

The Holy Sacrifice Of The Mass Part XII

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HOW CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES SAID THE MASS.

HOW CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES PREPARED FOR THE FIRST MASS.

If a reporter had been present when the Lord and His apostles prepared for and said the first Mass, with what avidity we would now read the account. But, the Gospels excepted, no details have been recorded, and we must look to the Jewish rites and customs of that epoch.

In Hebrew writings, Temple and synagogue services, in the works of the Fathers, in Catholic and non-Catholic writings relating to the Passover, we find a wealth of lore we now weave together to tell the story of the first Mass. We do not hold that they are absolutely exact, but they are as nearly true as possible after the lapse of centuries.

It was the eve of Passover, the 13th day of the moon of the month of Abib or Nisan, after the spring equinox, corresponding to our 6th of April; in the year A.D. 34; 4088 years after Adam's creation, 788 after Rome's foundation, the ninth year of Pilate's government, when Herod Antipas had ruled Galilee thirty-three years, Pomponius Flaccus, father of the emperor, being ruler of Syria, when Tiberius had sat twenty years on Caesar's throne, when Joseph Caiphas had pontificated for sixteen years; forty-four years after Herod dedicated his famous Temple, that our story begins. A month before the Jews began these preparations they called the Paraceve. They had fixed the roads leading up to the sacred city, whitewashed the tombs, cleaned the streets, set their houses in order to receive the great throngs of strangers from all the nations, who would flock to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. The Law of Moses required every Hebrew within fifteen miles of the city, who was of age, and free from legal blemish, "to appear before the Lord " in His sanctuary on this day they called Haggadah, "Showing Forth," because every Jew was to come up to Jerusalem and "show himself" in the Temple as the Lord had commanded. This law bound every Hebrew, who was not defiled, sick, or had a

legal reason for not coming. Those who could not come this day were to come and be present at the second Passover held for them a month later.

Origin Of The Offertory

They divided up into “bands” of ten to twenty members, each bringing his gifts for the feast. Generally the leader of each “band” brought the lamb on his shoulders to the Temple. One would buy the wine, another the flour for the cakes, another the bitter herbs, another the candles, and the others the food required. This custom was continued in the early Church, and they brought gifts each Sunday and placed them on a table in the sanctuary at the offertory of the Mass, whence the name “offertory,” from the offerings of the people, which in that day were divided into different parts, one for the support of the clergy, another for the maintaining of the religious buildings, and another for the support of the poor, the widows and orphans.

In the days of Christ, Jerusalem was much larger than now, extending south and taking in the large Sion quarter. The fixed population of the city was about 100,000 inhabitants, whole families living in one small room. But at Passover nearly 3,000,000 strangers from all the nations into which the Jews had scattered and engaged in trade used to come up to the Holy City, according to the Laws of Moses, to celebrate the feast. They camped on the hills and filled the valleys all around the sacred city, covering the country for miles in all directions.

Since Moses’ day they had chosen the lamb on the 10th day of the moon of the lunar month of Abib or Nisan, and condemned the victim to death. There was a prophecy in this. For this year the 10th day fell on Monday, and that day the local Sanhedrin or the Jerusalem Jewish Court, met and handed down a decree to execute the death sentence on Jesus, pronounced a month before by the great national Court of seventy-one judges.

The sentence was to put Him to death as soon as they could without rousing the people. But the prophecies stated and the Temple ceremonial showed that He was to die not that day but on the following Friday. Therefore Christ did not return to Bethany that night, for they would find Him in Lazarus’ house and kill Him.

The Grotto Of The Creed

Where did he hide?

A little below the summit of Olivet, whence He later ascended, was a cave in the dry limestone rock, its mouth then hidden by bushes, where watchmen guarding flocks and watching gardens retired in storms and slept at night. The cave extended forty feet north and south and was about fifteen feet wide. In it were four tables, seats, beds, etc. There the Lord with His apostles spent the three nights before His death. There He had taught His apostles the Lord's Prayer. There before they separated after the ascension, they composed the Apostles' Creed. It is called now the Grotto of the Creed. In the same enclosure, a little higher up, now stands a large building erected by a French countess, with the Lord's Prayer carved in thirty-five languages of the great nations on its walls. The first bishops of Jerusalem mention the Grotto of the Creed, many writers visited it, and in the early ages pilgrimages used to be made to it. A few hundred feet lower rises the church of the Dominus fievit "The Lord wept," where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Measuring with instruments, the floor of the church was found to be on a level with the spring of the arch of the Mosque of Omar, so that before His eyes across the Cedron vale, then rose the great buildings of the famous Temple .

