

WHAT ARE CATHOLICS?

Part 2: Christ's Body and Family?

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(a) CHRIST'S BRETHREN.

“Go to My brethren, and say to them: I ascend to My Father and to your Father.”

John 20:17.

Point 1.

BETHLEHEM.

Come back for a moment to the stable-cave of Bethlehem. God, so near to us by His love and care, is yet to our blind souls distant and remote. But see, the first Christmas is here and God has come into His own world. He keeps His divine glory hidden lest it should dazzle our weak eyes. Man's eyes are turned towards the earth, and, lo, the Eternal Word springs down to earth from His royal throne in Heaven (see Wisdom 18:14). Come, let us adore. The shepherds are there already: already little children are peering over the manger's edge; the great wise ones of the world, too, are hastening. We can join the throng. Poor or rich, old or young, let us gather round and gaze at the Babe of Bethlehem, our Brother Christ. Let us gaze first in simple affection at this tiny mite, wrapped in white swaddling clothes, lying on the manger-straw, this little child so poorly housed, so poorly sheltered. But straightaway, as we gaze with love and pity, we will mingle awe and wonder and faith and a great hope. This is God. This is the Lord and Maker of all things, the infinitely great and good, and – He is a baby. Truly has He emptied Himself and taken the form of a servant: He has entered His world to be our Brother.

In a little while, He is the exile in Egypt, the boy in Nazareth, the carpenter, the wayfarer of the Galilean hills. He has sought us out and come into this world to be one of us. He shares our human nature, He has secured a physical kinship with us and He calls Himself the Son of Man. We are children of Adam; so is Christ. We are body and soul; He, too, has now a human body and a human soul. Blood runs tingling through our veins; so, too with Christ. The lilies of the field are clothed in greater beauty than was ever Solomon in all his glory, and Christ sees their beauty. He sees the sparrows, the growing mustard seed, the brown earth waiting for the sower, the wheat unfolding – first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, the golden harvest. He notes children playing in the market place, women working at a hand-mill, fish leaping in the

net of fishermen. The beauties of the world – He sees them all; much more does He see and value the beauty of the soul. He rejoices at the faith of the centurion, at the persevering prayer of the Canaanite woman. He is pained and hurt at the rudeness of the Pharisees, at their blindness, at their malice. He is moved to pity by sorrow and suffering, by the grief of the widow of Naim as she follows her dead son to the grave, by the tears of Mary and Martha over the death of Lazarus.

OUR LEADER.

And Christ our Brother is Christ our Leader, too – our perfect Leader. Utterly unselfish, ever approachable, always patient and kind, He is also fearlessly courageous. He preaches a hard doctrine, and, when His followers complain, He does not compromise. He does not withdraw one iota of His message. When there is danger of scorn and contempt, He does not avoid it. He teaches the people, and ever mingling with the crowd are men hindering and faultfinding. As His life goes on, His enemies close in about Him, always watching, always critical, always striving to catch Him in His words, and always failing to do so.

Christ, ever patient, is also ever strong, and there are times when He answers these Pharisees. He has stern things to say to them, and they quail under the flash of His eyes. Always considerate to the weak and the fallen, He can be terrible to self-satisfied righteousness, to hypocritical pomp and pretence. Servants are sent to arrest Him – they return empty-handed and afraid. Death is in store for Him; yet He steps forward eagerly to Jerusalem so that even His Apostles are dismayed. And, when His hour has come, He goes forth to His Passion courageous to the last; the true, the perfect, the peerless man as He is also truly and perfectly God.

Point 2.

KINSHIP BY GRACE.

Our kinship with Christ does not consist merely in His sharing our human nature and dying for us. As the waters of Baptism flow, life giving, as the words of absolution lift off the heavy load of sin, there springs up in our very souls a new nearness, a new relationship to Christ. ‘As many of you as have been baptized, have put on Christ,’ cries Saint Paul (Galatians 3:27). Our souls now live with the same divine life as His; they are now like to Him. Human brothers resemble one another in external appearance: our souls in grace bear a special likeness to Christ. ‘My little children,’ Saint Paul affectionately addresses his Galatian converts, ‘of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you.’ (Galatians 4:19). The great Apostle suffers pangs of distress and anxiety as he endeavours to fashion their souls to the likeness of Christ. Again, he tells the Romans that God has deigned to make us ‘conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.’ (Romans 8:29). ‘The firstborn’ through grace, Christ, becomes our elder Brother.

Risen from the dead, He Himself sends Mary Magdalen speeding with a message to His Apostles. ‘Go,’ He says, ‘to My brethren and say to them that I ascend to My Father and to your Father.’ I ascend to Him Who is by nature My Father as He is yours by grace, the grace of adoption. ‘My

brethren', such is the title He gives them, for God, His Father, is our Father, too. Christ is in truth our Brother. We have all the same Heavenly Father. Indeed, we have all the same Mother, too. Mary is Christ's Mother; she is our Mother also; through her, too, do we become Christ's brethren.

