

THE HOLY MASS AS THE CENTER OF OUR LIFE

REV. DONNCHA Ó HAODHA

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask you for pardon of my sins and grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

We could begin this period of prayer by placing ourselves in the midst of a busy period in Our Lord's public life. You, Jesus, are traveling around different parts of the holy land of Palestine, preaching the gospel, healing, teaching, and also being challenged at times by- by those who don't understand you or those, perhaps who are not totally open to you. And St. Luke tells us in chapter 10 of his gospel that a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And the Lord answers him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have answered right. Do this, and you will live.' And so, Our Lord's response is very complete in every sense. Eternal life is a question of total love of neighbor, total love of the other. But this particular man, this particular lawyer who challenges Christ, is not entirely happy with the answer. Maybe it just seems too much to him. In any event, we're told by St. Luke that desiring to justify himself, he said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? And then you Lord, the greatest of all teachers, the Teacher with a capital T, you give us the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down that road and when he saw me pass by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day, he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, take care of him and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

This beautiful and powerful parable of the Good Samaritan, we will often have taught about it perhaps or heard it preached upon those who avoid the poor man who has been left beaten and half

dead. It's none of their business as they passed by on the other side. But then this Samaritan who gets totally involved, look at him binding up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine, setting him on his own beast, taking him to an inn, taking care of him and- and the next day paying for that care. Without any limits, whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. The Good Samaritan naturally, we often see in him an example of what we're all called to be, to be good Samaritans to one another, and especially to those who are needy in any sense spiritually or materially. In fact, the Holy Father in his last encyclical on- on fraternal love *Fratelli Tutti* talks about the Good Samaritan. So, the Good Samaritan is the Christian who seeks to live out his or her vocation. But ultimately, of course, the Good Samaritan is you yourself, Lord. You are the Good Samaritan who comes to rescue each one of us and all of us in the human race as our Redeemer, as our Savior. You're the one who- you are the one who binds up our wounds, who pours oil on them to soothe and balm and heal them and purify them. You're the one who pays without limit for our healing for our salvation. You, Lord Jesus, you are the Good Samaritan.

And the Church is the place of that healing, of that salvation. That's why the simile that the Holy Father has used a times of the Church being a field hospital on the battlefield makes a lot of sense because we all need- so deeply need salvation, healing. And it's not something we can provide for ourselves. And there is a battle going on. Life is complex, life is messy. It's not all plain sailing. There is opposition within ourselves and outside of ourselves. There is a battle going on. And within that battle, there is Christ, the good Samaritan, healing us, saving us, raising us up in and through the field hospital which is his Church, His presence among us today.

Lord, you are the Good Samaritan. And in the parable of the Good Samaritan, naturally enough, we can see the Mass. Because if the parable of the Good Samaritan is about the work of salvation, and ultimately it is, it's about needy, broken humanity, being lovingly restored by Christ by his self giving. Well, that is the very business, the very life of the Church. But above all, it's what happens in every celebration of the Eucharist. In every Mass, that saving healing work of Christ becomes present and effective in our world. That is the Mass. So you could say in a certain sense, the Mass is the activity of the Good Samaritan here and now for all of us. And that's why we all need the Mass so profoundly. Sometimes people say I don't feel like going to Mass. It's true. Our emotions may or may not be in sync. But we may not feel like going to Mass, but we absolutely need the Mass. It's the one thing necessary, the saving, healing presence of the Good Samaritan of Jesus.

And I suppose, unlike the Good Samaritan in the parable, it's not just that Our Lord gives us something or he does something for us, Our Lord gives us himself. He gives his very self to us. In fact, the Mass in that sense is the definition of true and pure love. St. John, in his first epistle, he- he talks about the nature of love, he who has observed closely from being so close to Our Lord. And he says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." By this we know love. Love is a divine

initiative. God loves us first. Again, from St. John, “In this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.” Well, expiation means an offering, a vicarious suffering a suffering in the place of another or of others. And this is what the ultimate good samaritan does. And that's why the Mass is the most powerful event that happens in the world every day. It is this saving sacrifice of Our Lord. Lord Jesus helped me to have a great love for the Mass and above all, perhaps to appreciate that I need the Mass, that it is only in the Eucharist, in your body broken for us, in your blood poured out for us, in your suffering and risen body in the Eucharist. Only there do I find the answer to all my real needs. Only there is the solution to all my quandaries and my problems. Only there is the ultimate meaning of life. Only there is the true source of hope. Only there is the ultimate good samaritan.