A little south of the Grotto you can enter the tombs of the Hebrew prophets, who foretold in minute details the Saviour's life and death. But because they had denounced the Hebrews for their sins, most of them were killed. Down deep in the limestone rock, you will find half-circle galleries and places for thirty-one bodies; but they are empty now.

Why Christ Drove Out The Money-changers

The great throngs were very busy that Monday; all was turmoil, talk and excitement, for that day they selected the lambs for the Passover. The men of the bands first bought and washed the lamb, and called it "The Lamb of God" "as they condemned it to death.

First they washed the victim to image the Passover bath the Lord took with His apostles before the Last Supper. They scented the animal with costly

perfume, to foretell the perfume of holiness and good works performed by Jesus. Then they tied the little victim to a colored stake emblematic of Jesus fastened to His bloody cross. This was the way the lamb was prepared from Moses' day to prophesy the future Passion of the "Lamb of God," who was to take away the sins of the world. A hundred and forty times the Old Testament mentions the lamb as a type of Christ, and thirty-four times calls the Lord "the Lamb."

Each morning the Lord, leading His band of twelve apostles, went out of His hiding-place in the Grotto, went down the hill thronged with Jews born of Juda's tribe, and passed the day in the Temple instructing, preaching, healing all diseases, and at nightfall He returned to His hiding-place. The sermons in the Temple, His burning denouncement of the Scribes and Pharisees will be found in the Gospels. The money-changers used to turn into the Temple treasury, as discounts, \$380,000 a year, and \$45,000 of that went into the pockets of the high priests. When Christ drove them out of the Women's Court, which they disturbed during divine service, He roused the priests to the highest fury. But they feared the people during the day and they could not find Him at night on Olivet.

Eve of Passover, of Pentecost, of Day of Atonement were days of fasting and of prayer, and the custom comes down to us in fasting and prayers on the eves of feasts. Therefore Christ with His apostles passed Wednesday in the Grotto in fasting and praying, preparing for His death, and that retreat was the model of these retreats people make before ordination or undertaking important works.

Why We Fast Before Communion

From the days of Esdras Thursday was a day of fasting and prayer, because that day Moses began his fast on Sinai before receiving the Ten Commandments and the Law. The Jews, who could not attend the Temple services, fasted in their homes or synagogues for four days before the Passover, taking neither food or drink till sunset.

In memory of the escape of the first-born of the Hebrews when the Angel of death killed the first-born of every Egyptian family the night of the flight from

Egyptian bondage, the first-born of every family down the ages kept a still stricter fast on the day of the Passover. This fast the Jews still observe, and their Form of Service of the Passover of our day has the following rubric: “All the first-born fast in commemoration of the deliverance of the first-born of the Israelites when God smote all the first-born of the Egyptians”.

Christ and His apostles were therefore obliged to fast, because it was the eve of the feast and because it was Thursday. The Lord was bound by the law of the first born, and they came to the Last Supper fasting. Therefore in every age coming down from the apostles, Church law and custom have prevailed, that the celebrant of the Mass and those who receive Communion must be fasting, the sick alone excepted. It is still the law in every Oriental church.

Law and custom enforced not only fasting, but directed every Hebrew on the eve of the Day of Atonement and of Passover to take part in the Temple ceremonial of preparation for the feast. There they prayed and confessed their sins, as to-day the people come to the church to confess and to prepare for our feasts. Let us see what Jewish writers say of these preparations we imagine Christ and his apostles attended because they followed every law and custom of their glorious Temple.

A whole Tract of the Talmud devoted to this subject of fasting, gives minute details of the Jewish fasts before great feasts, and in times of public calamities. The details are too numerous to give here. They were also forbidden to do any kind of work, light a fire, or even prepare food, and Jews of our day observe some of these regulations.

The Paraceve “The Preparation”

This eve, of Passover and of Sabbath was called by Grecian Jews the Paraceve, “preparation.” St. Augustine says that in his day Christians called the eve of Easter the “pure supper.” The Passover being the greatest of the Jewish feasts, as Easter is the chief Church feast, the Hebrews began the solemn preparations in the Temple and synagogues the evening before—that is, on the eve of the Passover. St. Augustine writes that the eve of Easter, now called Holy Saturday, is the mother of all the eves of the feasts of the Church. Let us see what the Talmud says regarding the preparations for the Passover.