See the boy Christ standing on the threshold of the little home in Nazareth, lit up by the sunlight that comes streaming through the doorway, turning His head to golden flame. See Him again standing at Mary's knee reading to her and with her. He is like her in appearance, in the colour of His eyes and the shape of His features. Her gentleness and quiet dignity are His. The way He speaks is like hers; like hers His whole bearing. In their thoughts, too, what wonderful accord; much more is there likeness between them in the depths of their souls – Christ, the fulness of grace; Mary, full of grace. Human life she gave Him; He gives her something far more precious, divine life. We, too, are her children, and we should beg her to secure for us the great grace of growing more like her divine Son.

Point 3. **OUR NEED OF CHRIST.**

We are Christ's brethren. Our likeness to Him goes down to the depths of our souls. It demands that our principles and our outlook be as His. Baptism is the sacrament, which makes us Christians. . . . There is a crisp cut in that word Christian, the title of a Christ-follower and a Christ-lover. In Baptism, our loyalty was first pledged to Him, and this promise was ratified again and again. In First Communion, when Christ entered, true God and true man, into our hearts, we reaffirmed our loyalty. We reaffirmed it again in Confirmation, when we became more fully His – 'confirmed,' fixed resolutely, fighters for Christ. The stroke on the cheek, the sign of peace, and the anointing of strengthening oil, awakened us to our calling – members now fully of the Church militant, the fighting Church, ready to struggle and to suffer for Christ, to struggle and suffer in a fight, not against men, but for men, for all men against sin and the powers of darkness; against sin in our own hearts first, and then, too, against sin in the world. In many a Mission, in many a retreat, we have reasserted our loyalty. We must mean it now; we must carry out its implications now. It is Christ that matters, Christ our Model, our Leader, our Inspiration. He is the source of all our power to do any good, any real good for ourselves and for others. 'Without Me,' He says quite simply, 'you can do nothing.' (John 15:5). Without Him we can indeed sin, we can cause trouble, unrest, discontent, suffering, death. But to do anything of positive, lasting value for ourselves or for the world we must work with Christ, through Christ, in Christ. 'As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.'

See a vine well-rooted in the soil; its gnarled, twisted stock rises firm against a wall, and from it reach out to left and right long shoots and branches that grip with strong tendrils to the wall. Among the reddish-green foliage here and there is a grape-bunch, purpling. Take a knife and cut through one of those shoots where it grows out from the stock. By evening, the leaves are all drooping, the branch sags shriveling. No more fruit will appear on it, nor leaves, nor even buds.

In a little while all that is left is a brown, withered stick, good perhaps for firing, but for naught else of use. 'I am the vine,' says Christ, 'you the branches . . . if any one abide not in Me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burns.'

'For without Me you can do nothing.' He does not say that we can do a little, can do this or that – but 'can do nothing,' absolutely nothing of any worth for eternal life, nothing of any real worth for ourselves or for the world.

Christ is our need of needs; the world, too, needs Him. Conscious through every land today is the conviction that the future must be different from the past, that the shock of War must issue in a new and better state of things. 'The world must be different,' say all. But how? Each one suggests his own solution. We Catholics have ours; it is the only one worth while. Other things may be important, useful, and even necessary; but by themselves, they are hopelessly insufficient. To solve the world's problems a remedy must be found for greed and lust and pride, for the mad search for money and ever more money, for the wild pursuit of pleasure at all costs, for overweening arrogance.

No external constraint will suffice. It is from men's hearts that all the world's miseries have come. It is these hearts that must be changed. The solution of the world's ills must be something able to enter men's hearts and souls, and there become a vital force bearing fruit in right principles and right practice. Such a vital force, both absolutely true and immeasurably strong, cannot be had apart from Christ. The only hope of the world – the only hope, not for perfect happiness, for that is impossible in this life, but for a reasonable measure of peace and prosperity – is a return to Christ – a return to His point of view, His principles, and a return to Him as the source of strength to live up to these principles in practice. There is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved – (Act 4:12) in this world as well as the next.

'If society is to be healed now, in no other way can it be healed save by a return to Christian life and Christian institutions,' wrote Pope Leo XIII And again: 'We have striven for the restoration, both in rulers and peoples, of the principles of Christian life in civil and domestic society, since there is no true life for man apart from Christ.'

Our present Holy Father, Pius XII, is equally insistent. 'If it is to have any effect, the re-education of mankind must be above all things spiritual and religious. Hence it must proceed from Christ as from its indispensable foundation.'

LENIN.

A final confirmation of this great truth comes from a strange source – from none other than the Bolshevik leader, Lenin. As he lay tossing on his deathbed, he made the following terrible admission: 'I have been mistaken. It was, I suppose, necessary to liberate a multitude of oppressed peoples, but our method has provoked other oppressions, frightful massacres. You know my most awful nightmare is to feel myself drowning in an ocean of the blood of countless

victims. To save our Russia, what was needed (but it is too late now) was ten Francis of Assisi. Ten Francis of Assisi, and we should have saved Russia. . . .’ (See Michel d’Herbigny, in *Letters from Rome*, June 5, 1937). Yes, indeed, what Russia needed, what the world needs, what we ourselves need is the spirit of the *Poverello*, Saint Francis of Assisi, the spirit of one on fire with the love of Christ, on fire, so that all the fuss and flurry about getting and grabbing, about money and possessions is seen to be pitifully trivial.

The poor world has tried and sought, and bled and suffered and failed, and become cynical and anarchical, and the cry of the Sacred Heart holds such a pang of sorrow – ‘You will not come to Me that you may have life.’

