

His Mercy and His Means

I. What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

In the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, the Psalm says, and He pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

Some of us do like to celebrate by drinking foaming wine, or *sparkling*, as we call it, which is sort of the same; but this cup which the Lord holds in His hand with foaming wine is not for celebration, rather, it is the cup of condemnation, foaming with His fury against all sin and evil, all ungodliness and impurity, for the wicked of the earth to drain down to the dregs. *At the time I appoint I will judge with equity*, the Psalm has the Lord Himself say; and it goes on to say that *it is God who executes judgement, putting down one and lifting up another.*

Our Lord Jesus knew very well, in that bitter night, that the cup which was to be handed to Him was not a cup of celebration. He knew very well the fury of God against sin, for He is the Son of God, Himself God from eternity, and the one appointed from eternity as Judge of the living and the dead. And the wrath of God against sin is His own wrath, the hatred of His own holy goodness against all things evil, all things impure. And so He prayed, in this bitter night, as we heard it: *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.* And He did so in agony, for He who knows all things knew full well which cup it was that was about to be handed to Him, the cup of condemnation, foaming with the fury of God against all sin and evil. He knew from eternity the goodness of God, for it is His own goodness, and the depth of His hatred against all that goes against His goodness. And so He knew also the severity of the sufferings that lay ahead of Him. And so it could not but be in agony that He prayed: *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*

Nevertheless, He would submit to the Father's will; for such was His will, from eternity. From eternity God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, those three who were together in love from eternity, had resolved in His heart to rescue sinners from His own holy hatred and His righteous wrath against evil. Such was the Father's will, and the Son's, and that of the Holy Spirit, for the Father is that good, and the Son, and the Spirit, so great is His love for us His sinners. Therefore the Son had come into our world for the salvation of sinners. Out of His own love He had had Himself to be made flesh, and be born into our kind, so as to be able to suffer and die with us sinners, and for us, in our stead and on our behalf.

And with us, and for us, He had suffered a lifetime in this world of suffering and sorrow and sin, away from His heavenly home in glory. And in this bitter night, as He suffered the agony of knowing that such severe sufferings lay before Him as no other human being has ever known, or could ever even begin to imagine, He had to suffer, also, and struggle with the temptation to turn away from the path laid out for Him by God from eternity, the way He had laid out for Himself from eternity, out of His love for us sinners, the path of suffering eternal death and damnation in the place of sinners. Although it was His own eternal will to suffer for us sinners, He had taken our human nature upon Himself, which wills not to suffer; yet in faith He would surrender and submit to the goodness of God, as all creatures owe it to their Creator to submit to His goodness, and His will. *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.* This mystery is indeed profound, that the Son of God would have Himself made to be made Man, for real, and suffer both in body and soul all that men suffer, and more, for love of us.

This, also, is beyond what we could ever begin to comprehend. The mystery of the love of God as Holy Scripture sets it before us, tonight, and always, is only for us to worship in thankful awe; what else could we ever do with it?

And three times He prayed, and three times He submitted to the will of God. *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.* And: *My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done.* And: *Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.* Now, in surrendering and submitting to the will of God, again, He did nothing more than all human beings owe it to God to do, He who is Himself God from eternity. We all owe it God to love Him above all things, and trust Him above all things, and submit to His will in all things. We all owe it to God, and we all fail, and allow what we ourselves want to take precedence over the love of God, and our love for Him, what we know to be His will, and what we owe to Him; as we hear it tonight that the love of their Master meant less even to the disciples than that they themselves were tired and would rather sleep than watch and pray with Him as He asked them to, even though they knew of His agony, how He was sorrowful at heart, even unto death.

The Son of God, though, surrendered and submitted to the will of the Father, as He had from eternity, for love of the Father, and for love of us sinners, also, for the love the Father has for us sinners is also the love the Son has for us.

God is that good.

And so the Son of God would take from the Father's hand the cup foaming with His own fiery fury against the sin of all sinners, and drain it down to the dregs. He would bear the fullness of suffering for us, His own judgement and damnation against our sin. This was how God had chosen from eternity to make His goodness manifest in its fullness, and fulfil the demand of His goodness that all evil be duly judged and damned and destroyed, *He who executes judgement*, as the Psalm says it, *putting down one and lifting up another*. And so the Son of God gave Himself over, in that bitter night, to be crucified, and cursed and condemned by God, and put down into the deepest depths of death and devastation. Lifted up high toward Heaven He would have Himself presented to the Father for His judgement, and be judged and damned for the sin of the world, who had already descended from the highest Heaven into the deepest depths of sin, baptised with the Baptism of sinners, in the sin of sinners, to take it upon Himself and make it His own. And clothed in the sin of the world He would be cursed and condemned for it and with it. He would drink and drain down to its dregs the cup foaming with the fury of God against the sin of sinners, in our stead and on our behalf.

Just a few hours earlier, or perhaps less than that, He had taken bread and broken and blessed it and given it to His disciples and said: *Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. This do, in my remembrance*. And He had taken the cup and blessed that, also, and said: *Drink of it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in my remembrance*. And then He would go where we find Him tonight, to give His body over to be crucified, His blood to be shed, for our salvation.

We can wonder about how the bread could be His body, and the cup contain His blood, in that bitter night, while His body was right there, at the table, with His blood in it; or we can not. Why would we? It is more important that He gave the command to *do this in my remembrance*, that what He did be done continuously in His Church, and often, and that accordingly, what He said about the bread and the cup in that bitter night would have to apply, also, in future: *This is my body. This cup is the new covenant in my blood*.

And so we know that the Sacrament of the Altar, as we observe it, in accordance with His command, really is, as our Catechism says it, *the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink*. In the Sacrament, what was once given for us is now given to us; and so you can know that what He did for the salvation of sinners was done for *your* salvation.

More than that, though, and so much more; if He gives His body to you, and His blood, to eat and drink, and He does, for He said that He would, then *He* makes you one with Himself, with His body and blood, who had Himself made flesh and blood, and born into our kind, and baptised with us and made one with us in our sin. And so you are made one with Him who has fulfilled for all sinners, in our stead and on our behalf, and for you, all that we owe to God.

For He has. He has submitted and surrendered to the will of God in all things, and fulfilled His will in all things, in His life; and in His death He has suffered the punishment and penalty for our failure to fulfil His will in our own lives, and in our hearts and minds. And so, as He gives Himself to you with His body and blood, He gives you His own *righteousness*, that is: His full and complete innocence before God. And so, in the Sacrament, nothing less is given to you than rescue from eternal death and damnation in the Hell of His judgement, and eternal life with Him instead, in the fullness of His glory.

This is what it means that we do what we do, as His Church and His Christians, *in my remembrance*, as He commanded, that is, not only for *us* to remember, but also Himself, and God the Father. And in Holy Scripture, when *God remembers*, it does not mean that He recovers from His loss of memory, for *He* has no loss of memory, who knows all things, rather, it means that He actually acts and enacts His will with regard to that which He remembers; which, when it comes to His salvation, means that He actually *saves*.

As we do this, as He commanded, *in my remembrance*, He Himself, as our heavenly High Priest, presents to the Father the salvation He has fulfilled for us. And as His Church we present and plead to Himself what He has done, and to the Father; we have the privilege of joining our High Priest in His heavenly worship, which is the worship that pleases the Father, to whom nothing is more precious than what the Son has done, for love of the Father, and for love of us.

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! *Amen*.