

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service
by John Keble

SERMON XX.

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COLOSSIANS ii. 13.

“Buried with Him in Baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him.”

WHEN the child by his sponsors has stood to his Baptismal Covenant, the Church, as you know, goes on to commend him to God in four very solemn prayers; as if a father, sending his child a journey, should first give him instructions what to do, then make him solemnly promise to do it, and lastly cause him to kneel down, and bless him very religiously before he set out. If that would be a comfort to the child undertaking the journey, so ought it to be a great comfort in our journey through life, whenever we call to mind these affectionate intercessions, which our loving Mother the Church offered up for us, before she put us in Christ's Arms to be baptized, and so to take the first step (and the greatest but one i. e. death) in our spiritual journey. There were four intercessions which she then offered up for us; and three of them, following Hbly Scripture, represent our Christian condition by a sort of parables. The first is, “O merciful God, grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried, that the New Man may be raised up in him.” This likens Baptism, as you see, to death and resurrection. The second is, “Grant that all carnal affections may die in him, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him.” This likens the soul of a Christian to a garden, in which are some foul weeds, carnal affections, which we pray may die; others, good plants, things of the Spirit, which we pray may live and grow. The third prayer is, “Grant that he may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph, against the devil, the world, and the flesh.” This collect has also its parable, and it is very plain what it is. It likens our Christian life to a warfare against the three enemies of our souls; as after Baptism, when we are signed with the Cross, it is said to be in token of our fighting under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and of our continuing to our life's end His faithful soldiers. Thus then each of the three prayers which are offered up for the child, immediately after the covenant and before the Christening, refers us to something which we well understand, in order that our duty, when we come to know it, may sink the more thoroughly into our minds, and be more easily recollected on all occasions. The fourth prayer will be considered by itself another time.

The first of them, as I said, compares Baptism to death and burial. It asks that the old Adam in this child may be buried. You know what is meant by the old Adam; or, as St. Paul calls it, the old man. It is the old bad nature, which we brought with us into the world. The child who is going to be baptized, be his parents who they may, has, we are sure, his part in the old Adam. He is of his own nature corrupt like the rest, and inclined to evil, and if he be left to himself, will surely go farther and farther from God. This is as certain as that he is born of flesh and blood, and cometh of the seed of Adam and Eve.

Well, the Church's prayer is, that this old bad nature may be buried in the child who is being brought to the Font; that it may be dead and buried, done away with and put out of sight. A great miracle, greater than raising the dead, and only to be wrought by the

Almighty power of the Spirit of God, yet most surely wrought in each child that is truly baptized, as our Lord himself taught: "Except ye be born again of water and of the Spirit, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God."¹ This is the great baptismal change, which God wrought for every one of us in the beginning of life; and the whole business of our after-life ought to be, the behaving ourselves worthy of it. What should we fancy right behaviour, in any person who had really and literally died, and been raised from the dead, e. g. in Lazarus of Bethany? Surely it would disappoint us, we should think it strange and unnatural, if such an one still went on as if there were no other world, or as if he had no soul to be saved or lost eternally in it. In like manner, well may the Angels wonder, and be filled with holy indignation, when they see an impure and unworthy Christian; rather I should say, when they see a Christian who is not really striving to purify himself, even as Christ is pure. For this is the purpose of Almighty God in killing and burying the Old Man, that the New Man may be raised up in his stead. The New Man is the image and likeness of God, renewed and brought into being again in the baptized soul and body by the power of the Holy Ghost making the child a member of Christ. As the Old Man is the likeness and nature of fallen Adam, so the New Man has the likeness and nature of Jesus Christ; and this is what we pray to have raised up in our children, when we bring them to Holy Baptism. Think for a moment, what a great thing it is we ask for them. Think of them *as children*. We may ask that they may grow up like that Holy and Blessed Child, Who was the very Word and Wisdom of the Father, Incarnate, and dwelling among men: Who, as He grew, waxed strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him: Who, when He was parted awhile from His parents, was found in no other place than His Father's House, in no other employment than about His Father's business; Who abode quietly with His parents, and was subject unto them, increasing continually in favour with God and man. This is He, Whose Image and Likeness you pray that you may see in these little ones; and surely we may see a great deal of it, if we will but watch, in their loving and confiding ways, in their little acts of self-denial, in their contrivances how to be kind and dutiful and obedient. Yes, indeed, he that will reverentially look, may in many things discern the New Man in the behaviour of baptized children; and much, very much more, would be to be seen, were parents and elders such as Christians should be, especially in their cares and prayers for the lambs of the flock; and perhaps it may help some of us to remember our duty to them, if we will sometimes recollect, that when they were christened, prayer was made especially that they might be changed into the Image and glory of Christ, and how fearful it would be, if through any fault of ours they should be found rather to have put on the horrible image of Christ's Enemy.