We Catholics cannot fold our hands in indifference. The agony of the world cries out for help, and to us, as Christ’s brethren, that cry is all compelling – we must help the world.

Of old, Irish missionaries brought to barbaric Europe the light of the Faith. Today once again, Ireland has its work to do, to live its Faith, to be in truth a Catholic nation, a light to the peoples seated in darkness and the shadow of death. We have the Faith, here in Ireland, thank God, but that Faith will fade and wither unless it is lived, unless it comes to transform our whole life, public as well as private.

EVERY CATHOLIC ANOTHER CHRIST.

And now the question narrows down. We call ourselves Christians, followers of Christ, Christ’s brethren. This means that we are pledged to promote His policy in the world; we must first bring Christ into our own hearts. Francis Xavier blazed a trail across the world, because his heart was on fire with a consuming love for Christ, was filled with Christ. We must form Christ in our own lives, through our Confessions and our Holy Communions, ever deepening our realisation that He wants us to be like Him, to be like Him in our thoughts, in the way we speak and act. And then, too, we must be like Him in our work for others.

Every Catholic is called to work for the salvation of the world, to be a leader, a crusader, another Christ. By our prayers, our example, our words and our deeds, we can all do this, each working in his own surroundings, in his own work, among his own circle, as a true follower of Christ. It is time we stopped wanting others to remedy what has gone wrong; it is time we got down to it ourselves. Let us stop asking: ‘Why don’t they – the Government, or the Corporation, or the police or the teachers, or the clergy, or any other ‘they’ – yes, ‘do something about it?’ Let us ask ourselves instead, each one of us: ‘Why don’t I do something about it?’ – First in my own heart, and then in my own surroundings!

Someone will plead ‘But what can I do?’ – I am ‘only a clerk, or a bus-driver, or a postman, or a mother’. And the answer is you can do all things, provided you are united to Christ, intensely in love with Christ. See what the poor fisherman, Peter, did; what Xavier did, what [Blessed Frederick] Ozanam did, and [Venerable] Matt Talbot, and all the others, men and women with

flesh and blood like us, and yet what grand things they did for God, and for the world, once the love of Christ filled their hearts. A few men today with false ideals and ideas have set the world reeling: we Catholics, with Christ as Leader, can set it right again.

HIS COMMAND.

But there is one thing Christ asked in particular – one thing that is to be the hallmark of His followers. They must, indeed, keep God’s law – they must not steal or kill or slander or be impure; this is presupposed, and without it, they cannot aspire to be Christians. This is necessary, but it is not enough. What then is His great demand? What is the special service that He asks above all from us His brethren and friends? Often He has spoken of it – but it is on the night before He suffers, during the Last Supper, that He returns to it with a new insistence. He has many things to say to His Apostles in this His parting message, but there is one thought that comes back again and again, like the tolling of a great bell, and that thought is: ‘Be united.’

‘A new commandment,’ He says, ‘I give to you,’ – and what is it? ‘That you love one another.’ Again, ‘If you love Me, keep My commandments.’ – What commandments? – Just the ten, just what is of sheer and strict obligation? No. His followers must do more than that. ‘This is My commandment, that you love one another.’

‘You are My friends,’ He says again, but He adds a condition: there is an ‘if’ – ‘if you do the things that I command you. These things I command you: that you love one another.’

After this long discourse, He prays. He prays for His Apostles and for His Church: He prays for us, for you and me. And He prays that we be united: ‘Holy Father,’ He prays, ‘keep them in Your name, that they all may be one, as You Father in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us.’

The early Christians had but one mind and one heart, and the pagans wondered: ‘How these Christians love one another!’ Does the pagan world today wonder at our love for one another, or have we allowed that pagan world to seep into our hearts, quenching there our ardent love of Christ and of each other, snatching away from us Christian unselfishness and replacing it by niggardly self-centeredness and sinister vindictiveness. Let us examine our own hearts now to root out bitterness. Bluntly does Saint John declare: ‘If any man say that he loves God and hates his neighbour, that man is a liar.’

Brotherly love is the acid test of our love of God, the hallmark of the Christian, the condition of our very salvation. ‘At the evening of life we shall be judged on love.’ (Saint John of the Cross).

Whom then must we love? – Our neighbour.

And who is our neighbour? – All mankind.

All men in general? – Yes, all men: but, first and foremost, those who cross our path in life, those of our own family, those who live near us, those who work with us. They must be the happier and the better because of us. And note, my neighbour is not just somebody I like, someone who is nice to me, and kind, and friendly.

‘If you love them that love you,’ says Our Divine Lord, ‘what reward shall you have? – Do not the pagans do this?’ – No, our true charity will show itself above all in kindness to the stupid, the deaf, the old, the perverse – and why? Because Christ in them pleads for it. And behind the white roundness of the consecrated Host, our eye lit up by faith beholds the fairest of the sons of men, Christ Our Lord, true God and true man; so, too, behind the appearance of poverty, and insolence, and doddering simplicity our eyes must see Christ Our Lord.

