

Source and Summit of Life: Making the Mass Meaningful
Galtier Society, 10/26/05

I didn't quite know how to begin this evening so here goes, a story:

A Father and his son were making their way from Jericho to Jerusalem for the high holy days. They began their journey with the father walking alongside his donkey and son on top. They soon met along the way another group of travelers, all who berated the father for letting his son ride when he was the older and more dignified of the two. And so after he took his leave from the "group of elders" he took his son off and rode the donkey himself. He was going but a few hundred paces when another group passed by and berated the father for mistreating his son. Why should the boy walk, he was told, this is child neglect. The father was once again undone by the criticism and when the group left he picked up his son and they began to ride the donkey together. A third time the father, his son and their donkey encounter a group of travelers who this time berated the father for abusing the donkey who was obviously, they said, straining under the weight of them both. The group reminded the father that donkey's have feelings too and that he could be reported for such inhumane treatment. Finally, the Father turned to his son and order him to carry the donkey with him. And so they began again carrying the donkey this time, the son in front and the father behind. Though the donkey was heavy things seemed to be going well until, that is, they came to a rope bridge. As soon as they began to cross, the bridge began to swing from side to side and whoops, over the bridge the donkey fell. There is a moral to this story you know and it is this: those live by the criticisms of others are likely to loose their ass.

As I mentioned I didn't know how to begin but with the story having been told and the moral given, I know how to proceed: if we are not going to live by the criticisms of others by what are we going to live? The question gives us the opportunity to pause this evening and consider the story we are living by for we all live by a story, known to us or not, a story of criticisms or complements, a story written by others or fashioned by our own hand, and it is from these stories that we draw the meaning and the values with which we live our lives. The narratives go by different names but among the most prominent narratives that compete to inform the meaning of our lives are Pleasure and Freedom. Pleasure is to be sought and individual freedom defended so the story goes – and so we live our lives seeking pleasure and avoiding whatever will demand, limit or cost us our freedom. And here I have a confession to make: I don't like pain and I want

to avoid being captive to the whims of another. But what if pleasure sometimes results in pain and what if absolute freedom is its own kind of bondage? This might seem a lot like a theme I addressed at our inaugural event a year ago in St. Paul. Some of you might remember – after you fought for a parking space and before you could find out that the BoSox might prevail after all - the question we asked then was this: What do we owe Fr. Lucien Galtier – how do we live our faith without regret nor without friends.

It is the conviction of the Galtier Society that deepening our Catholic Faith is essential to our lives, professional and personal, and that it will and in fact is meant to benefit our family members and friends. And so our Christian faith is meant to be a story, a narrative that lends meaning to our lives – orienting our pursuit of pleasure and ennobling the defense of our freedom. But often faith seems difficult and one place that at times faith can seem impossible is on Sunday when I go to Mass. The music is bad and the homily is worse and the kids are going crazy – why is this so boring, and by the way hurry up the lake is calling, the game is about to begin. And to think that these are only my thoughts – I’m kidding, I’m kidding. But kidding I am not about this: In the story of our Catholic Faith the Mass is meant to be the Source and the Summit of our life. But what does that mean – and when the music is bad and the homily worse, how can I make the Mass meaningful?

To answer this question let me return again to our namesake: Fr. Lucien Galtier. Remember he came to us in Minnesota almost one hundred and sixty years ago from a lovely part of France to found the first parish. He left the elegant culture of his day full of classical music, theatre and good red wine for the untamed outposts of Minnesota, the buzz of the mosquito, the struggle for

survival and the sour taste of mash or a pungent beer. Was this an increase of pleasure?, was this a good return for his freedom?

There is, of course, only one reason, one narrative that adequately answers why Fr. Galtier came to Minnesota and it was to bring us the Eucharist – the sacrament of God’s love made flesh in Christ. Shortly after his arrival Galtier constructed a simple altar upon which he might offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for his people. In 1840 his parish consisted of eleven families, a few soldiers and scruffy trappers, as well as several families in St. Croix Lake whom Galtier visited periodically, but that was all ... but for Galtier that was enough. For Galtier had allowed the Eucharist to become the center and weight of his life and his earnest desire was that it might become so for others. Leaving France and bearing the hardships of one of the newest territories of the New World were small sacrifices before a gift so great.

And so it has been for two thousand years. Galtier came to us, because centuries before, others had gone to France. The Irish once ruled the world you know and they brought with them the ancient faith and Mass to Gaul. They did so formed and transformed by the gift of divine love – a love of which Paul speaks of when he wrote to the Corinthians:

1 Cor 11: ²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

²⁴and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

²⁵In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

The Irish and the French, the German and the Pole, the Nigerian, the Mexican, the Korean, men and women of every age, of every place and time, who find in the story of divine love enfleshed in Christ the story of their life: This is My body, which is for you ... This is the new covenant in My blood ... as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. And in proclaiming the Lord's death we make present his life and the gift of his love.

Take for example, Margaret Clitherow, a wife and mother in York who was condemned in 1568 to the *peine forte et dure*, i.e. to be pressed to death. Her crime was that she harboured priests in an England which had declared that act a capital crime. But Margaret believed in the centrality of the Mass and of the gift that it was to her family and to the Crown. And so it is said that when she was asked – to consider her three children and to spare her own life - to swear on the bible not to hide priests any more, she asked for the bible and pledged for the sake of her children and the good of the Crown that she **would** hide the next Catholic priest who came to the door. For her Eucharistic confession of faith Margaret Clitherow was laid on the ground, a sharp stone beneath her back, her hands stretched out in the form of a cross and bound to two posts. Then a door was placed upon her, which was weighted down till she was crushed to death. Her last words during an agony of fifteen minutes, were “Jesu! Jesu! Jesu!” Margaret Clitherow, a wife of a butcher and mother of 3, was 30 years old.

