

the world where the doors seem always to be open and the rooms always full, full of all sorts of oddities as well as all sorts of loveliness, full of the waifs and strays of society as well as the immediate circle of friends, full because you can find there at all times the unassuming glory of Christian charity, the warmth and welcome of home. They need to be reminded that that is the ideal for them too; and that their life in its entirety is to be an invitation to a marriage feast, the marriage of Christ with the world.

'God is love: and who abideth in love abideth in God and God in him.' It is not for us to wonder whether the wine may give out at the marriage feast; we are only stewards. There were six waterpots at Cana; and 'Jesus saith to them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.' That is our calling: to fill our lives with love in his service, up to the brim. When we have done that, in faith and love and worship, we shall find that his grace has turned the water into wine; we shall find, perhaps in this life also, a happiness that is beyond our dreams. But even if we do that, even if his love cannot wait till we are with him before giving us his loveliest gifts, still we shall find hereafter what the chief steward found at the feast: 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.'

GERALD VANN, O.P.

FAMILY WORSHIP

Not men alone, but all human institutions, customs and habits of life partake of the effects of Christ's Redemption, and receive after their own manner a supernatural character. Man has a purpose in this life which transcends the boundaries of this earth, he is a child of God in no metaphorical sense, and his worldly business participates in his heavenly life in so far as it is the means of his attaining his supernatural end. The commonest failing among Christians is to put on one side our divine sonship and to be content with the earth and what it alone has to offer. Materialism means recognising only matter and the power of matter, and putting aside the spirit. Christians acquiesce in materialism when they put aside the 'higher things,' as they are often vaguely called, and are content to live in this world for the sake of making money, living comfortable lives.

In a world which appears to recognise only money, arms, and strength as symbols of the right, we can still find men appealing for

the restoration of what they call the more human or homely things, the restoration of the rights of the working man, of family life, and of Christian love. The grounds on which they base their appeal are usually that this is a more human condition of life, and men will therefore be happier when it has been reinstated. The defence of family life is most commonly set out in this way. But family life will not be restored by telling people that it will make them happy; many of them know, or think they know, that they are perfectly happy without family life, and in fact find themselves much more comfortable without the burdens of a wife and children. The fact that family life is a human thing is only half the question; family life is more than a human thing; as part of human life, it has been redeemed by Christ, and human life will only reach its perfection in Christ if all those things redeemed together with man are integrated into life. In addition the family will win the respect it merits, not when it is preached as a means of giving men happiness on earth, but when it is shown to be an integral part of Christ's redemptive work on earth.

We take part every day in Christ's Redemption in the Mass, and recall the social character of this act. We offer ourselves with Christ to God not for ourselves alone, but for all men. It is not we alone who offer, it is the whole human race. The Mass is the pledge of our love for our fellow men, and, unless we make good outside church all the obligations implied in the act of sacrifice, we are making a mockery of our worship. So, too, unless we see the Mass as a family meal and our family relations therein incorporated and supernaturalised, we shall never restore the family to its place of honour in the world. If the family is preached only as an excuse to make men more comfortable or to obtain better conditions for the poorer classes it will not be respected. If it is preached as the practice of Christian love, as a symbol of man's eternal destiny, then it has real significance.

The failure to respect the family and all that it represents has been brought about chiefly by two factors; the failure to see the human family as a miniature of the Christian family, and the setting up of a false distinction between the secular and the religious. These two factors are related as cause and effect. Men have only separated the worldly from the heavenly because they have failed to see that sin alone is worldly in the full sense, that all that they call worldly, including the family, is potentially heavenly. This brings us again to the point that not only men themselves but all their institutions partake of the redemption. God wishes men to become holy by using the normal human means of marriage, birth and death, and therefore

he has made these things vehicles of grace. They only fail as vehicles of grace when men refuse to use them so, when they turn them to selfish uses. So we have perverted marriage, the family, human love because we have employed them only for our own pleasure. We have refused to use them as means of sanctification. We speak often enough of a vocation to the priesthood, because that is obviously work for God—though even that can become the work of pride and stubbornness—but we rarely hear talk of the vocation to marriage. Yet marriage is a vocation, and a man has only a right to marry if God wishes him to live the supernatural Christian life in that sphere. Moreover, when a man is married he is as obliged as a priest to use his state of life in work for God's Church, through the sanctification of himself, his wife and his children.

Therefore, because we thought of marriage not as a vocation, but as something 'worldly' which, though we never admitted it, really meant evil, we have found it impossible to view the family as a miniature of the Church. Holiness and piety had become churchy; and religion being confined to church and Sundays, it was not at all clear how obedience and love of one's family fitted in. If family life was just a thing of the world, so was obedience, yet obedience and family love were commandments of God. But these worldly things have a more than human value in so far as they are potential means of grace. And Catholics who fail to stand by their obligations as parents or guardians or their duties of loyalty and obedience as children are not only guilty of neglecting their worldly affairs, but of an even greater crime of refusing God's offer of divine grace. Virtually they degrade one of God's greatest gifts to man, refuse to accept the opportunities of divine grace, and instead of making their family life a vessel of supernatural life they make their religion a formal and hypocritical sham. In this way families have broken up, and it is possible to have an individual man or woman, boy or girl, to all outward appearances a good practising Catholic, but who has no understanding of his or her responsibilities in the home. There are women who spend hours in prayer but neglect to mend their husband's clothes. There are men who spend their time at church or on the business of some religious organisation and yet fail in interest or love for their children.

It is not only the wife's duty to attend to her household, but this work should be a prayer: it has ceased to be a worldly thing since it has been redeemed by Christ. Neither is the husband's attention and care for his wife and children merely a worldly obligation: that too has been redeemed by Christ and raised above the level of the mundane to become a prayer. As all the members of the family are

welded into unity by love, instead of constantly repeating the stale jokes about the absence of love between husband and wife, we should remember its dignity. For it is a participation in the love that is a divine attribute and that prompted God to the greatest deed the world has seen.