His word stands; there is no escaping it. "Whatever you do to one of these, My least brethren, you do to Me." Come down the lanes and alleyways of our cities. Climb the broken stairs. These are little ones starving. Through their bright eyes, Christ looks out pleadingly to you His brother and His friend. There are old grannies lonely and neglected. Christ in them asks you to spare a little time with them. There are poor hopeless wrecks from the great mistake of the economic depression, or from drink, poor down-and-outs. They are, if you will, His least brethren.

God help us all:

Would we be any better in their surroundings?

And yet in these poor wrecks of humanity it is Christ, our Brother, who is in need. Some there are who ask for food and clothing. The lonely need a kindly visit and a kindly word.

The poor wrecks, too – they need, not stiff-necked Pharisees, but friends and endless patience. Friends that will know them and their weakness, but who will also seek, long perhaps and patiently, but seek till they find the spark of decency and goodness that is hidden away in every human soul, and fan this spark to a burning flame. Remember Mary Magdalen. Remember the Good Thief. God grant that one day we ourselves may find a place in God’s home with these two down-and-outs.

THOSE OUTSIDE.

Be kind, then, be good, and make allowances for everybody except yourself. And this, our love for one another will be the first step in the fulfilment of our duty to non-Catholics, to those outside the Church. ‘By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love, one for another.’ By our radiant kindness, we must attract all men to Christ; by our example, by our prayers, by a timely word, we must strive to win back to Christ and His Church the poor wandering sheep in our midst.

In a little district in China, on the island of Formosa, Catholic Action takes this form: each Catholic is to try to win one convert for the Faith each year. Would that we had a like pity for the non-Catholics about us, a longing to share with them the surpassing treasures of our Catholic Faith.

We Catholics, then, are Christ’s brethren. To Christ our loyalty is pledged, and now His command comes ringing out to us: ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ Crusaders of Christ,

we must fight for this; we must bring death to our own selfishness and sin, and to the world the peace of Christ in the reign of Christ.

(b) Bone of His Bone and Flesh of His Flesh.

“As in one body we have many members . . . so we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

Romans 12:4.

At the beginning of the history of our human race there occurred something very mysterious and yet very significant. Hard to understand, this incident has yet a profound meaning, and teaches a host of important truths. God, when He had made ready the universe and this earth of ours, created Adam, the human father of us all; And, lest Adam should be alone, God fashioned for him a helpmate. From mere nothingness could He have created Eve, but He chose in His infinite wisdom another way. In the opening pages of the Book of Genesis, we are told, “The Lord God cast a deep sleep upon Adam; and, when he was fast asleep, He took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman; and brought her to Adam. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh’.”

THE LANCE.

Later comes the trial and the fall and swift on the sin, follows God’s mercy – a rescuer is promised. Then, when the fulness of time is come, that mercy bends down in pity and is incarnate in Christ, the Second Adam come to repair and restore: to repair the sin of the First Adam, and to restore the wondrous heritage bartered away for the forbidden fruit. From a tree that fruit was stolen. Now another tree receives something back in return. The tree is the Cross. It is Christ Who is nailed to it. ‘As by the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just.’ (Romans 5:19). The Second Adam, lifted up between heaven and earth, hangs there in the deep sleep of death. The Centurion comes. Christ is dead. But, to make sure, he takes a spear, and drawing back, with a sudden thrust forward and upward he drives it through to the Sacred Heart. Then, as he draws it forth, there follow twin streams of blood and water, and from that riven side of Christ is built up His helpmate, His spouse, His Church.

‘We are members of His body,’ cries Saint Paul, ‘and of His flesh and of His bones.’ (Ephesians 5:30). We Catholics are bound to Christ and to each other by a bond of extraordinary intimacy.

Already we have considered the kinship with Christ that springs up, in our souls through Baptism – He becomes our Leader, our Friend, our Brother. We have thought too, how we should foster in our souls and in our everyday life a loving nearness to Him and a burning zeal for His cause. Now let us, with God’s help and our Lady’s prayers, try to glimpse the truth that in very fact Christ is more to us than a Brother.

Our union with Him, once we are free from serious sin, is something much fuller, much more

vital, much more intimate. Once more very slowly and patiently, we will climb up through many comparisons to this great truth: that all we Catholics are made one with Christ.

Point 1.
COMPARISONS.

You have often seen a heap of stones by the wayside ready for the road-mender – a little mound of sharp-pointed stones, each one separate from all the rest. In a building – a house or a church – there are stones, too, but among these stones, there is a certain order and a certain unity. Each one tops those below it, or supports those above it. Some go to shape windows, some to form, say, buttresses, some to link archways, but each and every stone plays its part in the perfection of the complete building.

A nation, too, is something built up, but it is made of human beings. Each one has his duties to others; each one has rights that must be respected by others. There is a fuller unity now; not just mortar welds together these men, but something more intimate – the strength of human wills striving for the common weal and ‘directed and controlled by authority’.

