

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

The Excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass

By Saint Leonard of Port Maurice

[From the book *The Hidden Treasure of the Holy Mass*]

The principal excellence of the most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass consists in being essentially, and in the very highest degree, identical with that which was offered on the Cross of Calvary: with this sole difference, that the Sacrifice on the Cross was bloody, and made once for all, and did on that one occasion satisfy fully for all the sins of the world; while the Sacrifice of the Altar is an unbloody sacrifice, which can be

repeated an infinite number of times, and was instituted in order to apply in detail that universal ransom which Jesus paid for us on Calvary. So that the bloody Sacrifice was the instrument of redemption; the unbloody is that which puts us in possession: the one threw open the treasury of the merits of Christ Our Lord; the other affords the practical use of that treasury. And, therefore, observe that in Mass there is made not a mere representation, nor a simple commemoration of the Passion and Death of the Redeemer, but there

is performed, in a certain true sense, the selfsame most holy act which was performed on Calvary. It may be said, with all truth, that in every Mass Our Redeemer returns mystically to die for us, without really dying, at one and the same time really alive and as it were slain, *"I saw a Lamb standing as it were slain"* (Rev 5:6). On the anniversary day of the holy Nativity there is represented by the Church the birth of the Lord, but Our Lord is not then born. On the day of the Ascension and on the day of Pentecost, there are shadowed forth the ascent of the Lord to Heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit down to the earth; yet it is by no means true that, as each of these days comes round, the Lord again ascends to Heaven, or the Holy Spirit visibly descends to earth. But the same

cannot be said of the mystery of Holy Mass, for in it there is made no simple representation of a bygone event, but the selfsame Sacrifice is unbloodily made which, with the shedding of Blood, was made upon the Cross. That same Body, that same Blood, that same Jesus Who then offered Himself upon Calvary, now offers Himself in the Holy Mass. In Mass there is effected, there is continuously practised, that same Sacrifice which was made upon the Cross. Oh, awful, solemn, and stupendous work!

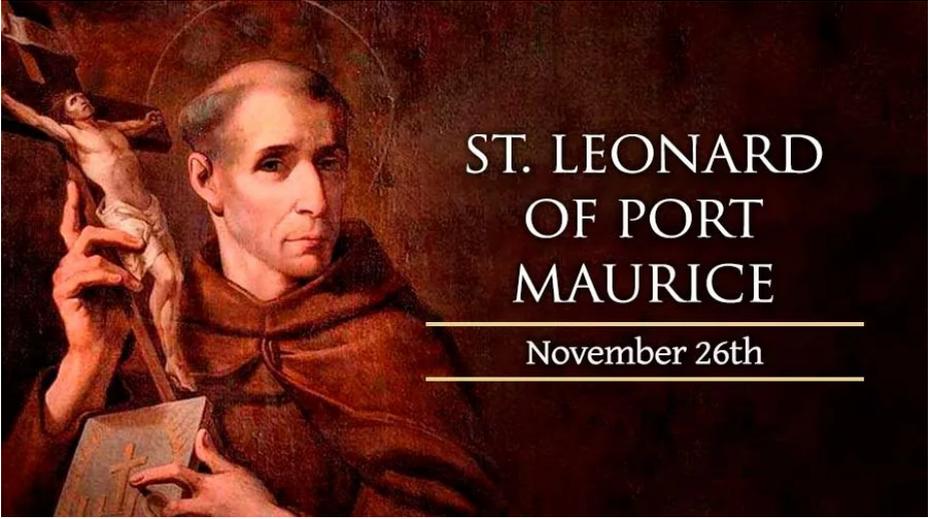
Now, tell me whether, when you enter church to hear Mass, you thoroughly well consider that you are going up as it were to Calvary, to be present at the death of the Redeemer. If so, would you go with behavior so unsubdued, with dress so flaunting? If the Magdalene

Author: Saint Leonard of Port Maurice

Leonard was born in 1676 in Port Maurice, on the coast of northern Italy. His family wanted him to become a doctor, but after completing his studies, Leonard decided to become a Franciscan friar. He hoped he could become a missionary to China.

After ordination, Leonard became seriously ill and was sent home. No one knew if he would recover. Leonard promised God that if he did get well, he would devote his life to the missions and to helping sinners change their lives. It took more than four years, but Leonard regained his health and began 40 years of mission work. Surprisingly, he did not become a missionary in foreign lands. He became a missionary to the people of his own country.

Leonard traveled throughout Italy, preaching at parish missions and retreats. He would often spend two or three weeks in a parish before moving on. That gave him time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with all who wanted to confess their sins and receive God's forgiveness. Leonard thought this was the most important part of his ministry. It was a sign that through his preaching, the Holy Spirit had inspired people to transform their lives and begin to live as followers to Jesus. He was so respected that two different popes called him to Rome to preach. St. Leonard died in Rome in 1751 at the age of 75. He was canonized in 1867, and in 1923 he was named the patron saint of parish mission preachers.



