

## **The Four Ends of the Mass**

To understand the four ends of the Mass, which are acts of the virtue of religion, we must understand that the unchangeable relationship between God and Man demands the virtue of religion and its four principal acts: Adoration, Thanksgiving, Petition, and Propitiation.

Man has a relationship of real and absolute dependence on God, and man, who is called to eternal life, has offended God by sin.

Knowledge of God and a correct understanding of ourselves as rational, sinful creatures are the foundation for the virtue of religion and lead us to live in a spirit of a most submissive adoration.

The highest wisdom and science of the saints, after which we should incessantly strive, is to know God and ourselves. With St. Augustine, we must constantly pray to know God and ourselves better, which will lead us to profound acts of religion.

### **Can you explain this relationship more fully?**

Man's relationship to God is two-fold:

- 1) Natural dependence on God leads to natural religion: God is the creator of all things, and man is a creature who depends essentially and absolutely on God for everything. As St. Paul said to the Athenians: "In Him we live, we move, and we have our being." Christ taught clearly, "Without Him, we can do nothing." This truth of natural dependence was already demonstrated in the apologetic series. We cannot escape this real relationship of absolute dependence upon God.
- 2) There is also an absolute dependence on God for supernatural goods. We know by revelation that we have been called to a supernatural end, have forfeited this end by sin, and have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, God, is the redeemer, and we are redeemed. "God so loved the world, that he gave up his only-begotten Son, so that those who believe in him may not perish, but have eternal life. When God sent his Son into the world, it was not to reject the world but so

that the world might find salvation through him.”<sup>1</sup> We can only please God to the extent that we accept redemption as offered in the Church Christ founded and by God’s grace to reflect Christ's internal life of adoration. This relationship of redeemed to redeemer is expressed in the psalmist's words: **“A humble and contrite heart God will not despise.”**<sup>2</sup>

The virtue of religion flows from this twofold relationship of humble dependence.

### **So, is Humility necessary?**

Humility is a foundational virtue that flows directly from this awareness of our dependence. It leads to the virtue of religion and the four acts of religion.

The objective foundation of the virtue of religion is our dependence. Still, the subjective foundation is the virtue of humility that we have as a consequence of our awareness of our absolute dependence.

As redeemed creatures, man must be humble for two reasons. 1) Creatures who absolutely depend on God, 2) We are sinful creatures who have offended this good God. These two realities lead to acts of Adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation.

### **Before speaking about these acts, can we review the virtue of Religion?**

To start with the etymology, “religion” comes principally from “Religare,” which means to bind to God.<sup>3</sup>

According to Fr. Nicholas Ghir in his authoritative book, *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*: “the concept of being bound or linked to God is the principal foundation of the concept of religion.”

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<sup>1</sup> JN 3:16,17

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 33 v19

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Ghir

Through the virtue of religion, we seek to be united to God, who is our first principle and last end. As we know, we are bound to God by our dependence on him, so by religion, we align our free acts with objective dependence.

By the virtue of religion, rational creatures who are fallen and wounded do acts by which they are united to their highest good and ultimate End. We can only be bound to God by performing acts of adoration, Thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation.

### **Can you explain the distinction between natural and supernatural religion?**

Following the distinction mentioned above, the virtue of religion can be categorized into naturally acquired and supernaturally infused virtues.

The natural virtue of religion is a virtue that can be acquired by all men without supernatural grace. This virtue stems from man's dependence on God and his awareness or understanding of this absolute dependence.

All creatures are equally dependent on God. However, man's unique awareness of this dependence enables him to acquire true virtue and perform acts of religion, which is the most elevated of all moral virtues. Even in a hypothetical state without revelation, man would still be duty-bound to perform acts of religion toward his creator. Our dependence and this awareness create obligations to practice religion.

Natural religion is not a perfect virtue since it does not merit us heaven. God has called us to practice supernatural religion for the sake of a supernatural end, heaven.

### **The supernaturally infused virtue of religion interests us here.**

Yes, when we speak of the supernatural virtue of religion, we speak of a moral virtue that follows Faith, Hope, and Charity. Since God created us for a supernatural end, we cannot honor God without accepting revelation and living the mystical life with the three Theological virtues.