Still there can be a fuller oneness than this. Think for a moment of a tree. It is made up of many different parts – the roots hidden away in the earth, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, and in each of these are myriads of little box-like compartments, myriads of cells. Each cell is different from all the others, and yet they all work together most wonderfully that the tree should grow and develop. Tiny thread-like roots stretch out thirsty fingers into the ground and suck up moisture. Through the trunk, this moisture courses up to the green leaves that conspire with the sunshine to breath in nourishment. Mingled with the moisture this nourishment flows back hither and thither to build up, and strengthen and make to live. What now is the bond of union leading all these multitudinous little compartments to work together, to work not just selfishly for their own good, but for the welfare of the whole tree? There is here something more than in the heap of stones, or the house, or even the nation. There is an inner fount of life – a life that is in roots and trunk and leaves – so that in the tree there’s ‘a marvellous oneness’. Every tiny cell has its work to do, every tiny cell contributes to the fulness of the tree; every tiny cell receives in return its own inner fulness. There is a ceaseless give and receive going on in perfect harmony.

But why trouble about trees – do not our own human bodies provide the best comparison for the truth we are striving to grasp. Each smaller portion of our bodily being is different from the rest, yet each has its part to play, each is helped by all and all go to make up the beauty and health and strength of the complete human being. We have our feet to stand on, our hands to hold with, our eyes to see and ears to hear. Each tiniest portion is built up, too, of little live compartments, little cells. And what is it that holds together this heap of cells that work together in such wonderful friendliness? What is it that binds together each muscle and artery and bone with a tighter hold than the mortar holds the stones in a building? What is it that gives oneness to each of us but that strange thing called a soul – our inmost source of life! Some cells have lowlier tasks than others. Some cover feet and hands; some make up our eyes through which we work the wonder of sight.

They are all unequal in task or position, yet each one is necessary for its own work. All work together in marvellous co-operation, and in return all share in the same life of the body, all are alive. ‘There are many members, indeed, yet one body.’ (1 Corinth 12: 20).

Point 2.
A HOLY TEMPLE.

A heap of stones, a house, a nation, a tree, a human body – from all these examples let us turn to the truth God teaches us. The stones by the wayside are but a heap, each one sharp and pointed, each one separate from those about it. Such is mankind without Christ, so many separate and lonely souls that share perhaps for a little while the companionship of family, the friendship of a few, or the support of fellow-countrymen, but for the most part are just so many individuals struggling one against the other – the Christless world in which man strives, un-befriended and alone against man. Once he becomes a Catholic, a man ceases to be alone. He becomes a stone in the building that is the Church. As Saint Paul tells the Ephesians: ‘You are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner stone: in whom all the building, being framed together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are built together into an habitation of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22).

A Catholic is no separate, lonely figure. He shares in the common effort of all his fellow-Catholics: shares, too, in the beauty and strength that come from such unity. Are we not all members of the Communion of Saints, of that wonderful union that exists between the members of the true Church on earth with each other, with the blessed in heaven, and with the holy souls in Purgatory?

But stones are cold, hard, lifeless things. Saint Peter seems dissatisfied with the comparisons, for Christ’s followers are ‘living stones’ – that go to build up a ‘spiritual house’. (1 Peter 2:5). Comparison with a nation or a state brings us further. United by common endeavour, under controlling authority, men form the state, the nation. From foreigners and strangers they become fellow-citizens. Saint Paul tells us: ‘You are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow-citizens with the saints. (Ephesians 2:19).

We belong to the city of God and in this city, we have special rights and duties above all, the duty to defend God’s commonwealth and work for the welfare of all its citizens. In return, we are helped by all the others. In every Mass, for instance, that is said in the whole wide world, each one of us is prayed for. At the beginning of the Canon, after the Sanctus bell, (the ‘Holy, Holy, Holy,’) the priest bows down in humble supplication asking God to receive the sacrifice he is offering – first of all for the Church, for its peace and protection, its unity and guidance; then for the Pope; then for the Bishop of the locality, and then for all the believers of the Catholic and Apostolic Faith.

Citizens in a state live what may be called a life in common. They share burdens and benefits. Yet this life in common is still something superficial, external. In a living thing, in a tree, life is something much more inward. Let us advance a step further with the tree example. You have

perhaps at times seen a skilful gardener working at a rose bush or a fruit tree. Watch, him cutting back one of the strong branches to near the main trunk. At the side of the branch's stump, he splits down the bark for a few inches, and into this crack, he slips a pointed cutting that fits smoothly and closely. Then he binds up again very tightly the split bark so that it encloses the inserted cutting. In a little while, the engrafted shoot begins to grow, drawing its life from the main sturdy stock and supported by it. Into Christ, we are engrafted spiritually by Baptism. 'You being a wild olive are engrafted . . . and are made partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive tree'. (Romans 11:17).

'*We have been planted in Christ*' (Romans 6:5). It is practically the same comparison as that developed by Our Divine Lord Himself: '*I am the vine . . . you are the branches.*' If we are truly to live, to live our Catholic life, we must be united to Christ, the source of that life. If we are to bear fruit, if we are to do lasting good for ourselves or for others, from Christ, and from Him alone, will we receive the necessary strength.

THE ELECTRIC BULB.