“Mishna: The following religious acts may be done during the whole of the day on which they are obligatory The reading of the Megilla, the Hallel, the sounding of the trumpet, the handling of the Lulab, the prayer at the additional offering, the additional offering, the confession of sin at the sacrificing of the bulls, the confession to be made on bringing the second tithe, the confession of sin by the high-priest on the Day of Atonement, the imposition of hands on the sacrifice, the slaughtering of a sacrifice, the waving of the offering. (In the form of a cross as already explained) the bringing it to the altar, the taking of the handful of flour the burning with incense of the fat of a sacrifice on the altar.”

The Talmud goes into minute details of the services and ceremonials of the Jewish church at the time it was written, many of these ceremonies with hardly a change we find in the ceremonies of the Church. We cannot give them all because they would alone fill a large book. But we will here show how they prepared for the Passover on the paraceve, “the preparation.”

“On the eve of the Day of Atonement (or of Passover) it is forbidden to eat and drink, to wash, anoint, lace shoes or have sexual intercourse. The one who broke these laws suffered Kareth, “excommunication.” Children need not fast, but when one to two years old they must, so as to become accustomed to obey the religious commandments. If one has eaten or drunk through forgetfulness, he must bring a sin-offering; if he has eaten and worked he must bring two. From dawn of day (This was Wednesday of Passion week) they must begin, but a pregnant woman who longs for food, and the sick were allowed to eat a little, the food being given them under medical direction”

How They Confessed In The Temple

To the Temple came the people on the eve of the feast to confess their sins, each bringing different offerings and victims to be sacrificed for different sins. They excited themselves to acts of sorrow and contrition and were truly penitent, many pages are devoted to this subject. Let us take a passage.

“Penance is great, so that it brings redemption. And there shall come a Redeemer to Sion, and to them that return from iniquity in Jacob, saith the Lord,” which means, ‘Why is the Redeemer come?’ Because Jacob has

returned from transgression. Penance is great, even the sins that have been done intentionally, are considered as done unintentionally, as it is written, 'Return, O Israel, to the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen down by thy iniquity.' Penitence is great. 'And when the wicked shall depart from his wickedness, and shall do judgments and justice, he shall live in them.' One is from love, the other from fear. Penitence is great, it causes a man to live long, as it is written, 'he shall live.' The way of the Holy One, blessed be He, are not like the ways of man.

They came into the Temple and confessed their sins to the priests as to-day Christians come to the churches to confession the day before the Easter feast. They humbled themselves before the Eternal of their forefathers, and over them the priests prayed for forgiveness.

"The Rabbis taught: The sins one has confessed on one Day of Atonement, he need not confess on the next Day of Atonement. This is the case if he has not repeated his sin, but in that case, he should repeat the confession. If without having sinned again, he confessed again, then to him applies the verse, 'As the dog returneth to his vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly.'" Rabbi ben Jacob however said, 'So much the more he may be praised as it is written,' For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.'

"When he confesses, he must specify his sin, as it is written, 'This people hath sinned a grievous sin, and they have made themselves gods of gold.'" Why then has Moses specified the sin?

The Duty Of Confession

The Rabbis taught the duty of confession is on the eve of the Day of Atonement (and Passover) when it grows dark. Still the Rabbis said, one should confess previously to the meal, for if something happened to him at his meal, he will have remained without confession. But although one has confessed before the meal, he should confess again in the evening, and once more the next morning, and in the additional Minchab prayer and the concluding N'ilah prayer.

“At what place in the prayer should he confess? an individual at the end of the prayer, and the reader of the congregation in the middle of the prayer. What shall he say? He shall begin:

‘Thou knowest the secrets of the world.’

‘From the depths of the heart.’

‘In thy Law it is written thus.’

‘Lord of the Universe, not for our merits do we pray Thy mercy.’

‘Our transgressions are too numerous to be counted, and our sins too mighty to be told.’

‘My God, before I was created, I had not been worthy to be made, and now when I am created, I am the same as before. I am earth during my life, and so much more when I am dead. May it be Thy will that I may sin no more. I am a vessel before Thee full of disgrace and shame.’”

As a sign of sorrow they struck their breasts as the celebrant and his ministers still do at the General Confession at Mass “Lamenting is by striking the breast for thus it is written.”

The Morning Light Of Christianity

That vast congregation, formed of Jews from fartherest ends of earth that Wednesday evening, bent their bodies down before the veil closing the dread Holy of Holies, of the Lord of hosts, where formerly, in the form of the Shekina, God Eternal their King dwelled. It was the morning light of Christianity rising over mankind. Silently, walked the Levites with torches lighting the thousands of candles to illuminate the courts with the prayer:

“Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by Thy commandments, and ordered us to kindle the Passover light.”

