

SERMON XIV.

October 14, 1849.

PSALM cxix. 32.

“I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty”

WE treated last Sunday of that portion of the Baptismal Service which concludes our Lord’s part of the Covenant, and also of the Prayer and Thanksgiving, in which the whole Church joins, acknowledging God’s mercy in calling them, and asking it for this child. After this it is directed that the Priest shall speak to the Godfathers and Godmothers; putting them in mind of God’s part, and telling them what is the child’s part; as who should say, “Here is this agreement to be signed and sealed; behold, the one party has signed and sealed it, and now it is your turn, who are the other party, to do the same. Our Lord Jesus Christ hath given you His assurance, in answer to your prayer and to the prayer of the whole Church. He hath declared Himself ready to receive it, by causing His gracious words to be said over it, in which He encouraged the little children to come to Him. It is just as much His own declaration, as if He were here in sight, to say the words to us concerning this child in particular.” Then whereas the Priest says, “Ye have prayed that our Lord would release the child of its sins,” we may remember that in the second collect the petition had been, “That he, coming to Thy Holy Baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration.” And this too Christ had promised, when He said, Let them come to Me; for He hath told us Himself, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast (out);”¹ now the Blessing and Embrace of Jesus Christ cannot be without forgiveness of sins.

Also it is said here by the Priest, “Ye have prayed that our Lord Jesus Christ would vouchsafe to sanctify this child with the Holy Ghost.” That was, where in the first collect it was said, “We beseech Thee for Thine infinite mercies that Thou wilt mercifully look upon this child; wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost.” This prayer our Lord promised to hear, when He said, “Of such is the kingdom of Heaven;” seeing that to enter into that kingdom of Heaven we must be regenerate and born anew of water and the Holy Ghost. Thus you see how Justification, which is being made a member of Christ the Righteous, (as all little children are at their Baptism), brings with it both pardon and peace. Pardon for sins past, and for original sin, and grace to do well for the time to come. How great is this gift! can we be too careful of it, or too penitent for our many sins against it?

Further; the Priest reminds the Godfathers that they had prayed God to give the child the kingdom of Heaven; that was, when they prayed that he might be received into the ark of Christ’s Church; for the Church of Christ is the kingdom of Heaven.

And to this our Lord, as you all know, has pledged Himself in so many words, saying, “Of such is the kingdom of Heaven.”

And observe; this means not only that God will make the child one of His Church,

¹ John 6:37

a Christian, in this world; but also that He means him to go to heaven, and to be happy in God's Presence with the Saints and Angels for ever. "The kingdom of heaven, and everlasting Life"—this we had asked in our Prayers for the Child; "that we may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally we may come to the land of everlasting life," and again, that he "may come to the eternal Kingdom which Thou hast promised;" and once more, "that he may be made an heir of everlasting salvation." And as we had prayed, so Christ had met us with His Promise, "Of such is the Kingdom of God." "Whosoever will not receive it as they, he shall not enter therein," meaning not only the church in this world, which is the beginning of the Kingdom of God, but much more the Church triumphant and glorious in Heaven, which is the perfection and fulness of His Kingdom.

Thus you see that the prayer of the Church, and the Promise in the Gospel said at baptism, provide for the Child's entire salvation, both in time and in eternity. They take him up, if I may so speak, just as he is; and they never leave him; they carry him on for ever. Christ having once taken him up in His Arms, will never let him drop, you may be sure. I pointed it out to the children last Sunday in the Catechizing, how seldom it happens that children are let fall on the ground, considering how many are being constantly nursed by persons more or less weak, ignorant, and careless; and if helpless mortals can do so much for those little ones, how much more may we make ourselves certain that the Everlasting Arms will not fall from under us; that Jesus Christ will never, of His own accord, cease to bear us in His loving Embrace. We may break away from Him; *that*, alas! we know too well: but He will never of His own accord leave us or forsake us. As the Priest goes on to say, "This promise He for His part will most surely keep and perform." It cannot be broken, because He is True, and not only True but Truth Itself. "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself."² His Word endureth for ever in Heaven. Well may we doubt or fear for ourselves; but we may not, we must not, in any wise doubt what He hath told us, or fear lest He should prove untrue.

Now you know what a satisfaction and comfort it is, in any matter of this world, any covenant or bargain we have to make, to be quite sure that we may depend on the other party: when he is so honest, prudent, and punctual, that we may without hesitation take his word, and settle all our matters accordingly, knowing that whatever he has promised, (be it to pay money, or to bring home work, or to render an account, or to meet us at any time or place,) there he will be, God willing, and *that* he will do. O then, if we only cared for the things of the eternal world as much as we care for a sum of money to be paid us, a piece of work to be done for us, the bringing of some business to an end—how great to us would be the joy and blessing of having for our souls a friend and helper, of whom we can say with absolute certainty; "His Promise He for His part will most surely keep and perform."³ And consider this too, my brother, whoever you are, who have been baptized to be a Christian. If you had to do with such a friend as I am speaking of, and knew that he was continually putting himself out of his way for you, that he spared no pains to keep his engagements, and to bring your business to a good and comfortable end, should you not feel a little bound to save him what trouble you could, to meet his wishes and convenience, to put him to no unnecessary pains or ex-pence, to shew how entirely you trusted in him, and how you thanked him from your very heart?