Karl Adam in his classic work, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, writes, “In the sacrifice of the Mass, we are not merely reminded of the sacrifice of the Cross in a symbolical form. On the contrary, the sacrifice of Calvary has a great supra-temporal reality, enters into the immediate present, space and time are abolished. The same Jesus is here present who died on the Cross. The whole congregation unites itself with his holy sacrificial will, and through Jesus present before it, consecrates itself to the Heavenly Father as a living oblation. So, says Karl Adam, “holy Mass is a tremendously real experience, the experience of the reality of Golgotha, and a stream of sorrow and repentance of love and devotion, of heroism, and the spirit of sacrifice flows out from the altar and passes through the praying congregation. These are not mere words.”

Indeed, the Mass is no mere symbolic rite. The Mass makes present the work of our salvation in a sacramental, real way. And it makes present this, this self-giving love of Jesus which- which redeems us, which makes us whole again. And it's so beautiful, so striking, the reality of vicarious suffering. The prophet Isaiah, in his- in his various prophecies on the suffering servant- they're worth meditating on- the Church meditates on them, particularly in regard to the Passion of Jesus. We hear about his suffering servant who- who gives his life for others, who opens his mouth like a lamb led to the slaughter. And then Isaiah makes those very striking statements such as “by his wounds we have been healed.” And what an amazing thing to say that, that you and I are healed by the wounds of somebody else. Yes, Lord, you are the Good Samaritan. By yourself giving love on the Cross by your wounds, we are redeemed. And that vicarious suffering, that suffering for others, is made present really truly and substantially in every Mass. And hence, the immense power of the Mass, the immense beauty of the Mass. Hence, our need, our great need for the Mass.

St. John Paul II has a beautiful encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, from 2004. It's his last encyclical written not long before he died. And the objective of the encyclical is precisely to- to help us to rediscover the Mass with a sense of, as he calls it, Eucharistic amazement: “I wish once more to recall this truth and to join you my dear brothers and sisters in adoration before this great

mystery. A great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly in the Eucharist he shows us a love which goes to the end, a love which knows no measure." And indeed, it's that divine human love of the crucified and risen Christ, which which redeems us and- and nothing else can redeem us.

The English poet Sally Reid has written a very interesting account of her- of her conversion to Catholicism quite recently. And it's called *Night's Bright Darkness*, published by Ignatius Press. A beautifully written account, I mean, you can see that she's a poet from the way she writes this book, a very honest account. And she says that being young- as a young person, she- she started off being a writer, and that was really her- it is, in a sense, her vocation to be a writer, to be a poet, a great desire. And she felt for the time that writing would be her redemption, that she would find salvation, satisfaction, I suppose, ultimately, happiness, redemption, through writing, through poetry. And I suppose she's not completely wrong in that because writing and poetry in any form of genuine art is transcendent. It does help us to elevate- the soul reminds us of our spiritual nature and ultimately can lead to God. After all, you Lord Jesus Christ, you are- you are beauty in person. So any form of creative beauty, such as art or writing, is an approximation somehow to you. But Sally Reid, there are many aspects to her conversion, of course, but she comes over time through the grace of God and through the help of different friends to realize that, no, there isn't salvation in art alone, there's only salvation from Christ. She actually concludes at a certain point that Catholicism is the only answer to the human condition. And we might add that at the heart of Catholicism is- is the Mass. You might say the center of the Church is the Eucharist, and the Eucharist is Our Lord's self-giving love.

And we could think here perhaps of how we spread the Good News of the Mass, how we encourage people to participate in the Mass, maybe family or friends. And in a certain sense, the Mass is the ultimate answer to everyone's searching, to everyone's quandaries, to everyone's yearnings. Everyone in that sense is made for the Mass. Like we all have problems, we all have challenges, we all have questions, we all have a certain amount of turmoil and sometimes less, sometimes more, different periods in our lives. We all have challenges in family, in work, in health, in friendships, and well, in the Mass, in the body broken for us and risen for us in the blood poured out for us, in the risen Christ, we have the answer to all those quandaries and problems and doubts and confusion. The Mass is everything. We need the Mass Lord, we need you, the ultimate good Samaritan, we need you. And the beautiful thing is we have you really, truly, and substantially present in every Mass.