They began the evening prayers with the Shema: “Hear, O Israel,” etc., and then said the following prayers: “Thou hast chosen us from all peoples,” etc. “O, our God, and the God of our fathers, may our remembrance rise, and come, and be accepted before Thee, with the remembrance of our fathers; of the

Messiah the Son of David, Thy servant; of Jerusalem the holy city, and of all Thy people, the house of Israel, bringing deliverance and well-being, grace and loving-kindness, mercy, life and peace on this Day of Atonement.’ Remember us, O Lord, our God, for our well-being; be mindful of us for blessing, and save us unto life; by Thy promise of salvation and mercy spare us, and be gracious unto us. Have mercy on us, and save us, for our eyes are bent on Thee, because Thou art a gracious and merciful God and King.”

Unseen grace coming from future merits of the Crucified streamed down that night into repenting hearts of Israel’s children, rousing them to realize the wickedness of sin. Brighter rose the aurora, the morning light of Christianity, since Moses, coming from the foreknowledge of the true Day of Atonement, that terrible Good Friday of the crucifixion.

Temple Penitential Litany

In the days of which we write, during the Ten Days of Penance, on the New Moon, on the Seven days of Passover, on the eve of the Atonement, great throngs gathered in the Temple, body and soul bowed down before the Holy of Holies, while that cry of anguish poured out the following before the Lord of hosts:

O, Our Father, Our King

The priestly and Levite choirs formed of 1,000 men sang the first words, “O, our Father, our King,” and the vast congregation filling the great Courts sang the forty-three responses.

We have sinned before Thee,

We have no King but Thee.

Deal with us for Thy name’s sake.

Let a happy year begin for us.

Nullify all evil decrees against us.

Nullify the designs of those who hate us.

Make the counsel of our enemies of no effect.

Rid us of every oppressor and adversary.

Close the mouths of our adversaries and accusers.

Of pestilence, sword, famine, captivity and destruction rid the children of Thy covenant.

Withhold the plague from Thine inheritance.

Forgive and pardon all our iniquities.

Blot out our sins and make them pass away before Thine eyes.

Erase, in Thine abundant mercies, all records of guilt.

Bring us back in perfect repentance unto Thee.

Send perfect healing to the sick of Thy people.

Let Thy remembrance of us be for good.

Write us in the book of happy life.

Inscribe us in the book of redemption and salvation.

Let salvation soon spring forth for us.

Exalt the Horn of Israel Thy people.

Hear our voice, spare us, and have mercy on us.

Open the gates of heaven unto our prayer.

We pray Thee turn us not back empty from Thy presence.

The high priest ended the Litany with these words:

“O, our Father, our King, be gracious unto us, and answer us, for we have no good work of our own, deal with us in charity and kindness and save us.

“In the book of life with blessing, peace and good sustenance, may we be remembered and inscribed before Thee, we and all thy people, the house of Israel, for a happy life, and for peace. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who makest peace.

“O, our God, and the God of our fathers, let our prayer come before Thee; hide not Thyself from our supplications, for we are not arrogant and stiff-necked, that we should say before Thee, O Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, we are not righteous we have sinned; truly we have sinned.

“We have trespassed; we have been faithless; we have robbed; we have spoken basely; we have committed iniquity; we have worked injustice; we have been presumptuous; we have done violence; we have forged lies; we have counseled evil; we have spoken falsely; we have scoffed; we have revolted; we have blasphemed; we have acted perversely; we have transgressed; we have been rebellious; we have been stiff-necked; we have done wickedly; we have corrupted ourselves; we have committed abomination; we have gone astray; we have been led astray.

“We have turned aside from Thy commandments and good judgments, and it hath profited us naught. But Thou art just in all that is come upon us, for Thou hast acted truthfully, but we have wrought injustice.

“What shall we say before Thee, O Thou, who dwellest on high, and what shall we recount unto Thee, who abidest in the heavens? dost Thou not know all things, both hidden and revealed ?

“Thou knowest the secrets of eternity, and the most hidden mysteries of all living. Thou searchest the innermost recesses, and triest the reins and heart. Naught is concealed from Thee, or hidden from Thine eyes.

“May it then be thy will, O Lord, our God, and the God of our fathers, to forgive us for all our sins, to pardon us for all our iniquities, and to grant us forgiveness for all our transgressions.

To Be Cont'd.