

# **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**

## **In the Light of Scripture**

by

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### **CHAPTER TWENTY**

#### **PRIEST AND ALTAR**

ROME CLAIMS to have both priest and altar, here on earth, now. Since there is an offering, the sacrifice of the Mass, there must be both priest and altar. And so indeed she has them, priests many and altars many. Every Roman Catholic church has its own priest, and every church its altar, and many churches have many altars. Various writers of different times speak of the fifty-two, sixty-eight, and even ninety-nine altars in the one church of St. Peter's at Rome, greatly enhancing its sanctity and magnificence.

As we have already seen, however, the Mass, far from being a real atoning sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, ordained by our Lord Himself, is in fact a man-made institution which is actually idolatrous. A caricature of that one great Sacrifice wherein our Lord offered Himself to God at Calvary, the Mass is an offense to God. There being no sacrifice on earth now, there can be no altar.

Under the Old Testament economy the Israelites were forbidden to have more than one altar, and that was to be in the place of God's own choosing (Leviticus 17:8, 9; Deuteronomy 12:13, 14). Only in cases of extreme national emergency could this rule be set aside (Judges 6:24; I Samuel 7:9, 10; I Samuel 18:32; II Samuel 24:18). This limiting of the altar to one place prefigured the one and only place where God could meet with man; namely, in Christ (Acts 4:12). Rome's multiplication of altars is a direct contradiction of this.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there any reference to an altar in a church. Christian worship was not molded on the pattern of worship in the temple at Jerusalem, but on the worship in the synagogues throughout the land. The Christian church has an altar indeed, "whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (Hebrews 13:10). But what immediately follows this statement points us to Calvary, where our Lord suffered for our sins:

**For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate** (Hebrews 13:11, 12).

The so-called altars in churches are not altars at all. They are but the equivalent of the table at which our Lord sat with His disciples when He instituted the Last Supper. The cross of Calvary was the equivalent of the brazen altar. The altar of incense found its fulfillment in the intercession of our Lord for us in the presence of God the Father.

**For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us** (Hebrews 9:24).

**But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them** (Hebrews 7:24, 25).

In the Old Testament, Aaron's sons were anointed to assist him in his ministry, because with its multiplicity of offerings, the work was too much for one man to undertake. This has no counterpart in the priestly ministry of our Lord, for He is not like Aaron "**compassed with infirmity**" (Hebrews 5:2), but ministers in "**the power of an endless life**" (Hebrews 7:16).

The Council of Trent declared:

*If any man says that in the New Testament there is no corporate body of priests, and no sacrifice to loose or retain sins, but only the responsibility and work of preaching the Gospel, let him be accursed.*

But the Council of Trent notwithstanding, the fact remains that the priest ministering in a church is as much a fiction as is the altar at which he stands, and as the sacrifice of the Mass which he claims to offer to God. Not one of them has any place or warrant in the New Testament. The New Testament never applies the word priest in the singular, either to individual believers or to any office-bearer in the church, but always used the plural, priests, referring to the whole body of believers.

Not to ordained priests, but to believers scattered abroad, the Apostle Peter says:

**Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ** (I Peter 2:5).

**But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light** (I Peter 2:9).

The Apostle John also refers to the entire body of believers in the following passages:

**Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever** (Revelation 1:5, 6).

**Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth** (Revelation 5:9, 10).

**They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years** (Revelation 20:6).

What then are the sacrifices we are to bring to God in our priestly service?

**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service** (Romans 12:1).

**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise** (Psalm 51:17).

**Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice** (Psalm 141:2). (See also Revelation 5:8 and Revelation 8:3.)

**By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name** (Hebrews 13:15).

**But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased** (Hebrews 13:16).

Let us look also at the prophecy in Malachi often quoted by Rome:

**For, from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts** (Malachi 1:11).

This prophecy is not fulfilled in the sacrifice of the Mass as Rome claims, but in the spiritual offerings which followers of Christ present to Him in their prayers and praises and loving service to others, not to gain merit, but as tokens of their love and devotion.

**But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth** (John 4:23, 24).

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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