

## DEVOTIONS AND LITURGY

THE EDITOR

IN the last issue of *THE LIFE* we had occasion to point to the importance of the changes in the Holy Week liturgy in that the Holy See has in these changes insisted on the liturgy becoming once more the primary method of prayer for every member of the Mystical Body. By now the liturgy has ceased to be the preserve of the aesthetes and cranks who decried all popular devotions in such a way as to antagonize the people whose principal source of communal prayer was the non-liturgical service of 'devotions'. The trouble with the specialists was that they sank into a morass of historical facts and conjectures. They were so intent on looking backwards that they missed the path of prayer altogether and disappeared into this historical bog. The services they enjoyed were not liturgy, for liturgy is the public work of worshipping God, a public work that is alive today, drawing its vitality from the spiritual life of the people who take part in it. The worship practised by the specialists was drawn from the dead pages of manuscripts and books. They enjoyed the life of the Church in the early centuries, but ignored the life of the Church today.

It would seem, too, that they were not sufficiently historical; for they forgot that the liturgy of those days was drawn to a large extent from the popular devotions of the time. The liturgy is a living prayer, and for that very reason it has gathered to itself innumerable accretions from the centuries through which it has lived. Many of these have become outdated and no longer represent the feelings or desires of the ordinary member of the Church. It is precisely in this that the value of the liturgical reforms now streaming out from Rome lies. The accretions which were once so popular have become a barrier to the people's devotional approach to the liturgy. But the reform does not consist in stripping the liturgy of every addition since the first century, but in assessing first of all the primary significance of every ceremony and then the significant and compelling elements that are in tune with the devotions of today.

As an example of what we mean we quote here an historical

note on the Palm Sunday Liturgy given by Père J. Christiaens, S.J., in his comments on the Holy Week Reforms in *Revue des Communautés Religieuses* (Jan.-Feb. 1956):

The procession on this day made its first appearance in Jerusalem before the fourth century. It left the heights of the Mount of Olives for the Holy Sepulchre. The custom spread rapidly throughout the Christian world. About the ninth century Theodulph of Orleans composed the *Gloria Laus*. At this point the faithful waited at one of the gates of the city for the clergy who had assembled in a chapel outside the city walls, called symbolically Bethany. When the two groups met they sang the dialogue which we still have and proceeded solemnly to the church for Mass the gospel of which was the text of the entry into Jerusalem from Matthew or Mark. In that there was certainly 'a public witness of love and homage to Christ the King'.

On the other hand, a gallican rite for a blessing of the Palms was introduced into the Liturgy, and by the twelfth century we find all the prayers which are now in our missals, but in those days they could choose between them. But the procession lapsed.

In most of this story we can detect the element of popular devotion. In those days they were not chary of inventing chants and ceremonies to enhance the appeal of the ceremony and bring out its essential features. There was also a choice which presumably was intended to be guided by the general piety of priest and people. The reformed liturgy for Palm Sunday simplifies the rite as we know it in consideration of the 'temper' of the modern faithful, but always with an eye to the central meaning of the ceremony.

Another historical mistake which often trapped the over-historical liturgical enthusiast was that of disregarding all the public prayers of the centuries that passed between that of the Reformation and our own. The period was regarded as wholly given over to 'devotions' without any understanding of the liturgical. The two articles in the present issue of *THE LIFE* on Challoner and Bossuet are evidence of the falsity of this judgment. The liturgy is the living prayer of the Church and in that it is based on the life of the Word of God, the living revelation which dwells in the heart of the Church rather than in the printed pages of any Bible. Men

like Challoner and Bossuet realised that the Scriptures, the living revelation of the Word of God, must provide the groundwork of any prayer; from readings from the Scriptures spring both the public worship of the liturgy and the private prayer of the individual. True devotion is given life by revelation; and readings always play a major part in any liturgical service. It is the aim of the modern reforms to make these readings more intelligible to the people and to link them more closely with the actions that are taking place round the altar. Challoner in particular saw clearly the relation between Scripture (*lectio divina*) and the prayer action of Mass, the centre of liturgical prayer, as well as the Office of Even-Song with its Psalms. Many nineteenth-century English Catholics did not recognize sufficiently the value of Challoner's work, but it may be said that he was more liturgical than the liturgical specialists of the beginning of this century. And at the same time he was more directly in touch with the popular devotions of the faithful remnant of Catholics of his day.

One of the most profitable methods of re-uniting the liturgy with the devotions of the people is that of the services called so unwholesomely 'para-liturgical', which might suggest some insidious disease. But these services, now being composed more and more frequently by those interested in the reintroduction of the liturgy into the spiritual life of the people, are in fact simply 'devotions' drawn from the Scriptures and liturgically inspired prayers and actions.

An excellent example of these services is to be found in *Paroisse et Liturgie* No. 14 from the Abbey of St André. Père L. Heuschen has here prepared services for the first part of Holy Week affording the people a fuller understanding of and sharing in the Easter Liturgy. They form part of what might be called a Liturgical Mission for Holy Week. For example on the Monday night the faithful assemble for a service on Light. They begin by singing a popular hymn about Divine Light. Appropriate readings are taken from Genesis and Exodus about Light and from Job and Isaias about darkness; and the 'Commentator' (an important official in these services) explains their meaning and how they are preparing for the feast of Light at Easter. The Church is in darkness; but soon the sanctuary lamp is lit to remind the faithful of the presence of our Lord the source of all grace. Their various other candles are lit to the accompaniment of appropriate chants.

A little girl dressed in white comes from the baptistry with a candle which she lights from the sanctuary lamp. And so it continues until they begin to consider the darkness around them. Those who never pray—the candles before the statue of our Lady are put out; those who will not have their children baptised—the little girl's candle goes out. And so gradually the Church is filled with darkness again. On the Tuesday there is a Service of Water.

Such services in detail may not be appropriate to an English congregation. But they provide a novel example of what can be done to encourage the devotion of the people in their assistance in the worship of the whole Church. They may remind us also that something of this nature must be done if the rulings of the Holy See are to be followed in that the people must be suitably prepared by instructions and services for a full and living share in the liturgy of the great week of the year. It is now the bidden responsibility of every member of the Mystical Body to see to it that the gulf between liturgy and popular devotions is bridged and that the two re-unite to foster a true, communal Christian piety and spiritual life in the Church.



## CHILDREN AT MASS

ROSEMARY HAUGHTON

**I** ONCE had the good fortune to attend a small chapel for Mass where children were no problem. There were always lots of them, from babies upwards, and they loved to go because they were not restrained, scolded, or made to feel out of place. Toddlers staggered up and down the short aisle, babies climbed on the chairs and cooed, older children watched attentively, moving forward to see more easily what was happening. If a child came too near the priest he was gently moved out the way by a parent or the server, but they often sat on the altar steps, and no one bothered them. The result of all this was that they seldom gave trouble, and if a baby did cry its mother took it outside for a minute without being made to feel that she was a criminal for having brought it at all. Parents could come to Mass together, and the children learnt to love the House of God because they were made to feel at home there.