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THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS
AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE MASS

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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

This week the Christian churches celebrate Good Friday. At first sight it may seem strange and paradoxical to call that day Good Friday because it is a day of such sad associations. Certainly it was a day of the triumph of evil. Jesus told those who came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane "This is your hour and the power of darkness", and nature itself bore testimony to the triumph of darkness by casting the world into shadow during the three hours that preceded Christ's death at Calvary. Yet that Friday was a Good Friday because the real Victor was not Satan but our Lord.

On the cross of Calvary Christ overthrew the powers of darkness; He triumphed over them! St. Paul says in Colossians 2, verses 14-15, that at Calvary Christ "blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it". We note that

the cross was a triumph and a victory, a victory through the obtaining of forgiveness for sins. St. Paul writes in the same passage that God has "forgiven us all our sins". Christ's triumph consisted in abolishing the accusation that Satan had been able to bring against us sinners at God's tribunal. The names 'Satan' and 'Devil' both mean 'accuser' and the evil one is pictured as bringing an accusation against us on the ground (and it is true) that we are sinners and rebels, in order that he might obtain our conviction, so that he might exercise his dominion over us eternally in hell. This Satan planned when he enticed into sin our first parents. But on the cross Christ obtained forgiveness for us by bearing our sins in His own body. Satan's claims against us at God's tribunal have now been completely nullified. This is God's supreme triumph, the supreme vindication of His sovereignty even over the powers of evil. For through the cross He has provided free forgiveness without encroaching on the claims of justice, for He Himself became man and bore our sins, so that the plans and schemes of the

devil, by which he planned to enslave God's creation by means of sin, have been completely overturned by the forgiveness of the sinner, procured by the obedience of the one man, Jesus Christ, at Calvary. God's forgiveness of our sins is complete. He has blotted them all out so whether we are accused by the devil at God's tribunal, or at the tribunal of our own conscience by our sense of the moral law, the accuser cannot sustain his case. God sees those who are trusting in Christ, not as sinners but as righteous, for all our sins have been blotted out through the death of Christ; our slate is clean, and Christ's righteousness covers us.

Our forgiveness is complete, because Christ's work of sin bearing is complete. That work neither has to be added to by our own efforts, nor repeated by Christ. This is underlined by our Lord in words spoken from the Cross as He died: He said "It is finished". The first Good Friday was a triumph because it brought complete forgiveness on the basis of Christ's finished work for sinners who trust

in Him.

Christ's victory at Calvary was followed by His resurrection. Death is the consequence and penalty of sin; it is the outward sign of sin's inward ravages. So, resurrection from the dead is the outward sign of victory over sin. Easter is the consequence of Christ's victory on Good Friday, just as our own resurrection to which we look forward, is the consequence of the complete forgiveness of our sins which Christ has already achieved for us in His death. The Bible says that Christ is now seated at God's right hand, reigning in His kingdom. Because we who have put our faith in Jesus have been identified by God with Jesus in His death, we also will be identified with Him in His resurrection. Indeed, St. Paul puts the matter very vividly in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 6, by saying that already we are seated with Christ in heaven. May I quote the passage "God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been

saved, and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus". The Bible expects us who are Christians to live in the clear realization of this glorious situation which God has brought us into through the death and resurrection of Christ, that already we are seated with Christ in Heaven, through the forgiveness of our sins.

On the cross our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins once for all. He is now seated at God's right hand, and we who are forgiven through Him are in spirit seated with Christ on His throne; so the apostle Paul testifies. Unfortunately the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass obscures this truth of the full forgiveness of our sins through Christ's death Who offered Himself once for all at Calvary. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that in every mass Jesus is offered again to God for the forgiveness of sins, as though Christ's sacrifice at Calvary needed re-presenting. This teaching minimizes the note of triumph that should be sounded on Good Friday. For how can Christ be

said to have triumphed over the powers of darkness which hold man in thralldom if Calvary's offering needs constant repetition. The Roman Catholic teaching is summed up in the decrees of the Council of Trent, Session 22, where it is stated that in the Mass the same Christ who once offered Himself on the cross is immolated, and sacrificed on the altar by the priest. The Council of Trent goes on to state that this sacrifice of Christ at the hands of the priest is truly propitiatory and that by means thereof we obtain mercy, for "the Lord, appeased by the oblation of the mass, forgives our sins". The Council of Trent goes on to say that Christ is offered daily to the Father in the mass not only for the sins, punishments and satisfactions of the living but also for those of the dead.