Let us recall the example of the electric bulb. Such a bulb has light, and gives light only when it is connected up with a source of power. We say that the electric current passes or flows through the connecting wires into the filament of the bulb and makes it glow. The bulb remains a bulb, and yet there is now something common to it and to the battery or dynamo or turbine. They both have electricity. The same electricity that is in its fulness in the powerhouse is shared in a limited, but true, way by the bulb. The example is crude and commonplace, but it may help us to see our relationship to Our Divine Lord. He is the powerhouse. Our prayers, our works, our sufferings, – above all, the Sacraments – are the wires through which the current of grace flows into our souls from His soul. His soul has the fulness of grace; ours receive a share in this. Our souls remain human, individual souls, and yet the same grace that ennobles in its utterest fulness Our Divine Lord's soul ennobles, too, our souls once they are free from sin. But this comparison covers so little of the reality – for grace is a life, and, as it flows into our souls, that life is ever widening and deepening and intensifying, ever growing more wonderful. Separated from Christ and from His grace, our lives are futile, wasted failures.

One last comparison remains to us. It is the fullest, the most adequate, and yet it, too, falls short of the reality. In our human frames there is a multiplicity of different limbs, each made up of myriads of cells, which co-operate together, each in its own particular position, be it high or low, playing its part in the welfare of the complete body, and each living with the life of all. 'You are the body of Christ and members of member'. (1 Corinth 2:27) Saint Paul tells us. We are all baptized into this Body (1 Corinth 14:13). Members of Christ, we share in the merits and satisfaction of our Head. With Him, we die to sin. His sufferings are ours. His sufferings make up for all sins; they make up, too, for ours. Through Him, and with Him and in Him, we are enabled to give fitting glory to God. We are, as it were, cells in this Body – cells that must, each and all, play their part in harmony with others, striving ever for the welfare of the complete being.

Each smallest portion of our human frames must be healthy, if the whole body is to be healthy: so, too, the strong and deep Catholic life of each one of us helps on the welfare and strength of the whole Church. Our Holy Father the Pope has his part to play, but so has each one of us. Each one of us counts for the goodness of the complete unity. There is no one left out, no one who has not his own importance, no one who can leave his work to be done by others. Each one of us matters. We have each of us a work to do that will not be done unless we do it, a good to be achieved which will not be achieved unless we achieve it. And, if we do not do this good, we shall do harm, not merely to ourselves, but to others as well. 'No man lives to himself, and no man dies to himself.' The holiness of *each one* helps others, helps Christ's work in the world. By our faults, we hinder others: we hinder Christ's efforts for the salvation of mankind.

COMMUNION.

To keep this life healthy and strong, to make it deeper and fuller, to draw us closer to Himself and to one another, Our Divine Lord comes to us in Holy Communion. 'Communion' – the word means 'union with'. Our Lord seeks by Holy Communion to unite us all with Himself in the closest bonds of intimacy. He seeks to unite us all, too, among ourselves. It is the sacrament of unity. 'He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood, abides in Me and I in him. (John 6:57). 'Abides in Me' – not just because Our Lord is present to us and in us by His human nature, but much more because through His humanity He draws us into a fuller and deeper oneness with Himself, so that now the life that is in Him is flowing, too, through our souls. 'As the living Father has sent Me and I live by the Father, so he that eats Me the same also shall live by Me'. Father and Son and Holy Spirit all live by the one life – three Persons, yet the one life. In a wonderfully similar way, through the Blessed Sacrament, we are all drawn, in spite of our many differences of temperament and personality, into the same current of Divine Life, we are assimilated to Christ. See, then, the greatness of a Catholic. In a mysterious, but very true, way he is the completion, the complement, the filling-up of the human Christ that was born and suffered and died and rose again for us. He is, as it were, a cell of the mystical Christ that has the human Christ for its Head.

THE MYSTICAL BODY.

So, then, just as Christ during His thirty-three years on earth taught with His Sacred lips and with His Sacred hands brought cleansing to the leper, to the fevered refreshing coolness, and to the dead life, as out in the desert He lifted up His soul in prayer all night long abiding in the intense love of His Heavenly Father, as, when the time came, He bore on those Sacred shoulders the heavy weight of the Cross and of our many sins, and stretched out for us His hands to the cruel nails, as He hung on high, lifted between heaven and earth, the Victim for all men; so, too, as century follows century, as the sand in the hour-glass of time slowly and ceaselessly trickles on, Christ no longer visibly in our midst in His Human nature is yet still amongst us in His Church, in us who go to make up His Church. Through this His Body that is His Church, His Sacred Message still comes: the Church speaks, it is Christ that speaks: 'He that hears you, hears Me.' Through darkened hospital wards nuns and nurses are moving noiselessly, bringing health and

healing and peace; it is Christ still passing up and down the long lines of the sick. In the confessionals of the world, to souls dead in sin, the life-giving words are still being uttered:

‘I absolve you; go in peace, and sin no more.’ It is Christ the merciful still forgiving. And Christ is still in the desert, fasting forty days. He is still on the hilltop by night praying, but now in His Carthusians and His Carmelites, His Trappists and His Poor Clares. As dawn comes, tinting the hilltops, spilling over a golden cascade of light into the valleys, already the sound of little bells is breaking the morning stillness and Christ is once more offering the Sacrifice of Calvary. ‘The same Christ Who once offered Himself a bleeding Victim on the Cross continues to this moment, as He will continue to the end of time, to offer Himself by the hands of His priests on our altars.’ Richly robed figures move along the altar rails, and, as they move, the waves roll up, along and back most endlessly; and still Christ of the Supper room is speaking, ‘Take ye and eat; this is My Body.’ Christ, working in the Mass, in the Confessional, in all the Sacraments, and teaching and prayer and work and suffering of the Church, is still among us. He is still among us, and, in a wonderful way that is yet utterly mysterious, we are in Him.

