

The Need for Sacrifice

FATHER KENNETH BAKER, S.J.

Catholics should get into the habit of making small sacrifices for God.

"I am the Lord your God. You shall not strange gods before me." The First Commandment positively prescribes the worship of God and negatively forbids idolatry, superstition, sacrilege and anything that would dishonor our Creator and Lord. We might be tempted to think that the ancient peoples were crude in their worship of idols, that modern scientific man does not do such things, and that therefore we do not have to worry about violations of the First Commandment because, since we have now "come of age" we are above such behavior.

Actually we are creating small and large idols all the time. In a certain sense, every time we sin, every time we prefer a creature to the Creator, we are setting up "strange gods" and falling away from the true God.



We all know that adoration of God is one of the basics of our Catholic religion. In the last section we made a few observations about the nature of adoration. Now is the time to expand on that a little.

Adoration always involves some kind of recognition of the absolute supremacy of God and of our total dependence on him. One of the most fundamental types of adoration is "sacrifice" -- an idea that is often misunderstood and in any event is not popular in today's pleasure-seeking world.

Often when we pray to God we proclaim our love and devotion for him. But St. Ignatius Loyola said in his *Spiritual Exercises* that love is shown more in deeds than in words. A true sacrifice is shown in deeds more than in words. The requirements of a valid sacrifice are that some object, normally a desirable or valuable object, is offered to God as a sign of man's total dependence on him and of his subjection to the Lord. There is such a thing as a sacrificial mentality -- a readiness to give up something for the love of God. But a real sacrifice requires more than that, in order to make it clear that the offerer is sincere. It requires that the object is actually surrendered to God, destroyed, or completely removed from the possession or control of the one making the sacrifice.

In this sense, the supreme sacrifice for a human being is to offer up his life for another. As our Lord said, "Greater love than this no man has, that a man lay down his life for a friend." And that is exactly what Jesus himself did for us on Calvary -- he offered up his life to his father as a propitiation for our sins. He took our sins upon himself and suffered in our place, he, the perfectly innocent One.

The Mass is a re-presentation now, in an unbloody manner, of the bloody sacrifice of the cross over

nineteen hundred years ago. Since it is a re-offering of Jesus on Calvary, the Mass is rightly referred to as "the holy *Sacrifice* of the Mass", although we do not hear this expression much today. It has been replaced with the more general and vague "liturgy", which also applies to the celebration of the other sacraments.

Every dimension of human existence can, and often does, require sacrifices. There are certain things that we have to give up, that are taken away from us, and so forth. But a sacrifice to God, a religious sacrifice, is one that is *freely given* to God as a sign for reverence and submission to him. Such sacrifices are very meritorious in the sight of God, because they are basically acts of love of God and that is what God wants from us more than anything else -- love. Love must be free; it cannot be forced and it cannot be bought.

Catholics should get into the habit of making small sacrifices for God. Sacrifices come in thousands of different forms: fasting, penances of various kinds, controlling vain curiosity to see and hear everything, giving up smoking or drinking during Lent, getting up early to attend a weekday parish Mass, denying oneself sweet desserts on occasion, and so on. If you are familiar with the life of any saint, male or female, young or old, you know what I am talking about. For there has never been a saint who did not practice some kind of sacrificial self-denial.

Our Lord said, if you want to be my followers you must take up your cross daily and follow me. Those who try to lead a Christian life cannot expect to avoid what Jesus did not avoid -- the Cross. As many Christian writers have pointed out in the past, the baffling thing about the cross is that we all have to carry it -- whether we want to or not. For those who accept it and submit to God, it is salvific; for those who reject it, it is the occasion of damnation. We should often pray for the grace to be able to accept and offer up the crosses that the Lord sends us.

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The Author