Or consider the example of Anacleto Gonzalez Flores, a fiery young attorney from Tepatilan, in Jalisco, Mexico. Gonzalez Flores cultivated a deep interior life as a daily communicant in the 1920s during which Mexico was becoming increasingly hostile to religious claims. At first the resistance of Gonzalez Flores to the persecution unleashed by the government was legal and

oratorical. By 1924, however, things had taken a turn for the worse and Gonzales reluctantly set about resisting the totalitarian claims of the government. He wrote: "We are not worried about defending our material interests, because these come and go; but our spiritual interests, these we will defend because they are necessary to obtain our salvation." Gonzales Flores was captured and tortured and shot to death with three others on the First Friday of April in 1927.

When the body of Anacleto Gonzalez Flores, 38, was recovered by his family, hundreds of friends, relatives, and admirers passed by his home, to pay their final respects. Anacleto's young widow brought their sons into the room where their father's body lay. "Look," she said to her eldest child: "This is your father. He has died defending the faith. Promise me on his body that you will do the same when you are older if God asks it of you."

Margaret and Anacleto may seem like heroic persons – actors in a drama that could never be our own. And yet Margaret and Anacleto and so many other heroic men and women are our brothers and sisters who simply began by making the Mass their own. The dates and circumstances change but the plot does not: How will we remember our Lord?

With the time that remains I want to begin to answer this question and offer a few suggestions about how to proceed. For the Mass is meant to be the source and summit of our life and it is left to us – as it was to Galtier, Clitherow, and Gonzales Flores – to make of the Mass the meaning of our lives.

The Mass is the Source and Summit of Life because it is the incarnate gift of God's own life in love. The Mass is the memorial of the most complete revelation of the love of God for us in the

crucified and resurrected Christ. And so the Mass is a sacrifice because Christ lays down his life for us. And the Mass is also a Meal because Christ gives to us his very life. Think of it this way – when you love some one you want to be in their presence, you want to share their life. And when we can not be near those we love because of distance or death we seek solace in their memory or a momentos. God understood this longing of ours to be with those we love. In fact, God gave us this longing. And, as an answer to our longing, God has given himself under what appears to be bread and appears to be wine – so that we might always remember we are in his presence and indeed created to share communion with him.

The Mass is thus offered in praise and thanksgiving to God in acknowledgement of what God has done. The focus is thus not first on ourselves and that is why the Mass does not aim to entertain. That's not to say the music and the homily are not important, they are. It is, however, to emphasize that we may not be moved in an affective sense. Its also why we maintain at times a respectful silence and at other times sing and respond, its why we sit and stand and kneel. Its why when presented with the Body and Blood of Christ we respond Amen: I believe. But its also why we reserve the consecrated host: because God is Immanuel – he remains with us in the Tabernacle so that we might remember God has made his dwelling among us and that he desires to dwell in our families and friendships and to bless the work of our hands. We have therefore more than memories and momentos // we have in and thanks to the Mass His real and abiding presence. In short, God remains with us in the Eucharist so that we would remain with him.

Consequently, everything I do from the first moment of my day to the last is meant to flow in and out of the Mass. Certainly on Sunday – but even each day in between – I am invited to

present my family and my friends, my work and my leisure, to unite my every endeavor to God. Through, with and in God my littleness and my selfishness can be, much like the bread and wine, transformed so that I might share ever new the gift I have received. This is what we recall at mass in the Liturgy of the Word and it is what is realized in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is also what we look forward to in faith – the promise of an everlasting communion of all the living with God when death yields at last to love and gives life.

If this is what the Mass is – in a sense the Mass is already meaningful no matter how we feel when we are present. But it makes all the difference how we are present and whether we give or take. And so finally let me provide some practical ideas about how to make the Mass meaningful:

>FIRST: Make an Intention: what is the reason you come for? This will aid the investment of your heart which is the principle way you participate in the Mass. We always get more out of the things we give our selves to...so give your self. The Collection at Mass is but a reflection of the gift of self that all are called to make *usque ad mortem* – unto death.

- Married: A mini-retreat at the Mass: this is my body, this is my blood.
- Single: Only say the word and I will be healed – healed of my doubt about finding my future, etc.

> SECOND: Take time to adore the Lord: Holy, Holy, Holy – Our Eastern brothers and sisters refer to the mass as a divine liturgy in which heaven comes to earth. Have the mindset you are going to God. Holy Water. Dress up. Participate: Responses/singing. Pray. One moment which I would recommend to you is the elevation just after the consecration: my Lord and my God. Or Lord I believe in you, help my unbelief. Don't worry about how your feel.

> THIRD: make an act of Thanksgiving and Resolution: Take a moment to say thanks when you return from communion and before you leave. We consider it bad form to take leave of our hosts before a word of gratitude – even more with God.

>FOURTH: Take a booklet: Mass Appeal. We can only know what we love. Often, unfortunately, the study of our faith ends at confirmation. Take and read and you will live because you will have increased your knowledge and your love.

Here are but a few things that we can do to make the Mass the Source and Summit of our lives. And if we do only that, we will have made the Mass meaningful.