It was His prayer after the Last Supper: ‘Holy Father, keep them . . . that they may be one, as we also are . . . that they all may be one as You Father in Me and I in You; that they may also be one in Us.’

‘I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one.’

Again and again does the thought recur with an insistence that shows Our Lord’s longing for the unity; that shows, too, its utter necessity and its extraordinary reality; and this long prayer He ends with the words, that sum it all up, ‘I in them’.

Point 3.

SOME CONSEQUENCES.

Then, ‘Let us rejoice and give thanks.’ Not only are we become Christians, but we are become Christ. ‘My brethren, do you realise the grace of God that is given us? Wonder, rejoice: we are made Christ. If He be the Head and we the members, then together He and we are the whole man.’ These great words are from the lips of Saint Augustine (*On John’s Gospel, Homilies, 21, number 8*). Let us dwell often and prayerfully on this thought; it will bring a great holiness into our lives and a great power for good. I am Christ’s – no sin must find a place in my life; I am Christ’s – no ordinary service will do. Once more “*Noblesse Oblige*”. ‘We are obliged by the greatness and nobility of our calling’.

‘Remember,’ says Saint Leo, ‘of what a Head and what a Body you are a member.’

The whole flowering of the Christian life springs from this truth, and from it, each of us can take what he needs. In his letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul develops this truth in great detail; but, when he comes to draw lessons from it, they are of the simplest – avoid lying, anger, stealing,

evil speech, blasphemy, for, he adds, 'we are members one of another'. Let us just note a few things about certain matters that result very immediately from this truth.

LOYALTY.

First of all, as we have seen, the welfare of a human body is dependent on the co-operation of all its members and of all the tiny cells in those members; each must play its part in the wellbeing of the complete body. So, too, in the Church there is needed co-operation and loyalty. We Catholics, members of Christ, must be loyal to Christ, and, therefore, must be loyal to His Body, which is the Church. And this loyalty is not to some imaginary, distant Church, but to the Church of today, loyalty to our Faith, loyalty to one another, to our priests, and Bishops and to the Pope. And let us be quite realistic. The Church as it exists in this world has always had and always will have its defects. We are members of the Church – you and I and similar lay-folk and priests all over the world – and, alas, we have our faults: we mar its beauty; and yet the Church, too, is Christ. Even in His least brethren, He tells us, we are to find Himself. At times, on account of some unkindness or sharpness or scandal, frail souls are shocked into revolt and leave the Church. At times, it is for something trivial. What a tragedy! To Whom as Catholics have we pledged ourselves? – First, and foremost, to Christ, and Christ is flawless sanctity, Christ is never harsh or impatient.

He Himself warned us not to imagine that here on earth His Church would contain only saints. They will be ever in evidence, but there will be others as well. He compares His Church to a net full of fish – some good, others bad; to a field sown with wheat (corn) in which cockle is over-sown; to ten bridesmaids, of whom five are foolish. It is only after this life that the final separation of good fish from bad, of wheat from cockle, of wise from foolish virgins takes place. The Church here on earth will always contain a certain number who are unworthy of the name of Christians and Catholics – is that any reason for deserting Christ and doing oneself the greatest injury that could be done: spiritual suicide? It is necessary, said Christ, that scandals come – but woe to that man by which the scandal comes.

Yes, indeed, woe to such a man, but woe, too, to the soul who through such a scandal loses the Faith. At times, we shall come across things that should not be. To discuss such matters over the tea table or at a game of cards is the way of traitors who spread only discontent and unhappiness. No man worthy of the name sneers at his own mother – do we not call the Church 'Our Holy Mother?'

'No man hates his own body, but cherishes it.' We are the Body of Christ; we must cherish it, and, if disease shows itself, seek a remedy, not in idle gossip, but by fervent prayer and greater holiness strive to make up for such shortcomings. We are members of Christ; He demands loyalty from His members; He expects them to work and fight in the defence of the Church. An easy cynicism is unworthy of a Catholic.

OBEDIENCE.

Then, too, the members of the human body must carry out promptly the messages that come from the head. A car-driver or an airman takes in a situation in a flash. With his eyes, he sees impending danger, and swiftly a message is sent to hands and feet to manage the controls. Prompt and perfect obedience to such messages is absolutely necessary if he is to save himself from destruction. So, too, in the Mystical Christ. The messages from Christ the Head to us His members must be instantly followed – messages directly from Christ Himself, or from those who stand in His place, messages from Pope or Bishop. At times, such directions may seem to us unnecessary or irksome.

Ours not to reason why. Once the command comes, Christ's members must respond promptly and perfectly. To follow directions only when what is commanded appeals to us personally, to hesitate and criticise when something is proposed that runs counter to our views, with our very limited knowledge to cavil at what those who can take the larger and sounder view have seen fit to impose, such conduct is not loyalty. Christ had hard things to say about those who would not hear the Church, for to disobey the Church is to disobey Christ. – 'He that hears you,' said Christ to His Apostles and their successors, 'hears Me; and he that despises you despises Me'.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN.

