

Entering into Christ's Passion: The Mass as a Sacrifice

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STh II-II, q. 85, a. 1: Whether offering a sacrifice to God is of the law of nature?

I answer that, Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him: and whatever this superior being may be, it is known to all under the name of God. Now just as in natural things the lower are naturally subject to the higher, so too it is a dictate of natural reason in accordance with man's natural inclination that he should tender submission and honor, according to his mode, to that which is above man. Now the mode befitting to man is that he should employ sensible signs in order to signify anything, because he derives his knowledge from sensible realities. Hence it is a dictate of natural reason that man should use certain sensible realities, by offering them to God in sign of the subjection and honor due to Him Now this is what we mean by a sacrifice, and consequently the offering of sacrifice is of the natural law.

STh II-II, q. 81, a. 7: Whether religion has an external act?

I answer that, We pay God honor and reverence, not for His sake (because He is of Himself full of glory to which no creature can add anything), but for our own sake, because by the very fact that we revere and honor God, our mind is subjected to Him; wherein its perfection consists, since a thing is perfected by being subjected to its superior. . . . Now the human mind, in order to be united to God, needs to be guided by the sensible world, since "invisible things . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made," as the Apostle says (Rm. 1:20). Wherefore in the Divine worship it is necessary to make use of corporeal things, that man's mind may be aroused thereby, as by signs, to the spiritual acts by means of which he is united to God. Therefore the internal acts of religion take precedence of the others and belong to religion essentially, while its external acts are secondary, and subordinate to the internal acts.

Reply to Objection 2: [E]xternal things are offered to God, not as though He stood in need of them, according to Ps. 49:13, "Shall I eat the flesh of bullocks? or shall I drink the blood of goats?" but as signs of the internal and spiritual works, which are of themselves acceptable to God. Hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei x, 5): "The visible sacrifice is the sacrament or sacred sign of the invisible sacrifice."

Thomas de Vio Cardinal Cajetan, *On the Sacrifice of the Mass* (1531), chapter 6:

It is **the unity of the sacrificial victim [hostia]** that is the basis for the truth of, and for the right understanding of, the different passages of Sacred Scripture dealing with the sacrifice and the priesthood of the New Covenant.

This sacrificial victim was, simply and absolutely speaking, immolated only once – on the cross by Christ himself, who offered himself. In a certain qualified sense [*secundum quid*], this victim is offered daily by Christ’s ministers in his Church.

Thus, in the New Covenant, there is a bloody sacrificial offering [*hostia*], and an unbloody sacrificial offering [*hostiam*]. We recognize that Jesus Christ is the bloody sacrificial victim [*hostiam*], offered once on the altar of the cross for the sins of the whole world. And we recognize that Christ himself instituted the unbloody sacrifice [*hostiam*] as his body and his blood under the appearances of bread and wine [at the Last Supper].

In truth, we do not have here two sacrificial victims – one bloody and one unbloody – but only one victim, because the thing offered is simply one. For the body of Christ which is on our altars is nothing but the very body of Christ which was offered on the cross, and the blood of Christ which is on our altars is nothing but the very blood which was shed on the cross. . . .

The mode [of the sacrificial offering in the Mass] – namely, to immolate unbloodily – was not instituted of itself as a different mode of immolating. It purely referred to the bloody victim [*hostia*] on the cross. . . .

Thus, properly speaking, it cannot be said that, in the new covenant, there are two sacrifices, two *hostia*, or two oblations or immolations (or whatever other name you like), simply because on the cross there is Christ the bloody *hostia*, and on the altar [there is] Christ the unbloody *hostia*. Rather, **there is a single *hostia* offered once on the cross, continuing to be present in the Eucharist** in an immolative mode by the daily repetition as instituted by Christ.

Indeed, on our altar, we handle the *hostia* offered on the cross: but this is because of the identity of the thing offered on the cross and on the altar. From **this** – the one and identical body of the Christ, once offered on the cross and the very same now offered on the altar – it is clearly evident, that there is not a different *hostia* on the altar and on the cross. Rather, what was offered once on the cross, perdures in a different mode on the altar, by the mediation of Christ: “Do this in memory of me.”