ST. LEONARD OF PORT MAURICE

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had gone to Calvary, to the foot of the Cross, all dressed out, perfumed, and adorned, as when she associated with her lovers, what would have been said of her? What, then, shall be said of you who go to holy Mass as if you were going to a ball? But what shall be said if you profane those functions of most dread sanctity with nods and becks, with tattle, with laughter, with the petty attentions of courtship, or with graver sacrileges of thought, word, or deed? Wickedness is hideous at any time, and in any place; but sins committed during the time of Mass, and before the altar, draw down after them the curse of God. Think seriously upon this, while I proceed to

disclose to you yet other marvels and glories of this all-precious treasure.

It seems to me impossible for a religious function to possess a prerogative more excellent than this of the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, that it is no mere copy, but one original with the Sacrifice of the Cross. Still further is its eminence enhanced by having for its priest none else than God made man. In so great a sacrifice three things attract consideration: the priest who offers, the Victim offered, and the majesty of Him to Whom the offering is made. Now observe

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the marvellous grandeur of Holy Mass, in virtue of each of these three

considerations. The Priest Who offers is the Man-God Christ Jesus; the Victim is the Life of God; nor is it offered to any other than unto God. Rekindle, then, your faith, and recognize the true celebrant to be not so much the human priest as the adorable person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the primary offerer, not only because He has instituted this Holy Sacrifice, and has given to it all its efficacy through His merits, but also because in each Mass He Himself deigns for our good to, transubstantiate the bread and wine into His most Holy Body and into His most Precious Blood. Behold, then, the chiefest privilege of Holy Mass, to have for priest God made man; and when you see the celebrant at the altar, know that his highest dignity consists in being the minister of that invisible and eternal Priest, Our Redeemer Himself. Hence it results that the sacrifice itself does not cease to be agreeable to God, although the priest who celebrates may be wicked and sacrilegious, seeing that the principal offerer is Christ Our Lord, and the priest is His mere minister. In the same way, anyone who gives alms by the hand of a servant is called in all truth the giver; and even though his servant may be wicked and infamous, yet if the

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master be good, the alms do not cease to be praiseworthy and holy. Blessed, then, be God, Who hath bestowed on us a holy, a most holy Priest, Who offers to the Eternal Father this Divine Sacrifice, not only in every place (the holy faith being now everywhere diffused), but every day, and even every hour; since the sun is rising to others, while to us

it sets. At every hour, then, in various parts of the world, this most perfectly holy Priest offers to the Father His Blood, His Soul, and His whole self for us; and all this He does as many times as there are Masses celebrated in the whole world. O boundless treasure! O mine of inestimable stores thus possessed by us in the Church of God! O happy we if we could but assist at all these Masses! What a store of reward would be thus acquired! What

a heaping up of graces in this life, what a fund of glory in the other, would be the fruit of so loving an attendance!

You are surprised, perhaps, to hear me speak of the Mass as a stupendous work. But what tongue, human or angelic, may ever describe a power so immeasurable as that exercised by the simplest priest in Mass? And who could ever have imagined that the voice of man, which by

nature hath not the power even to raise a straw from the ground, should obtain through grace a power so stupendous as to bring from Heaven to earth the Son of God? It is a greater power than that which would be required to change the place of mountains, to dry up seas, and to turn round the heavens; it even emulates, in a certain manner, that first fiat with which God brought all things out of nothing, and in some sort would seem to surpass that other fiat with which the sweet Virgin drew down into her bosom the Eternal Word. She did nothing else than supply matter for the body of Christ - made indeed from her and her most pure blood, but not by her, in the sense of her own potential act. But altogether different, and most marvellous, is the sacramental manner in which the voice of the priest, operating as the instrument of Christ, reproduces Him, and does so as often as he consecrates.

But let us dig farther into the depth of this mine, in order to discover more of the vast treasures contained in it. Oh, what precious gems lie there! What graces, virtues, and gifts holy Mass calls down! In the first place, it calls down all spiritual graces, all the goods appertaining to the soul, such as repentance for sins, and victory over temptations, whether such result from external trials, as bad companions and infernal spirits, or internal, as for instance, those arising from rebellious appetites. It calls down the aid of grace, so necessary for enabling us to rise up,

to stand upon our feet, to walk forward in the ways of God. It calls down many good and holy inspirations, and many internal impulses, which dispose us to shake off tepidity, and spurs us on to work our best with greater fervor, with will more prompt, with intention more upright and pure; and these, again, bring with them an inestimable treasure, being the most effectual means for obtaining from God the grace of final perseverance, on which depends our eternal salvation, and the grace, of as much moral certainty of eternal bliss as is ever permitted here below. But further still, it calls down temporal blessings, so far as these may not oppose the salvation of the soul, such as health, abundance, peace, with the exclusion of the evils which are their opposites, such as pestilences, earthquakes, wars, famines, persecutions, hatreds, calumnies, injuries; in fine, here may we find liberation from all evils, here may we find enrichment by every sort of benefit. In a word, holy Mass is the golden key of Paradise; and while the Eternal Father gives us this key, which of all His other benefits can He refuse? St. Paul says, "*He that: spared not even His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us; all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?*" (Rom 8:32) Now, was not that good priest quite right who used to say that whatever he asked of God, even the loftiest height of grace, for himself or others, while celebrating holy Mass, he seemed to himself to be asking, nothing in comparison with the offering which he was engaged in