Theological virtues are supernatural principles infused into the souls by God that allow acts of true religion. The more these three virtues influence our actions, the more perfectly we can practice religion.

“They give rise to the virtue of religion and excite us to glorify God through works piety, mercy, and penance.”<sup>4</sup>

“Religion is a special moral virtue that enables and inclines the will to give God the supreme honor and adoration due to Him as the creator, supreme ruler, and last end of all things, particularly of man....it is our duty, with the help of grace, to nourish this noble and precious gift of heaven so that it may bear abundant fruit for the honor and glory of God and our blessing and ultimate salvation. <sup>5</sup>

The virtue of religion of which we speak can only be infused by God and is in itself substantially supernatural.<sup>6</sup>

The Virtue of religion is less noble than [the Theological Virtues]: Faith, Hope, and Charity. Still, it holds first place among all moral virtues since it is connected to theological virtues. The virtue of religion has as its primary object those acts that refer directly and immediately to the honor due to God, that is, acts that pertain to divine service.<sup>7</sup>

There is a reciprocity between theological virtues and the moral virtue of religion. We cannot perform actual acts of supernatural religion without the Theological Virtues, but once we have Theological Virtues, the moral virtue of religion commands us to make acts of Faith, Hope, and charity.

By the virtue of religion, we honor the Lord insofar as we acknowledge and proclaim His greatness, majesty, and dominion over us and, at the same time, confess our littleness, lowliness, and dependence upon Him.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Billuart De religion dissert. 1 art. 2 (on St. Augustine)

<sup>5</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p 18

<sup>6</sup> Bouquillon, de virtute religionis 1.I p. I, C. N. 35

<sup>7</sup> S. Thomas II II q. 81 a 6

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p 18

St. Ignatius teaches us that all prayer must proceed from this attitude of adoration. We must pause before all formal prayer and elicit a profound reverence in front of God's majesty.

“The sublime virtue of religion ennobles man precisely in this, that it completely subjects him to [God's] will and dominion and brings him into the closest communication with the primal source of all Holiness.”<sup>9</sup>

This concept of being ennobled by submission is contrary to the inclination of fallen men. Our perfection consists of submission to a higher power. St. Thomas shows us how the perfection of the body consists in its submission to the soul and that man is made perfect by submission to God through his superiors. Everything man does is meant to become at least an indirect act of religion.

The lack of religious practice in the modern world is a consequence of man's spirit of independence, and the very casual attitude when religion is practiced is a sign of man's failure to understand God's transcendence.

We have lost our sense of dependence on God, our sinfulness, and God's transcendence and thus are very sloppy and lazy regarding our acts of religion.

**You said that the virtue of religion has as its primary object those acts that refer directly and immediately to the honor due to God, and you spoke of indirect religion. Can you explain?**

There are two classes of acts of religion:

- 1) Acts which by their nature are performed to manifest God's greatness and mercy while acknowledging our weakness and sinfulness. We perform such acts when we pray, offer sacrifices, and even adorn churches.
- 2) The second class is all other virtues done for God's glory. We think of St Paul's advice to the Corinthians: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the glory of God.” (I Cor. 10, 31)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p22

<sup>10</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p 21

In the first class, we speak of the acts directly and immediately ordained to the four ends of religion: adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation.

The Worship due to the Divine Majesty consists principally of acts of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation, and all four of these flow from the relationship of creature to creator and redeemed to the Redeemer.

### **Can we now consider these individually?**

Firstly, we must consider adoration. By Adoration, “Adoratio,” we understand that supreme and most perfect homage, not due to any mere creature, but only and solely to God on account of His infinite perfection, majesty, and sovereign authority.<sup>11</sup>

God alone is adorable as He alone is the All-Powerful source of all being.

When we say God alone is adorable, we include all three persons of the Holy Trinity, the Sacred Humanity on account of the Hypostatic Union, and, of course, the Holy Eucharist and each part of it since God is truly present in the Holy Eucharist.