In her liturgy the Church impresses on men the fact that the whole of life has been taken up and transformed in the Incarnation, for though the liturgy of the Church is centred round the Mass and the Sacraments, in effect it extends outward from them to all levels of human life, conduct and reality, making these things sacramental. Dom Theodore Wesseling has pointed out in his *Liturgy and Life* the meaning of the word sacramental. A sacrament, he tells us, is 'any reality consisting of a spiritual element contained in a material one. This containing is not a merely material containing like that of a glass containing wine. The material element 'contains' the spiritual element in such a way that the outward visible matter is the natural outward manifestation, the perpetual corollary, the normal vital and visible complement of the spirit.' In this way the human tongue is the *normal* material complement of the human soul. The dog's tongue differs from man's not only because it is constructed differently, but because it lives only with the life of the dog. So the whole human body is human, and even the most debased of human bodies is infinitely removed from the most refined of animal bodies because it has human life which is immortal. And as human life is raised to a supernatural state, so too is the human body and all its functions, potentially at least, and in many cases actually. The liturgy insists on this fact. We have only to look at what the Church includes in her liturgy to make this clear.

One of the most important 'branches' of liturgy—and, incidentally, one sadly overlooked by reformers—is the rites of the sacraments. In fact, after the Mass, which includes the greatest of the sacraments, the liturgy consists principally in the administration of the sacraments. St. Thomas (*Summa* III, lxxv, 1) gives an enlightening exposition of the place of the sacraments in human life. They equip man for life, he tells us, first as an individual, when the waters of Baptism bring him to life, when the oil of Confirmation brings him from childhood to manhood, when the bread of the Eucharist provides him with sustenance; the medicine of Penance cures his ills and the comfort of Extreme Unction solaces him on his death-bed. They also equip him for social life either as a married man giving him through matrimony the grace to propagate the Church, or as a priest the grace to minister to the needs of the faithful. In all these sacraments the Church takes and uses *ordinary* human things for

the sanctification of *ordinary* human life: water, oil, bread, wine. Moreover, she insists that these ordinary human elements ('worldly' they would be called by the dichotomists) are necessary instruments of grace. Grace is given in baptism by means of water, Christ is received through bread—the doctrine of the Real Presence is the Church's greatest avowal of the sanctity of simple human 'worldly' things. Throughout the whole community of the Church the ordinary things of human life are opportunities for grace and Christians receive grace not only through water, oil, bread and wine, but through one another.

The liturgy thinks of the relations of men to one another in the same way; it assumes man's need of his fellows and insists that that need is a holy thing and a means of grace. The insistence on the plural in all liturgical forms and especially in the Mass is too well known to be reiterated; the significance of *Dominus Vobiscum*, *Orate fratres*, is clear. The unity of the Church cannot be questioned after reading the Ordinary of the Mass. Man's need of man has its most sublime natural expression in the human family, and the Church in sanctifying that need has sanctified the family and made it the most perfect example on earth of what the Church itself is on a larger scale.

Since the Church worships as one, so should the family; for it is sanctified both as an instrument of divine grace and as a symbol in miniature of the Mystical Body of Christ. The neglect of family life has arisen out of a failure to understand that the family is more than a collection of individuals, but is one body, 'they shall be two in one flesh.' In its turn this misunderstanding has grown out of the failure to use the family itself as a centre of worship. The bond of family life is sealed by corporate worship in the Mass; not that all the members of the family should attend the same Mass together, but that it should be for them all an inspiration to bear the burdens and face the obligations of family life in a spirit of love and in their higher unity in Christ. If they have prayed together with Christ for one another, if they have together offered themselves up with Christ on the altar, it would become hypocritical worship to return home and indulge in selfish interests to the hurt and detriment of the common body. Just as Christ continues his sacramental life within each individual outside the church and outside the time of Mass, so he is perpetually present in the family, the image of his Church. Just as the individual naturally expects to speak during the day to Christ in his redeemed soul, so the family should speak occasionally to Christ in their midst.

This expression 'Christ in their midst,' used no doubt thought-

lessly on occasions, is no pious exaggeration. Christ is really present in the family circle because the family is redeemed and because it is a means of grace to those who will so use it. For this reason it is all the more shocking to find families who not only do not pray together, but think the suggestion absurd. Prayer is regarded as a purely private business; no mother or father is thought to have the right to interfere with the prayers of their children, still less with the prayers of one another. Where, then, are the children to learn their prayers?

No doubt there are objections to be raised against family prayers. True, they provide occasion for abnormal distraction; but, apart from the natural human weakness which sees the incongruous in any form of public gathering, this is only the case where family prayers are conducted in a self-conscious atmosphere, in other words in the family where the tradition of common prayer has been lost. The tradition must be regained. If we could take these things for granted, if it were the normal thing for a mother to say the Angelus with her children in the middle of her work, and if daily the whole family or, as so often must be the case in these days, what is left of the family, were to **pray together in the evening**, no objection of this sort would arise. The family would be raised from the level of a worldly thing, and would become a sacrament of love and unity as it re-enacts Christ's love for his family. Obedience would not need to be defended, the husband would not need to be told why he must consider his wife, and the wife would understand the divine nature of her very material duties. Then too the love of Christ and the love of our fellows in Christ, practised first in the home, would spread throughout the world. Not only would the family itself be raised to the level of the divine, but the love practised in the home would spread to the nation and through the nation to the world. Men would recognise one another as members of that great universal family whose head is Christ and whose mother is the Queen of Peace.

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