

## **The Holy Sacrifice Of The Mass Part XVI**

**Fr. James L. Meagher, D.D. 1906**

### **Origin of St. Peter's Liturgy**

Having robed themselves in the vestments Christ, with His seven apostles beside Him, comes to the steps leading up to the ark, the Aaron or Tevah, "the chest," or "Hechal," called the "Little Temple," containing the sacred Books of Moses.

There they stand, and put hands together, eyes on the floor as become suppliants in the presence of their God and Creator. These were the customary postures of prayer in the time of Christ, as still seen at the beginning of Mass. First, they bow deeply down before the Holy Scrolls in the ark, as the celebrant of the Mass bows down before the altar. Thus, they began the synagogue prayers always said before the celebration of the Passover.

According to the Temple custom they recite the Versicle and the Psalm — the Master beginning, the ministers responding.

"I will go into the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth.

"Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy," etc.

Christ beginning and the apostles responding, thus they recited the whole Psalm. In the Liturgy St. Peter composed at Antioch, still followed by the Maronites, they follow this custom of Temple and Cenacle, beginning this Psalm when entering the sanctuary. But the celebrant of the Latin Mass says it at the foot of the altar.

"I will go into the altar of God, etc.

"Bless ye the Lord, who is to be blessed.

"Blessed is the Lord, who is to be blessed for ever and ever.

"Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted and extolled, be the name of the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who is the first and the last, and

beside Him there is no God. Exalt ye Him that rideth upon the heavens by His name Jah, and rejoice before Him. His name is exalted above all blessing and praise. Blessed be His name whose glorious kingdom is for ever and ever. Let the name of the Lord be blessed from this time forth and for evermore.

“Blessed art thou, 0 Lord, our God, king of the Universe, who formest light, and createst darkness, who makest peace and createst all things.

“How goodly are thy tents, 0 Jacob, and thy dwelling place, 0 Israel! As for me, in the abundance of thy loving-kindness, I will come into Thy house. I will worship toward Thy holy Temple in the fear of Thee. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth. I will worship and bow down. I will bend the knee before the Lord, my Maker. May my prayers unto Thee, 0 Lord, be in an acceptable time. 0 God, in the abundance of thy loving-kindness answer me in the truth of Thy salvation.”

### **Striking The Breast At Mass**

Filled with sorrow for their sins, like the penitent hosts of Israel on the eve of the Day of the Atonement, they strike their breasts, as the Talmud tells us, “They shall strike on the breast lamenting. Clapping is done with the hands, and striking is done with the feet.” It is evident that from this Temple and synagogue custom came the ceremony of striking the breast at the Confiteor, “the General Confession,” during Mass.

This was the custom from the beginning of the Church. “Who does penance is mad with himself. For if he is not sincere, why is the breast struck? Why do you do it if you are not mad? When therefore you strike your breast, you are mad in your heart that you may satisfy your Lord, and thus may these words be understood. “Be angry and sin not.” And the publican standing afar off would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast saying: “0 God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Striking the breast is the sorrow of the heart. What does the stroke on the breast mean? “0 God, be merciful to me a sinner.” And what was the sentence of the Lord? “Amen I say unto you, that publican went down to his house justified rather than the other.” This great doctor tells us that when the people heard the General Confession at Mass they

struck their breasts. He says that in his time the bishop and clergy struck their breasts at the Confession. Did Christ and His apostles, following this Temple ceremony, strike their breasts as the clergy and people still do at the beginning of Mass? We find no record.

### **Ceremonial Of Incensing At Mass**

After the prayers at the foot of the staircase, Christ with His two ministers went up to the ark and kissed the place where the holy Scrolls rested, — that was a synagogue ceremony, a sign of their love of the Law. This the celebrant of the Mass now does.

The Lord takes the censer, puts incense on the burning coals with blessing, and with an apostle on each side of Him, bows deeply down before the holy Scrolls of Moses and the Prophets, the Torah and the Heptorath. First He incenses the Torah in the middle, then on each side where rest the other sacred Books of the Old Testament. While offering incense, they recited the words of the Psalm said in the Temple since David's day.

“Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight, the lifting up of my hands as evening sacrifice. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words, to make excuse in sins with men that work iniquity, and I will not communicate with the choicest of them.”  
etc.

Handing the censer to one of the apostles at the right side of the ark the latter incenses Him as the Rabbi, then they go to the middle, bow deeply down before the holy Scrolls, and return to the floor of the Bema.

The ceremony of incensing the Scrolls, and Rolls of the Prophets and ark in the synagogue, was in memory of the incense offered in the Holies of the Temple before the sacrifice of the lamb twice a day, at nine and three o'clock, with the Psalm we have given. This ceremony without a change is carried out at the High Mass.

When Israel fought against the Amalecites, Moses held up his hands — hands and body forming a cross — foretelling the crucifixion. While he held them that way the Hebrews prevailed. When he tired, and let his hands fall, Amalec overcame. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, and the battle of Raphidim was gained. God commanded Moses to write the history of this battle in a book, because it foretold that at a future day the Lord on Calvary would stretch out His hands, nailed to the Cross, in superhuman patience till His death, in which He conquered mankind's enemy the demon.

### **Stretching Out Of The Priest's Hands**

When saying the Temple prayers, the high priest held out his hands like Moses blessing the people. The Talmud tells us, "At three periods of the year the priests should raise their hands at each prayer, and during such periods there are days when this is done four times during the day, viz: during the morning, and additional, the afternoon and the closing prayers. In all the four prayers, mentioned above, the priests are to raise up their hands."

Did Christ hold out His hands with His body forming a cross, as He stretched out His hands when He was crucified, as the celebrant of the Mass holds his hands? The Talmud says they held out their hands this way in Temple and synagogue prayers, and that they were forbidden to hold them higher than the Phylactery on their brow. Isaias foretelling Christ celebrating the Last Supper says, "And He shall spread forth His hands in the midst of them as he that swimmeth spreads forth his hands to swim." We conclude therefore that Christ stretched out His hands during the prayers as now the celebrant of the Mass holds his hands during the prayers.

### **Meaning Of The Word Selah**

The following prayers almost word for word are taken from the Old Testament. The word Selah, given seventy-one times in the Psalms and prophetic books, is found only in Hebrew poetic works and at the end of a verse. The Jewish writers say it means "forever and ever," or "in the world to come." It is rendered in the Latin Mass "Per omnia saecula saeculorum, For ever and ever," or "Through the ages of ages." The Church Fathers and many writers have

treated the subject. Some think it means that the music should stop, that the tone should be changed, or the instruments taken up. But it seems to be a sign to raise up the hands in prayer, although the rabbinical writers lead by tradition as given above offer the most reasonable meaning. The Lord and His apostles continue the prayers as follows.

“Blessed be Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who formest the light, and createst darkness, who maketh peace and createst every thing, who in mercy doth give light to the earth, and to those who dwell on it, and in Thy goodness day by day reneweth the works of creation. Blessed be the Lord our God for the glory of His handiwork and for the lightgiving lights which He made for His praise. Selah, Blessed be the Lord our God, who hath formed the lights.

“With great love hast Thou loved us, O Lord, our God, and with much overflowing pity hast Thou pitied us, our Father, and our King. For the sake of our fathers, who trusted in Thee, Thou taughtest them the statutes of life; have mercy on us and teach us. Enlighten our eyes in Thy law, cause our hearts to cleave to Thy commandments, unite our hearts to love and fear Thy name, and we shall not be put to shame forever and ever. For Thou art a God who preparent salvation, and thou halt chosen us from all nations and tongues, and in truth Thou hast brought us near to Thy great name — Selah that we may lovingly praise Thee and thy Oneness. Blessed be the Lord, who in love chose His people Israel.”