We must highlight that Adoration, which is due to God alone, is an absolute obligation of every rational creature because of his dependence on God and His infinite power and majesty. Every rational creature has an absolute duty to adore God. By acts of adoration, we humble ourselves in front of God, acknowledging and admiring His power and Majesty.

Sacred Scripture tells us that the mere mention of Christ’s name will bring all souls in Heaven, and even hell, to their knees—this external manifestation of submission to Christ's power and dominion. As we pray in the preface, even the angels adore Christ and stand in awe of Him. There is no escaping this submission; by acts of adoration, we freely embrace it in this life and will find happiness in heaven.

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<sup>11</sup> S. Thomas III list 9, Q I a. 1 sol, 1

An act of adoration includes many aspects: We acknowledge His power and perfections, admire them, and praise them. Consequently, we submit ourselves to His Holy Will and consecrate all our actions to Him as the first principle of our being and our last end.

Our external acts of adoration—genuflection, for example, as Mass are meant to lead us to have an interior disposition of adoration—ever adoring God’s Will in all of its manifestations

We reach our absolute perfection in perfect submission to God. Thus, every act perfects us to the extent it is directed, at least indirectly to God.

**We see how adoration flows from our relationship of absolute dependence on God. What about the other's ends of the Mass?**

We will examine “two religious duties inseparably linked to adoration—namely, thanksgiving and petition.”<sup>12</sup>

**Thanksgiving.** It is a fundamental human virtue to be grateful for gifts given to us. We see how grace builds on nature. Our natural dependence on others leads us to a spirit of gratitude, and our absolute dependence on God should lead to supreme gratitude.

The first step in cultivating gratitude is recognizing the gift, but this step is often absent.

With St. Paul to the Corinthians: I Cor 4:7 “For who distinguisheth thee? Or what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

Once we recognize the gifts, we must express our gratitude to the giver through words and gestures. We all know that we must do this for gifts we receive from others. Likewise, we must express this gratitude with words of thanks to God, and this is one central element of the Liturgy.

Thirdly, after recognizing the gift and thanking the person for the gift with appropriate words, we must use the gift well. As all gifts come from God, the first principle of all existence, we must use all gifts for God's glory.

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<sup>12</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to thy name give glory.”<sup>13</sup> As seen in the apologetics series, God is not only the first efficient cause of all but the final cause. God does all for His glory, and we can only united to God by using all gifts for His glory. This, of course, demands that we follow the law of God written in our hearts and the law positively revealed by God.

Who in their right mind recognizes that they have received gifts from another and would refuse to thank someone for a gift or, even worse, insult the giver by throwing away the gift?

We think of the parables of Christ about using our talents well since they are only lent to us by God, who will come to judge us for how we use the gifts he has lent us.

All that we are and all that we possess have been freely given to us by God. Failure to thank Him for all He has given us would be a grave lack of gratitude. The spirit of gratitude must animate our lives and actions. If we recognize that God is God who has given us so many good things, then thanksgiving will always be united with adoration.

### **Petition. Why ask God for things when we already know everything?**

Throughout the inspired Word, in the Old and New Testaments, we are told to ask God, who promises to hear us.

Luke 11, 9-11: “And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you.... And which of you, if he asks for bread from his father, will he give him a stone? Or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?”<sup>14</sup>

Why does God want us to ask?

It is a consequence of our dependence on Him, and asking helps us grow in a spirit of dependence on God, which is the foundation of all prayer and all religion. The first sin was an act of independence, and we must constantly fight that tendency in ourselves.

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 113: 9

<sup>14</sup> Luke 11: 9-11

The real relationship of absolute dependence on God demands that we live in a state of humble dependence, and asking God for our natural and spiritual needs keeps us in this state of dependence.

By petitions, we recognize that despite all we have received, more is needed, and God alone, as the first cause, can give us what we need.

We need to be kept alive naturally, and we need grace to support us constantly. Actual grace must precede, accompany, and complete our good actions. Aware of our constant needs, we must not only join our petition to our adoration but live in this spirit of dependence. Petition keeps us humble, which means it keeps us in the truth.

