

New Brighton, Sunday 10th March 2024

4th Sunday in Lent

“Grant, we beseech You, almighty God, that we who justly suffer for our sins may find relief in the help of Your grace¹.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“Jesus then took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, distributed them to those reclining².”

He had given thanks.

I would like to attract your attention this morning upon these few words, which we often forget, as we are so justly amazed by the miracle of Jesus, who multiplied the loaves of bread to feed all his friends and disciples.

He gave thanks to his Father in heaven, for the graces He gave and was about to give again. We find out this same prayer several times in the Gospel. I would especially mention one, which you will easily find in your missal, in the ordinary of the Mass. During the Last Supper, Jesus gave thanks to His Father before instituting the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist³. Each priest repeats this same prayer and gesture of Christ during Consecration at mass:

“The day before He suffered, [He] took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and with His eyes lifted up towards heaven unto Thee, God, His almighty Father, giving thanks to Thee, He blessed it⁴.”

The gesture of Jesus, who lifted his eyes towards Heaven, is performed again by the priest, who, saying these words, lifts his eyes towards the cross of the altar.

As at many other times in the Gospels, Jesus gave us the example, leading us, our prayer towards heaven, towards his Father, before doing anything.

“One must not, before beginning any action, give in to nature, but first unite one's self to Our Lord. Before taking up an occupation, kneel down at Christ's feet and say to Him: ‘My Jesus, I leave there my natural activity, I want to do this thing solely for You, and I unite myself to You.’ And if during the occupation, you feel that you are letting yourself be carried away by nature, go back to Our Lord. It must not be A... (*name of the religious*) who is acting, for that would be good for nothing; but it must be Jesus who acts through A..., then it will be excellent.

There are some people who have a great deal of activity; they pray, mortify themselves, and give themselves up to good works; they advance but rather limpingly, because their activity is partly human. There are others whom

¹ Roman Missal, 4th Sunday in Lent, Collect.

² Jn., VI, 11.

³ Lc., XXII, 19; Mk., XIV, 22; Mt., XXVI, 26.

⁴ Roman Missal, Consecration of the Bread.

God has taken in hand, and they advance very quickly, because He Himself acts in them. But before reaching this second state, there is much to suffer, for God must first make the soul feel that she is nothing and can do nothing; she must needs be able to say in all sincerity, 'I am brought to nothing, and I knew not. I am become as a beast before Thee'⁵⁶.

Prayer before, prayer during, prayer afterwards. Our life should be dedicated to prayer, so that our actions themselves become prayer. Prayer is one of the three ways to practice our Lenten journey. We were reminded about it on the first Sunday in Lent. Today, as we are reaching half of this moment, we are subtly reminded again, with these few words describing the action of the Lord: "He had given thanks".

If we become prayer, our actions will be completely informed by the grace of the Lord, and will be even more fruitful, because Jesus himself will made them with us, will guide our arm, our tongue.

Jesus Himself wished that in His beautiful prayer after the Last Supper, while He was giving His last teaching before His Passion:

"And for them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me ; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee... Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me; that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me, because Thou hast loved Me before the creation of the world⁷.'

What a wonderful prayer! And rising up from what a Heart! From the Heart of Jesus, the supreme High Priest of all humanity, our Pontiff, when He is about to make Himself our Victim! Why then do we so often doubt Christ's power? Why are we discouraged, when Jesus, true God as well as true Man, offers such a prayer to His Father when He is on the point of glorifying Him with an infinite glory and immolating Himself for our sins?

O Christ Jesus, often repeat for us this prayer: Father, keep those whom Thou hast given Me from evil... that they may have my joy... that they may have it in its fullness... that they may share in My glory... that they also may be one in Us !...⁸

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁵ Ps., LXIII, 22 & 23.

⁶ Dom Columba Marmion, Union with God, Chp. IV, In Christo Jesu.

⁷ Jn., XVII.

⁸ Dom Columba Marmion, Christ in his Mysteries, Chp. V, Saviour and high Priest, III.