To be loyal to Christ is then our plain duty. But to be loyal, obedient, submissive, will mean at times that we will be called on to suffer. What then of suffering? It is one of the facts of life. Suffering will find its way sooner or later in the lives of all of us – suffering in the form of mental anguish, or poverty, or physical pain. How are we to grapple with it? Well, first, we are not wrong in following the God-given instinct to avoid or lessen suffering in our own lives or in the lives of others. Still, a time will come when all the remedies will be in vain, suffering must be faced. – What then? Discontent or fierce revolt will not help matters; rather will they increase the torture beyond all imagining. Some other way out must be found, and that other way begins with resignation. This strange thing that is suffering can, indeed, drag a man's soul down to blackest despair, but only if that man allows it to do so. The man who goes unbroken through great suffering emerges grey-haired perhaps and aged, but yet more of a man, mellowed, ennobled. 'It is the lesson of the ages that no man ever reaches his full stature as a man without having suffered.' (Frank Sheed). The strength and sweetness that come from great suffering are proof that it is not something utterly evil. It opens windows in the soul and lets in great light.

All this is true enough, but, face to face with actual pain, it is all of little help. There are more helpful thoughts. We are sinners – suffering comes, and suffering is a chance to make up. We have abused in the past the pleasant things of the world. Behold now we receive with patience and resignation the painful things. We offer them to repair, to atone, for our sins; to repair, too, for the sins of the world.

Do we not every First Friday recite our Act of Reparation, and, therein having recalled some of Our Divine Lord's sufferings, declare: '*All this we know, O dear Redeemer, and would most*

willingly redress these Your sufferings by our own or share with You in Yours.’ We would most willingly redress, lessen, make up for His sufferings by our own sufferings, or share with Him in His sufferings – what if at times He takes us at our word? Will we forget that we have pledged ourselves to this?

HE SUFFERED.

But it is above all in Christ crucified that we Catholics find the answer to suffering, that we find the secret that sweetens the bitterest pain. He tasted the depths of human woe, and seeing Him, our Brother and Our Friend, going before us carrying His Cross, will we not be drawn to follow Him? Christ is thorn-crowned; we His members must share in His sufferings. ‘The Man of sorrows,’ Isaiah called Him in prophecy, ‘surely He has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows’. (Isaiah chapter 53).

‘In all things made like unto us save in sin.’

‘He was made obedient even unto death, even unto the death of the Cross.’

Already have we contemplated the tiny mite in swaddling clothes lying in the manger, homeless in winter. Quite freely for our sakes did He choose this utter poverty and suffering. ‘He leaves all His glory behind to be born and to die for mankind.’ In Nazareth He toils long, monotonous years till His Sacred Hands grow hard and rough from holding plane and hammer and chisel, and the sweat stands out on His brow, and He can cry: ‘All you that labour and are heavily-burdened, come to Me and learn of Me.’

Then the three years of ceaseless work and hardship. He has now no home. He is often hungry, often cold, almost always lonely. The people press round Him unsparingly, begging for favours and for help and instruction. At Capharnaum, there are so many coming and going that He has not time to take food. He has scarcely entered Peter’s boat when He falls asleep, wearied out with His toil. On another occasion, after a day of teaching and miracles, He slips away before it is morning to pray; and even then, He is sought out. And ever there is the hardship of the growing circle of enemies, and the slowness, the lack of understanding, of those closest to Him. Yet, amid these troubles and trials, Christ longs for even more: ‘*I have a Baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*’

Yes, indeed, Christ sought out the hard way: He chose suffering, not for itself, but to help us. ‘If there had been anything better and more helpful to man’s salvation than suffering, Christ would certainly have shown it by word and example.’

But His example and His words speak compellingly: ‘If any will come after Me, let him deny himself: take up his cross and follow Me.’ It is the brief rule of life for all His followers, for all true Catholics. We seek to follow Christ, to live as Christians, to know Christ, to live Him, to follow Him – the way is clear: self-denial, the carrying of the cross, and a great closeness to Him.

This then is the special worth of suffering: it makes us more like Christ. He chose it; we do not seek to be better off than He was. The Head is thorn-crowned, blinding tears of pain are mingling

with the trickling blood – the anguish of the Head is fittingly the anguish of the members also. ‘With Christ,’ cries Saint Paul, ‘I am nailed to the Cross, and I live now not I, but Christ lives in me.’

It was by His Cross that Christ saved the world; it is through the Cross, too, that we shall become other Christs, suffering again today, and so carrying on in our own selves the great work of Calvary, the work of saving souls, of repairing for sin, the great work of ‘filling up,’ as Saint Paul puts it, ‘those things that are wanting to the sufferings of Christ for His body which is the Church.’ (Colossians 1:24).

Let us then join our sufferings to the sufferings of Christ, let us make them our share in the Passion, let us be glad of this opportunity of showing that we are not just fair-weather friends, but that we are in truth ready to follow Christ whithersoever He goes, even up the slopes of Calvary. It is only a few years since the Catholics of another land had to realise the fulness of meaning of these words as the fierce tempest of persecution burst over them. [The reference, no doubt, is to China, the Soviet Union, Mexico Spain, Korea and Vietnam.] May we be protected from such things in Ireland; but should they come our way, please God we will live up to our calling as Catholics – members of Christ Crucified.

(Thanks to the Irish Messenger.)