Adoration, thanksgiving, and petition are owed to God since we are creatures essentially dependent upon Him.

The fourth end of religion is propitiation.

### **What is propitiation?**

**Propitiation**, the fourth end of the Mass, is not demanded by our natural dependence but because we are fallen creatures and have freely offended God's majesty. We must appease God's justice by appropriate propitiation. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, propitiation must be present for our religion to be pleasing to God.

As we have freely turned away from God and chosen some forbidden pleasure or satisfaction at the price of offending His goodness, we must perform acts that accept the pain involved in turning back to Him.

This propitiation shows our love for Him and our hatred for sin. We can measure our love for God by our hatred for sin. As St. John tells us, those two claim they love God but love sin are liars.

We must be willing to suffer in reparation for past sins, which brings us to an essential point taught very well by St. Augustine: "Our exterior sacrifice must represent our interior sacrifice" This is true for all acts of religion.

## Are the acts of religion primarily interior or exterior?

Our acts of religion must be, above all, interior, coming from our minds and hearts. If these acts do not flow from our minds and hearts, our exterior acts will be hypocritical, and Christ hates hypocrisy.

St. Thomas distinguishes two aspects of adoration in the following manner:

“As [Damascene](#) says (De Fide Orth. iv, 12), since we are composed of a twofold [nature](#), [intellectual](#) and sensible, we offer [God](#) a twofold adoration; namely, a [spiritual](#) adoration, consisting in the internal devotion of the [mind](#); and a bodily adoration, which consists in an exterior humbling of the body.

And since in all acts of latria, that which is without is referred to that which is within as being of greater import, it follows that exterior adoration is offered on account of interior adoration; in other words, we exhibit signs of [humility](#) in our bodies to incite our affections to submit to [God](#), since it is connatural to us to proceed from the sensible to the intelligible.<sup>15</sup>

If we have the internal virtue of religion, we spontaneously seek to pray, perform sacrifices, build beautiful churches, adorn the churched the best we can, and wear our best to Mass.

But, we acquire this internal virtue by performing external acts. It is easily understood that interior acts lead to exterior acts since man's internal life naturally overflows into his external acts. Likewise, external acts strengthen interior dispositions.

Our inner thoughts betray themselves exteriorly by exterior acts and are strengthened when we act on them.

We think of Psalm 15, 9: “My heart hath been glad and my tongue hath rejoiced.” Matt 12:34: “From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

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<sup>15</sup> Summa Theologica II-II, Q. 84 Art 2

It is a sacred duty to worship God through external acts because Man must adore God in a way that corresponds to his corporal and social nature. Man is composed of body and soul.

The chief external act, which is the center of the heart of the virtue of religion, is the act of Sacrifice.

By sacrifice, we understand the offering of a visible gift, which represents us and is destroyed to manifest God's absolute majesty and our absolute dependence and submission.

When we offer sacrifice, we also thank Him for all He has given us and ask Him for all we need. Ever since the Fall, we have been making reparation for our sins.

Since this gift is offered to God, it must be the most noble gift possible. When we think of giving a gift to someone, the person's dignity determines the value of the gift we give them.

These external sacrifices are meant to create an attitude of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation. God cares about the heart, and these acts of religion are needed to transform our souls into souls of religion.

God has always required man to offer the most perfect visible things that man possessed and, in a certain sense, upon which man depended— lambs, heifers, bread, wine, etc. You will see later how Christ offered and offers Himself upon the Altar of the cross and the Altar in the Catholic Church in perfect adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and propitiation.

“This fourfold duty [Adoration, Thanksgiving, Petition, Propitiation] is realized primarily through the Sacrifice of the Mass and must lead us to a spirit of reverential homage that should permeate our whole life to render it ever more pleasing to God.”<sup>16</sup>

If we live united to the Mass, we will realize the command of St Paul: “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the glory of God.” (I Cor. 10, 31) Adoration is the most perfect thing we can do, and all

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<sup>16</sup> The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: Ghir p. 26

acts are holy and perfect to the extent that they are done in a spirit of adoration.