making to Him? He reasoned thus: All the favors which I ask of God in Mass are finite, whereas the gift which I offer to Him is uncreated and infinite, and so, the account being rightly summed, I am the creditor, He the debtor. The good priest by no means purposed to deny that the power of offering the gift, and the gift itself, came first from God; but, putting it thus, he courageously besought great graces, and received yet greater. And you, why do not you also awake? Why not demand great graces? Take my advice, and in every Mass ask God to make you a great saint. Does this seem too much? It is not too much. Is it not our good Master Who protests in the holy Gospel that, for a cup of cold water given out of love of Him, He will, in return, give Paradise? How, then, while offering to God the blood of His most blessed Son, should He not give you a hundred heavens, were there so many? How can you doubt but that He wishes to give you all the virtues and all the perfections which are required to make you a Saint, and a great Saint, in Heaven? O blessed Mass! Expand yet more and more your heart, and ask great things of Him, with the reflection that you ask of a God Who does not grow poor by giving,

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and, therefore, the more you petition for, the more you will obtain.

But, will you believe it? Besides the benefits which we ask in holy Mass, our good God grants many others which we do not ask. St. Jerome distinctly declares, "Without doubt the Lord grants all the favors which are asked of Him in Mass, provided they be those fitting for us; and, which is a matter of greater wonder, oftentimes He grants that also which is not demanded of Him, if we, on our part, put no obstacle in the way." Whence it may be said that Mass is the sun of the human race, scattering its splendors over good and wicked; nor is there a soul so vile on earth who, hearing holy Mass, doth not carry away

from it some great good, often without asking, often without even thinking of it. Oh, how many times hath God freed you from death, or at least from many most grievous perils, through the Mass which you have attended! St. Gregory assures us of this in the fourth of his dialogues: "It is most true that he who attends holy Mass shall be freed from many evils and from many dangers, both foreseen and unforeseen." "He shall -as St. Augustine sums it up-

be freed from sudden death, which is the most terrible stroke launched by Divine Justice against sinners.” “Behold a wonderful preservative -says the Saint- against sudden death: attend holy Mass every day, and attend it with all possible devotion.” He who carries with him so effective a guard, shall live secure against the occurrence of so terrific a misfortune. St. Gregory says, “One who attends holy Mass with real devotion keeps in the direct way of the Spirit.” Grace and merit are all the while increasing in him, and he makes ever new acquisitions of virtue, so as more and more to please his God. St. Bernard even sums it up thus, that more is to be gained in one single Mass (here we must understand him of its intrinsic value) than by distributing your means to the poor, or going on pilgrimages through all the most famous sanctuaries of the world. O unbounded riches of holy Mass!

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intrinsic worth, than by opening the treasury of your wealth and distributing the whole to the poor, or by going as pilgrim over the whole world and visiting with utmost devotion the sanctuaries of Rome, of Compostella, of Loreto, Jerusalem, and the rest. And this most reasonably follows from the position laid down by the angelic St. Thomas, when he says that in Mass are contained all the fruits, all the graces, yea, all those immense treasures which the Son of God poured out so abundantly upon the Church, His Spouse, in the bloody sacrifice of the Cross.

Now, pause a little, close this book, read no further at present, but sum up in your mind all these singular uses of holy Mass, weigh them well in silence, and then tell me, will you have again a difficulty in believing that one single Mass -speaking of its own intrinsic worth and value- is of such efficacy as, according to the speculation of various learned men, might have sufficed to obtain the salvation of the whole human race? Imagine the case that Our Lord Jesus Christ had not suffered

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anything on Calvary and, in place of His bloody sacrifice of the Cross, had solely instituted Mass for our redemption, with an express command that in all the world it should only be celebrated once. Well, then, had this been the case, that single Mass, celebrated by the poorest priest in the world, would have been sufficient, considered in itself and so far as its own share in the work is concerned, to win from God the salvation of all men. Yes; one single Mass, taking the case imagined above, might thus have been made to obtain the conversion of all Mahometans, all heretics, all schismatics, in fine, of all unbelievers, and also that of all bad Christians; closing the gates of Hell to all sinners, and emptying Purgatory of all the souls there obtaining purification. We, unhappy creatures, through our tepidity, through our little devotion, and possibly even through our scandalous improprieties

committed during attendance on Mass - oh, how we contract the limits of its vast circumference, and render ineffective its mighty worth! Why not imitate the holy Angels, who, according to the saying of St. Chrysostom, when holy Mass is being celebrated, descend in squadrons from the empyrean, and stand before our altars, covered with the wings of reverential awe, waiting the whole of that blessed time, in order that they may intercede for us the more effectively, well knowing this to be the time most opportune, the conjuncture, above every other, propitious for obtaining favors from Heaven. Sink down, then, in confusion for having in time past so little appreciated holy Mass, for perhaps having even many times profaned an act so dread and holy; much more so if you are of the number of those who have recklessly dared to utter, "A Mass more or less is of little importance."



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