself into the breaking down of the barriers which the more sensitive soul sets around its spiritual life. The soul must issue forth from these if it is to go among others and share their existence. Just as in the first case the community was perceived as a great concrete order, in the second it is perceived as a broad tissue of personal affinities, an endless interweaving of living reciprocal relations. The sacrifice required in the first place is that of renouncing the right of self-determination in spiritual activity; in the second, that of renouncing spiritual isolation. There it is a question of subordinating self to a fixed and objective order, here of sharing life in common with other people. There humility is required, here charity and vigorous expansion of self.

There the given spiritual content of the liturgy must be assimilated; here life must be lived in common with the other members of Christ's Body, their petitions included with one's own, their needs voiced as one's own. There "We" is the expression of selfless objectivity; here it signifies that he who employs it is expanding his inner life in order to include that of others, and to assimilate theirs to his. In the first case, the pride which insists upon independence, and the aggressive intolerance often bred by individual existence, must be overcome, while the entire system of communal aims and ideas must be assimilated; in the second, the repulsion occasioned by the strangeness of corporate life must be mastered, and the shrinking from self-expansion, and that exclusiveness triumphed over, which leads us to desire only the company of such as we have ourselves chosen and to whom we have voluntarily opened out. Here, too, is required continual spiritual abnegation, a continuous projection of self at the desire of others, and a great and wonderful love which is ready to participate in their life and to make that life its own.

Yet the subordination of self is actually facilitated by a peculiarity inherent in liturgical life itself. It forms at once the complement of and contrast to what has already been discussed. Let us call the disposition manifesting itself in the two forms indicated above, the individualistic. Facing it stands the social disposition, which eagerly and consistently craves for fellowship, and lives in terms of "We" just as involuntarily as the former bases itself on the exclusive "I." The social disposition will, when it is spiritually active, automatically seek out congenial associates; and their joint striving towards union will be characterized by a firmness and decision alien to the liturgy. It is sufficient to recall in this connection the systems of spiritual association and fellowship peculiar to certain sects. Here at times the bounds of personality diminish to such an extent that all spiritual reserve is lost, and frequently all external reserve as well. Naturally this description only applies to extreme cases, but it still shows the tendency of the social urge in such dispositions. For this reason people like this will not find all their expectations immediately fulfilled in the liturgy. The fellowship of the liturgy will to them appear frigid and restricted. From which it follows that this fellowship, however complete and genuine it may be, still acts as a check upon unconditional self-surrender. The social urge is opposed by an equally powerful tendency which sees to it that a certain fixed boundary is maintained. The individual is, it is true, a member of the whole--but he is only a member. He is not utterly merged in it; he is added to it, but in such a way that he throughout remains an entity, existing of himself. This is notably borne out by the fact that the union of the members is not directly accomplished from man to man. It is accomplished by and in their joint aim, goal, and spiritual resting place--God--by their identical creed, sacrifice and sacraments. In the liturgy it is of very rare occurrence that speech and response, and action or gesture are immediately directed from one member of the fellowship to the other.[3] When this does occur, it is generally worth while to observe the great restraint which characterizes such communication. It is governed by strict regulations. The individual is never drawn into contacts which are too extensively direct. He is always free to decide how far he is to get into touch, from the spiritual point of view, with others in that which is common to them all, in God. Take the kiss of

peace, for instance; when it is performed according to the rubric it is a masterly manifestation of restrained and elevated social solidarity.

This is of great importance. It is hardly necessary to point out what would be the infallible consequences of attempting to transmit the consciousness of their fellowship in the liturgy directly from one individual to another. The history of the sects teems with examples bearing on this point. For this reason the liturgy sets strict bounds between individuals. Their union is moderated by a continually watchful sentiment of disparity and by reciprocal reverence. Their fellowship notwithstanding, the one individual can never force his way into the intimacy of the other, never influence the latter's prayers and actions, nor force upon the latter his own characteristics, feelings and perceptions. Their fellowship consists in community of intention, thought and language, in the direction of eyes and heart to the one aim; it consists in their identical belief, the identical sacrifice which they offer, the Divine Food which nourishes them all alike; in the one God and Lord Who unites them mystically in Himself. But individuals in their quality of distinct corporeal entities do not among themselves intrude upon each other's inner life.

It is this reserve alone which in the end makes fellowship in the liturgy possible; but for it the latter would be unendurable. By this reserve again the liturgy keeps all vulgarizing elements at a distance. It never allows the soul to feel that it is imprisoned with others, or that its independence and intimacy are threatened with invasion.

From the man of individualistic disposition, then, a sacrifice for the good of the community is required; from the man of social disposition, submission to the austere restraint which characterizes liturgical fellowship. While the former must accustom himself to frequenting the company of his fellows, and must acknowledge that he is only a man among men, the latter must learn to subscribe to the noble, restrained forms which etiquette requires in the House and at the Court of the Divine Majesty.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Rom. xii. 4 et seq.; I Cor. xii. 4 et seq.; Eph., chaps. i.-iv.; Col. i. 15 et seq., and elsewhere.

2. Cf I Cor. xii. 4 et seq.; M. J. Scheeben, "Die Mysterien des Christentums," pp. 314-508 (Freiburg, 1911).

3. This does not apply, of course, to the communication between the hierarchical persons and the faithful. This relation is continual and direct.