² 2 Timothy 2:13

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Yes; I am sure you would have some feelings of this kind; you would not be so entirely cold-hearted and selfish, as to take all the benefit of your friend's kindness and punctual trouble to yourself, without at all thanking him, or putting yourself out of the way to be exact and punctual as well as you could in your turn. Now apply this to the great agreement, the covenant made in Holy Baptism between God Almighty and you His unworthy helpless creature, His promise He for His part will most surely keep and perform. There is no doubt of it; "one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from His Gospel until all be fulfilled."⁴ And can you find in your heart to receive all this good at His Hands, and take no pains to please Him? Can you forget Him morning by morning, not even trying always to say your prayers to Him in earnest? Will you take your meals like the beasts that perish, without begging a blessing beforehand, or offering praise to God afterwards? Will you, all the day through, let things have their own way, never stopping to consider what will best please Him, but only pleasing yourself, and seeking your own profit? O my brethren, be ashamed of such ingratitude.

And if you are not ashamed, be afraid. For now I must put you in mind of the other part of the Baptismal covenant, your own part; what you promised and vowed immediately after you had heard God's part. As the Priest, taught by the Church, said to your godfathers and godmothers: "After this promise made by Christ, this infant must also faithfully for his part promise by you that are his sureties, until he come of age to take it upon himself, that he will renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy Word, and obediently keep His commandments." As much as to say, though it is a free gift, yet it is given you in the way of a Covenant, and may be forfeited if you break what you promised in the Covenant. He will keep *His* word, you need not fear about *that*; only do you take care to keep yours.

The whole transaction appears to me very like the verse which I read to you for the text out of the cxixth Psalm, "I will run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou hast set my heart at liberty." God has set our heart at liberty; we were in sad and hard bondage, born in slavery to the world, the flesh and the devil; and He has come down to be our Saviour and mighty Deliverer; He hath broken our bonds in sunder; the snare is broken, and we are delivered. He has set our heart at liberty, so that it need no longer be led captive at the will of the Evil One. It is no longer forced to lust after evil things, as the Gentiles which know not God. He is ready to set this child's heart at liberty; and then what will the child have to do but to run the way of His commandments? Mind, the Psalm says, not "walk" but "run"—not go slowly and lazily, as if it had no pleasure in the work, but make haste and put forth its strength; doing God's will heartily and thankfully, as to the Lord, and not as to men; coming forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a giant to run his course. This is what Christ expects of us, that, He having delivered us out of the hand of our enemies, we should serve Him without fear, not fearing nor doubting to trust ourselves with Him, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life. This is, in substance and meaning, the vow by which we bind ourselves at our Baptism, as the Priest goes on with his instruction: Wherefore, after this promise made by Christ, this infant must also faithfully, for his part, promise by you that are his sureties, until he come of age to take it upon himself, that he will renounce the Devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy Word, and obediently keep His commandments."

⁴ Matthew 5:18

Now concerning the particulars of this promise, there will be something to be said another time; now I will add a word concerning the part which the Godfathers and Godmothers have in it. It is plain that, if the child is to make the covenant, he must do it by another, since he cannot yet speak or write, nor make any sign at all of himself. That other is his surety, he becomes bound, as it were, to Almighty God and His Church, for the child, that he will keep his covenant; just as in earthly matters, in the case of an estate for instance; If a rich man die while his child is under age, there are trustees ordained to manage the property for the benefit of that child, any bargains and engagements they make in the child's name are held binding on him when he comes to age, being made entirely for his advantage. And of course such trustees are bound in duty, when the heir comes of age, to get him to fulfil such engagements, so far as he can; still, if he will not, the loss and the disgrace must be his own. So it is with the sureties of our souls in Baptism. We are bound by their words, bound before God and man to all eternity, and *that* at the peril of our souls. The Covenant of our Baptism is one from which we can never be discharged, and they are bound, as they have opportunity, to put us in mind of our duty, and see us to do it. Being then so far in the place of parents, they should have something fatherly and motherly in them; however young they may be, they ought to feel as if God had put into their hands something of a father's or mother's trust. The least they can do is to wish and pray in their hearts, that the little one for whom they answer may keep his vow. But this they cannot do, they cannot really wish and pray for the child's soul, except they be really in care for their own souls also. Now the Church well knows, that no one whatever, who in earnest cares for his own soul, will live in wilful neglect of Holy Communion, and therefore she has ordained, that no person be admitted to answer for a child before he or she has been admitted to receive Holy Communion, and although, in this sad condition of things, we find it hard to keep to this rule, and sometimes think it more charitable not to insist on it, yet I am sure you must all feel how reasonable and proper it is; and that nothing can be quite right, while Communion is neglected.

But as for such as really endeavour to be regular and worthy Communicants, I most earnestly recommend it to them as a real work of Charity, to answer for their neighbours' children without making too many difficulties; intending of course to do their duty according to the best of their power. If Godfathers and Godmothers were always so minded, then our gatherings round the Font would oftener prove, by God's mercy, unfailing tokens of so many meetings in Heaven.