WHY WE COME TO HOLY MASS

Bp. Michał Stobnicki

Dear faithful, today's Gospel describes two men who come to the temple in order to pray. We have probably heard this Gospel many times already. Many times we have heard this parable of the Pharisee and the publican. But surely, time and again, many a Catholic discovers the secret prayer of his own heart: „God, I thank You that I am so splendid. God, I thank You that I am so wise and pious." And once again the Lord Jesus wishes to tear us out today from this state of self-satisfaction. He wishes us to stop deceiving ourselves about our own righteousness, our humility, so that we may see what we are really like.

Unfortunately, it must be said with regret that many, very many Catholics resemble stones lying on the bed of a river. And although for 2,000 years we have been washed over, smoothed by the water of the Catholic faith, it so often turns out that inside we are untouched by that water. We keep up a certain appearance, but our interior is still not Catholic.

My dear ones, let today's parable be an encouragement for us to ask ourselves a very important, fundamental question: why do I come to church? Why do I come to Holy Mass? This, my dear ones, is a question that every Catholic should ask himself, because the answer to this question will show what we are really like.

For today we see a self-assured Pharisee who stands before the altar. Already by his outward posture he reveals his disrespectful attitude toward the Lord God. He has come to the temple today not in order to give worship to the Lord God, but in order to give worship to himself.

Unfortunately, a whole mass of Catholics resemble this Pharisee. They come to Mass not in order to give worship to God, one in the Holy Trinity, and such is the purpose of Holy Mass — the giving of worship to God. A sacrifice of praise, a sacrifice of atonement for our sins, of thanksgiving for the graces received, of petition for those graces that we need. Such is the purpose of Holy Mass. The Mass is not for man. The Mass is an act of worship, an act of adoration of the Lord God. But which Catholic today has this before his eyes? Which Catholic today understands this? Which Catholic goes to Holy Mass precisely in order to give worship to the Lord God?

For unfortunately, my dear ones, many traditionalists too resemble this Pharisee, who comes to church in order to glorify himself. A whole mass of Catholics take part in Holy Mass for two completely mistaken reasons. First, in order to win recognition in the eyes of other people, because one goes to church. It is worth showing oneself, showing off a new coat, a new outfit. After Mass one can meet acquaintances, have a bit of a gossip. The second mistaken, completely mistaken reason is that I go to Holy Mass so that I may feel good, so that I may have a kind of religious experience, so that I may have butterflies in my stomach. This, my dear ones, is not the reason for which a Catholic comes to Holy Mass.

A Catholic goes to church in order to give worship to the Lord God, because he understands that he has this obligation. To keep holy the holy day. This holy day, Sunday, is the day — one of seven — on which we have the obligation to give worship to the Lord God. Not in just any way, not in any slapdash way, but in the way that the Lord God Himself indicates. And this, my dear ones, we must keep before our eyes. We must continually remind ourselves of this. I do not go to Holy Mass so that I may be made to feel good, so that I may feel myself a good, pious man. I do not go to Holy Mass so that others may think well of me, that I am a pious, good man. I do not go to Holy Mass so that, as soon as it is over, I may gossip. I go to Holy Mass to give worship to the Lord God, to take part in His most holy sacrifice.

THE PUBLICAN

That is why, my dear ones, we must today look to the example given us by the publican, who is the complete opposite of the Pharisee. He stands afar off, in the vestibule [?] of the temple, does not even dare to lift his eyes to heaven, does not look around him, does not come in order to compare himself with oth-

ers, does not come for human recognition, but comes in order to beat his breast and ask the Lord God for forgiveness: „God, be merciful to me, a sinner." A beautiful ejaculatory prayer, which it is worth our repeating every day. „God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

And we see, my dear ones, in what way the Lord Jesus points out to us very clearly whom we are to imitate. It is the publican who goes away justified. It is the publican who obtains the forgiveness of sins. It is the publican who is a truly pious man. Because the publican comes in order to give worship to the Lord God. Not for himself, not for another man, but for God.

And now each one of us, every Catholic, every Catholic who attends the Tridentine Mass, should ask himself this question: why do I go to Holy Mass? Do I do it for God, or for man? Is it an act of adoration of the Lord God, or an act of adoration of man?