To each prayer the apostles replied Amen, “Let it be so.” The first prayer was said in the morning and gave rise to the prayer for peace in the Christian Liturgies the second prayer was added at the evening service.

“The prayer Sch’mone Esre: “Eighteen Benedictions,” was drawn up in the years 348-342 before Christ. The Jews say Esdras was its author. But some believed that the 14th and 17th petitions were added later. The whole petition was spoken in a low tone by the congregation and allowed by the Rabbi. Three times a day every Israelite repeated it after he had recited the Sch’ma, “Hear,” morning and evening. During these prayers the congregation stood immovable, faced towards the shrine, feet close together, mind fixed in

devotion. At the beginning and end of the first and sixteenth Benediction, all bent the knee, and bowed their heads down towards the earth. It seems that this is the reason the congregation in our churches stand during the Gospel, and bend the knee at the end.

### **Christ's Sermon On The Real Presence**

Did the Son of God, leading in this solemn synagogue service, explain in a sermon to the congregation that eating the lamb with the bread and drinking the wine from patriarchal times foretold Calvary and the Eucharist? We know not; history is silent on the details of that Last Supper. But His sermon in the Synagogue of Capharnaum, had prepared them for the change He was about to make in the Passover. We beg the indulgence of the readers and give His words as the Gospel of this, the first Mass.

“I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and they died. This is the bread descending down from heaven, that if any one eat of it he may not die. I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever: and the bread which I will give, is My flesh for the life of the world. The Jews therefore debated among themselves saying: “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

“Then Jesus said to them. ‘Amen, amen I say to you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him.

“As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me the same shall live by Me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna and died. He that eateth this bread shall live forever.

“These things He said teaching in the synagogue in Capharnaum.”

## The Creed

When they read the Scriptures in the Temple or synagogue the clergy stood, while the congregation sat. That is the reason the celebrant and ministers stand and the people sit during the reading of the Epistle in all Christian Rites. But when they said the Shema, the Jewish Creed, either in the synagogue or in private they always stand. Perhaps this is the reason we stand during the Creed. The congregation rises and stands while all recite the Jewish Creed.

While reciting this Temple Creed they brought in the roasted lamb and laid it on the table, as the chief victim of patriarchal and of the Temple worship. Who brought in the lamb? It was becoming for a Temple priest to bring in its victim, to link together patriarchs, Temple, synagogue, Last Supper and Eucharist. James was a Temple priest. He was, the quasi deacon of the Last Supper, while his brother John acted as subdeacon. The deacon during Mass represents the Catholic Church while the subdeacon typifies the Jewish Church.

It was just and right therefore that James, a Temple priest, might bring in the lamb at this Passover which was to fulfill the Passovers celebrated down the ages, for now the great yearly feast was about to pass into the eternal Passover, the Eucharist Sacrifice the great Antitype of them all.

While singing the Creed, James went to the credence table where with the wine and water rested on its cross the roasted lamb. He takes up the plate on which it rests, passes by where the Lord and His ministers are in the sanctuary, bows deeply down before his Lord and Master, and goes to the table in the middle of the Cenacle. On the table he spreads a linen cloth, on that lays the dish with the lamb, returns into the sanctuary, bows to the Lord, and sits in his place besides his master.

To-day that very ceremony is seen at every High Mass while the Creed is sung. The deacon bows to the celebrant, goes to the credence table, takes the burse with its corporal, bows to the celebrant, goes and spreads the corporal on the altar, returns, bows to the celebrant and sits in his place.

But the Shema, or Creed of the Jewish Church would not suffice for the Christian Church because new elements, the Divinity of Christ, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Baptism, and other truths had been added to the Hebrew religion.

After the coming of the Holy Ghost, the apostles gathered in the Grotto on Olivet, where they had hid with their Master from Monday till that Thursday afternoon before the Crucifixion. There they formed what is called the Apostles' Creed, each one forming, it is said one of its doctrines. This Creed sung at every High Mass as the Jewish Creed was sung at the Last Supper.

**To Be Cont'd**