So, in the midst of our lives which are often busy and sometimes confusing, and sometimes a bit too hectic even, we can find an oasis in the Mass, and what better way to begin the day or to what better thing to do at any time of the day than to take part in the Mass. There's nothing more wonderful, more powerful, more fulfilling in the whole world. We might feel I'm very busy, or there's too much

going on, or yeah- and often there is too much going on, but what's the most important thing of all, and what gives meaning to all the rest?

In his book, *The Longest Day: An Account of the D-Day Landings*, written by Cornelius Ryan, it's quite a classic book really at this stage, and I think a film was made of it many years ago as well. The book gathers together testimonies from different participants in the D-Day landings. And that gives it a great human interest- different soldiers who took part, different sailors who sailed in that immense fleet, and pilots of planes and so on. And among those who were quite important in the D-Day landings were the paratroopers, because before this immense fleet arrived on the shores of France, on the sixth of June 1940, 4000's of paratroopers were dropped by parachute out of the skies, above France inland from where the landings would take place. And they had various jobs to do in preparation for the- for the D-Day offensive, they had to, I suppose, take command of bridges or transport routes or communications or whatever different things they had to do. And of course, the the German or the Nazi occupying force in France had prepared for this. And they had flooded large areas inland where they expected that paratroopers would land so that, in fact, many of the paratroopers landed in water and some died from drowning or were held down by their equipment when they- when they landed in these flooded parts of land.

And in that book, *The Longest Day*, Cornelius Ryan recounts the experience of one particular paratrooper who was a Catholic priest, he was the chaplain to- to some paratroopers, and he lands in- into occupied France early, early in the morning of D-Day. And unfortunately, he lands down in a in a flooded area. And he's weighed down by his equipment, he is dragged down. So, he has to get out his knife and cut off his parachute as quickly as he can to save himself from being drowned and cut off all of his equipment and- and save himself. All the time while he's doing this he's saying acts of contrition, he's saying acts of contrition, because he's very close to death. He is in a very dangerous position but eventually frees himself from all the equipment that's weighing stuff down and he manages to save himself and gasps and- and survives. But then he realizes that he has- he has cut off all his equipment. And he has also cut off his Mass kit, the kit he has for celebrating Mass which he brought with him as chaplain, as priest. And that Mass kit now is sunk below in the water somewhere. And he's obviously a very good man, and so he dives down to try and recover the Mass kit. And he fails the first time and he tries again, doesn't succeed the second time. But the third time he does, he recovers the Mass kit. And it's a beautiful witness, really, to fate, that in the midst of that incredibly tense and dangerous situation where his life is, well, at the edge of, you know, in a very dangerous position, his focus is on the Mass. And what he really needs to do is to be able to celebrate the Eucharist. And that's why he makes that effort to get- to get his Mass kit.

There's also a funny little aspect of the story as well, which is that afterwards when he had calmed down, this priest realized that, although he thought he was saying acts of contrition all the time,

repeatedly acts of contrition, he was actually saying grace before meals over and over again, but that's because he was nervous, he was nervous. But I'm sure Our Lord was delighted with his prayer and delighted also with his- his- his emphasis on the Mass, his focus on the Mass. Lord, please help me also to value the Mass as- as the great arc of salvation in the oceans of of turbulent history.

The Mass is everything. The Mass is the heart of being. The Mass is the motor of existence, the Mass is the ultimate source of meaning. The Mass is Heaven on Earth. Hans Garavanie, in his book, *The Christian Mind*, talks about the Eucharist and he says, "We may view the Eucharist and make it a most real activity in so many different ways, and the saint is still to be born who has applied to his soul all the treasures which are hidden there in. The Eucharist is the life of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ. It is the companionship of Christ. It is the blessing of Christ. It is the triumph of Christ, as well as his sweet humility. Our minds see all those things in the Eucharist and many more. He is food and drink. He is priest and victim. He is our introduction to God and our badge of brotherhood with man in this one and indivisible thing- he is Eucharist."

