

Baculus Pastoralis

Blessed Ildefonso Cardinal Schuster

From *The Sacramentary (Liber Sacramentorum)*

The Church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic in her being and in her life, magnificently expresses these marks in her Liturgy, especially during the cycle of the Sundays after Pentecost, in which, through the reading of the Epistles of the Princes of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, we experience over again their preaching and realize that the edifice of our faith rests on that one prophetic and apostolic foundation upon which Christ has built His Church. Those pages tell of Catholic unity, of the sacred hierarchy, of the duties of the faithful towards lawful authority, of the social ties which bind Christians to their family and to society, of the persecution of Nero, of the famine in Palestine, and of the charitable contributions made among the Greeks. The story of these first twenty years, which constitute the golden age of the Catholic Church, contains also the forecast of that which the life of Christ's flock was to be in the ages to come.

We have only sketched out the principal features which give to the sacred Liturgy its character of absolute unity, and which, like a magnificent christological cycle, make in the course of the entire year a wonderful epic poem representative of the whole of our Christian polity.

To this long cycle of fifty-two weeks, which contains the vivid and dramatic unfolding of the whole Christian catechism, it is as well to add that other short cycle which, during the course of each week, celebrates the divine masterpiece of the six days of the Creation and draws a parallel between them and the acts of grace in the regeneration of the world through the blood of the Saviour.

St. Ambrose has adapted his theological talent to the harp of the Christian muse, and in the vesper hymns appointed for each day of the week he presents to us such an example of heavenly music that we can easily understand the tears which Augustine shed, when in the first days of his conversion he listened to the Ambrosian hymns being sung by the people at Milan.

The weeks of the ecclesiastical year form, therefore, a compact and intimately connected christological cycle, which exalts the divine working in the regeneration of the world in the fullness of time. Each period of seven days in this cycle constitutes in its turn another, which has for its object the creation of the world. There remains lastly a daily cycle, which, divided into seven periods, or, as the Breviary calls them, canonical hours, especially commemorates each day the mysteries of the Passion and death of our Saviour. This last daily cycle, which is the basis of the other two cycles, forms in its turn the setting, as it were, of the eucharistic sacrifice which is daily offered up to God as the act of perfect worship in spirit and in truth which redeemed humanity offers to the ever-blessed Trinity.