This doctrine of the mass is perhaps the major barrier between the Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations. For in spite of the modern ecumenical atmosphere, there has been no change in this doctrine since Trent; but it still continues to be taught. Thus a Roman Catholic Catechism of Christian Doctrine

(18th edition printed in Sydney in 1962 with the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop), states on pages 49 and 50 "The mass is the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, which are offered to God by the priest, for the living and the dead... The mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, because the same Christ, who once offered himself a bleeding victim to His Heavenly Father on the cross, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner, by the hands of His priests, on our altars ... The sacrifice of the mass is offered ... to obtain the forgiveness of our sins and to blot out the debt of punishment we owe for them".

But the Bible teaching on the matter is quite different. Not by the daily offering of Christ in the mass, about which the Bible is silent, but by Christ's death, once for all, at Calvary are our sins forgiven. The Bible teaches that God does not need to be appeased or propitiated by anything that we now do. It explicitly states that Christ does not need to offer His sacrifices more than once. Any

teaching to the contrary obscures the glorious truth of Christ's triumph at Calvary over sin's accusations against us; and that these are now completely nullified through the forgiveness that flows from His death. It also obscures the truth that through faith in Christ as Lord already we have been accepted by God and seated by Him with Christ at God's right hand in Heaven. Our response to Christ's death should be one of thanksgiving and praise that God has provided a way of forgiveness, and the grateful acceptance of this forgiveness. It should not be one of continuous effort on our part to propitiate God through persevering in offering propitiatory sacrifices. To teach that such offering is still necessary detracts from and disparages the victory of Calvary.

The Mass is the centre of Roman Catholicism, and the central doctrine of the Mass is that the priest, on behalf of the whole church, daily offers to God the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, just as Christ offered Himself on Calvary. Thus the Catechism of the Council of Trent says:

"The sacrifice of the mass is and ought to be considered one and the same sacrifice as that of the cross, for the Victim is one and the same whose sacrifice is daily renewed in the mass, by which God is appeased and rendered propitious to us".) It is this doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass that is the central doctrine of Roman Catholicism, the one that is most clearly contradicted by the Scripture. It is, for example, contradicted by our Lord's words from the cross: "It is finished". Again, St. Peter in his first epistle chapter 3, verse 18, says explicitly that "Christ suffered for sins once (only), the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God". In the Epistle to the Hebrews the writer frequently states that Christ's sacrifice was offered to God once for all. Let me quote from this epistle. Speaking of Christ's offering of His sacrifice to God, the writer says "Nor yet that he should offer himself often ... else must he have often suffered ... but now once, at the end of the ages, has he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and as it is appointed unto men

once to die and after death, judgment, so Christ also has been once offered to bear the sin of many . . ." Notice how the writer constantly emphasizes the unrepeatableness of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. He asserts the same truth in chapter 7:27, where he states that Christ made an offering "once for all, when he offered up himself". The same once for allness of Christ's sacrifice and offering is re-emphasized in Hebrews 9:12 and 10:10. Indeed the whole New Testament is opposed to the concept that God needs further propitiation through constantly repeated sacrifices. God loves us and Himself gave His son to save us. That salvation is complete. God needs no further propitiation. The message of the New Testament is the full and free forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ for all who put their faith in Him. Thus the Epistle to the Hebrews concludes its arguments by quoting God's promise, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more". The writer adds "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin". Note those words, "There is no more offering

for sin".

We should thank God that our sins are forgiven, and not throw this promise into doubt by continuing to offer Him propitiatory sacrifices. Easter reminds us that our Lord is not now offering His sacrifice any more, but rather He is seated reigning at God's right hand, His sacrifice for men having been accepted, and on the basis of its completed triumph He Himself has been raised from the dead, and we ourselves have been forgiven so that we may look forward in confidence to our own resurrection and to an eternity in God's presence, not because of our own merits or because of our offerings, but because of Christ's perfect sin bearing made once for all at Calvary, an offering which God has accepted, and on which He has set His seal, in that He has raised Him from the dead and will raise us up who by faith have been united with Him.

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