St. Josemaria, as is very well known, had a profound love for the Eucharist. And he was really pained whenever he was impeded from being able to say Mass. And that happened, for example, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July of 1936. He was hiding out initially in the apartment of his mother and he kept a kind of a very telegraphic diary of the experience of those highly stressful days. "Tuesday 21st of July 1936: Without Mass. Wednesday, the 22nd: without being able to say Mass. Thursday, the 23rd Spiritual communions, no Mass,. Friday, the 24th, no Mass." He was suffering because he didn't have the elements with which to celebrate Mass. He didn't have the bread and wine. But eventually, after a few days in the house, he found a missile. And he began to say what he called, he termed, dry Mass. And what were these were was going through the different prayers of the Mass, all the prayers, and he would say them all out loud in a spiritual sense. He's not celebrating Mass because he doesn't have the elements to celebrate Mass, but he's- out of devotion, saying as it were, a dry Mass. And when he got to the consecration, he was silent. He didn't say the words of consecration. And then at communion time he would say a spiritual communion. In fact, very often during the Spanish Civil War, when- when- when he couldn't say Mass, he would say a dry Mass, and one that he commonly said was the Mass at *petendi vocationes*, a Mass in petition for vocation, a Mass- a Mass asking for the gift of vocations.

So, we can think of our own participation in the Mass. How much do I love the Mass in practice? There- there's any number of things we could consider in our prayer: our punctuality, our spirit of recollection, the use of a missile or of a text to help us to concentrate, bringing our different intentions to the Mass. It's interesting, St. Maximilian Kolbe, his first Mass which he celebrated in Rome, he brought 83 intentions to the altar with him, written out, 83 intentions. It shows the faith in the power of the Mass and in the saving sacrifice of Our Lord.

Lord Jesus, your Mass is the action of the Good Samaritan. Your Mass is the work of salvation. And that's why it's our Mass as well because we need that salvation. We could think here for a moment of the first miracle of the Lord, which is at Cana of Galilee, the turning of the water and into wine. We know that in Scriptural terms, wine stands for love, and for joy, and also for feasting- means all those things. But also we can see in the miracle of Cana of Galilee a reference to the blood of Jesus, that fine wine, that rich and copious and generous wine of Jesus, which is given at Cana through the intercession of Mary, his mother. It's a real historical event, of course, it is a real wedding feast. And it's a great miracle as the first of Our Lord's signs and miracles. But it's also a prophetic gesture, that wonderful wine, that incredible generosity of God speaks of the wine of Christ's blood which will be poured out on Calvary for love of us. And that is the ultimate finest wine. It's Christ who- who gives himself for the salvation of all, for all who want to welcome that salvation. We look at, you might say, the work of salvation accomplished at Cana.

Our Lord, you Lord Jesus, you save that couple from who could say, everlasting embarrassment, running out of wine on their wedding day. You saved the steward from unemployment and shame, from running out of wine. You saved the guests by providing this wonderful wine. You saved the apostles because we're told that from this moment they begin to- to believe in you. It's a prefigurement, though, of the great work of salvation of the ultimate wedding feast of the Lamb, whereby we're all redeemed and enabled to share in the fullness of redemption, ultimately, in Heaven. And in that sense, of course, the Mass is an anticipation of- of Heaven.

We ask the Holy Spirit to give us a deep faith and an ever deeper understanding of the Mass and to realize above all the nature of the Mass as salvation, and therefore the need of every human person. Everyone, in a certain sense, is made for the Eucharist. Everyone's solutions, the solution to everyone's quandaries and concerns ultimately, is- is in the Mass. And we can think about that in the light of our own personal apostolate, to help people, to make that link between their struggles and the Mass, that they're with- they're there, they're going to find the strength they need in marriage, in difficulty. Well, are they going to Mass? Are they praying? A sick person- sick person told me that each day- I live each day from the Mass, and somebody coping with bereavement or unemployment, or an addiction gets the strength from the Mass. "This is my body given for you. This is my blood poured out for you." We all need- we all need the Good Samaritan. And we ask you, Lord, to fill us with confidence in your generous love.

We turn to Our Lady, our mother of Cana is also the Mother of the Eucharist and we ask you, Mary, to give us a deep sense of the Mass as the mystery of salvation. I give you thanks, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel intercede for me.



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