HUMILITY AND HONOURS

Dear faithful, God resists the proud. The Lord God wishes us to be humble people. And the first step, the foundation of the virtue of humility, is the giving of worship to the Lord God. The acknowledgement of our dependence on our Creator and Saviour. The acknowledgement that we need His grace, that without Him we can do nothing. This is the foundation of the spiritual life. And may we, my dear ones, we Catholics living in the twenty-first century, desire and be able to be humble people.

Unfortunately, the fact that so many people, clergy too, desire honour, distinctions, high positions — many a priest dreams whole nights through about the bishop's office and the mitre — all this shows that people who desire these honours and high positions should never attain them. So often it must be stated with regret that there have been, are, and probably always will be in the Church clergy who do not wear the purple, but rather the purple wears them.

Humble souls are always aware of their frailty, their imperfection, their dependence on the Lord God and His grace. They are able to beat their breast, they are able to apologise for their faults, and they do not compare themselves with other people. A humble man, even if in the eyes of this world he is great, does not parade his merits. A humble man is a man who gives everything to the Lord God, because he is aware that what he has, the talents he has, he received from God, from the Creator. Truly great people are courteous, kind, approachable, understanding. It is small people who must turn up their noses and pretend to greatness. A wise man does not need to seem wise. A pious man does not need to seem pious.

And let us answer honestly today the question: why do I get up in the morning, devote a shorter or longer time to travel to Holy Mass? Do I do it for God, or for myself, for another man? What is the sense, what is the purpose of my standing here at the foot of Calvary, of my wishing to gaze upon the Lord Jesus nailed to the Cross?

As long as we live, we can still, all the time, straighten the paths of our life. And surely in the life of many a Catholic it will be necessary to straighten this path, to understand what Holy Mass is for me, why I take part in it. May we, my dear ones, imitate the example of the publican and take part in Holy Mass always with humility, with zeal, with attention.

THE OUTWARD POSTURE MATTERS

It is repeated in the post-conciliar anti-church that outward posture does not matter. It does not matter how you receive Holy Communion. One can do it this way or that way, and the big stars of the Novus Ordo, supposedly conservative, like Cardinal Burke, have no problem with giving Communion even in the hand to people who are standing. Behind all this stands that stupid, senseless explanation that outward posture does not matter, that what is most important is what is in the heart.

But the Lord Jesus in today's Gospel shows us something to the contrary. The Lord Jesus in today's Gospel shows us that what we have in our heart should find its reflection outwardly. If you tell your wife, your fiancée, that you love her, and yet you spit in her face, you shove her, then where is this love of yours? What we have in our heart must find its reflection outwardly, in our posture.

That is why you are here, because you understand

this — you should understand it. You wish to give worship to the Lord God and you wish to do it in a worthy way, in a way pleasing to the Lord God, in the way the Lord God wants, you approach Holy Communion, you kneel, expressing through this outward posture that you truly believe that Jesus Christ is present under the appearance of a host, a piece of bread. This is truly God, before whom the unreasoning animals knelt in the stable at Bethlehem. How can a man who has even a little sense say that outward posture, gestures, do not matter to the Lord God? Compare for yourself the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee, puffed up, self-assured, stands and recites to the Lord God his merits. And the publican, humble, bowed down, beats his breast.

The Holy Mass — if we come to Holy Mass in order to give worship to the Lord God, it will teach us humility. It will form humility in us, it will form in us respect toward the Lord God. But if a whole mass of Novus Ordo anti-Catholics come to Mass for human reasons, if a whole mass of so-called traditionalists come to Holy Mass for human reasons, they will never become humble people. They will forever turn up their noses and will be a great anti-advertisement for the Catholic Church. It is the pseudo-pious priests and the pseudo-pious faithful who become the greatest anti-witness for the Church. They pass themselves off as Catholics, but they are simply Pharisees.

May we, my dear ones, imitate the example of the publican, may we come to Holy Mass in a spirit of humility, desiring to give worship to the Lord God. And the Lord God forms a humble soul, a truly humble soul. Not the one who says of himself that he is humble, but the one who is truly humble. May we be such humble souls.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. For ever and ever. Amen.