But we pray besides, that all carnal affections may die in the babe which is about to be baptized, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him. Carnal affections are the lusts of the flesh; all undue appetite for meat and drink and pleasures; all those many thoughts, fancies, wishes, habits, which get hold of men who give themselves up to this world; and are like so many foul and weak and noisome weeds, overgrowing the garden of the soul. Concerning all these, we pray that they may wither and die; but for the things belonging to the Spirit, i. e. for "all holy desires, good counsels, and just works," for these we pray, that they may live and grow in that child; even as fair flowers and precious fruits thrive in the good soil of a kindly and well-managed garden. And it should be particularly noticed, that we pray not only for their

¹ John 3:5

living, but for their *growing*. We pray, and therefore we should labour, that in every baptized person there should be the spirit of improvement, not of continuance only. We are not contented if the plants we set merely just keep alive; if they leave off growing, we consider that more or less as a sign of decay. So it is not enough for a man to say to himself, I have not gone back that I know of; I believe I am no worse than I was; but he ought to have some reasonable ground of hope that on the whole he may be advancing. *That* is the necessary token of spiritual life. Thus, if you have left off telling absolute lies, still you are not to be satisfied with yourself; you must practise every day to be more tender and exact in your regard for truth; and so of all other virtues; as we read of the Holy Child, that He did not continue in one stay, but increased in wisdom. For as no garden is ever so perfect, but a great deal may be done in it, so no Christian's soul is so exact in any good thing, but it may be greatly improved—there are yet more things belonging to the Spirit which may be introduced into it, to live and² to grow there; and those which are there already, may be cultivated into higher beauty or more abundant vigour. Remember this, Christian Brethren and Sisters, when you are tempted to be weary and fall back. Remember, it was prayed over you, the first time you were brought here, “may all spiritual things not only *live*, but *grow* in him.”

And remember, lastly, that the Church prayed for you as for young *Soldiers*; that you may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. She did not pray that you might be at rest and entire peace from all temptations; this, the Church knows, cannot be had in this world; she did not pray that you might have no warfare, but that you might get the better in your warfare. Two things she prayed for, victory and triumph; victory here over the enemies of your soul, triumph hereafter on the great Day, when God will finally put under the feet of His saints all the powers of evil, to rise again no more. This, your Spiritual Mother asked on your behalf of the Great King as a very precious baptismal gift; and you cannot doubt that He would grant her request. You may not doubt, you must earnestly believe that God has given you power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. If you do not fight, or if fighting, you do not prevail, you may be quite sure it is not for want of power and strength given you in Holy Baptism. It is not for want of such a gift, but for abuse and forfeiture of it. Put this home to your own hearts, dear brethren. The victory is in your own hands if you will. Neither the devil nor any other power, can make you sin against your will. He may dart evil thoughts into your mind, but if you turn away from them at once, and decidedly, they will hardly be so troublesome again; at any rate, they will do your soul no harm. And then imagine the triumph at last; how the Great King will come in person, and all His holy Angels with Him: how from the innumerable multitude before Him, He will in some marvellous way single out each one separately who has pleased Him, with a “well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord.”³ and so each one of us, if not found unworthy, shall meet the Lord in the air, and being blessed by Him and taken up, shall follow Him through the everlasting doors into His Kingdom.

I say, let us often think of this day of triumph, and fear greatly, as indeed we have great occasion, lest our own careless and wilful ways deprive us of our portion in it. Do you not see, when any particular Festival or Holiday is soon coming on, how much better

² The word “and” was repeated here in 1868.

³ Matthew 25:21, 25:23

than usual young people are apt to behave, for fear of losing their share in the Holiday? So and much more should we do our best, to secure the place graciously provided for us in that last and most glorious Procession, the procession of our Lord and His saints from Judgment to glory? It is but a short while; the day will very soon be here; and if we have many adversaries, yet a great door, by God's mercy, is open, and we have large and sufficient helps. May He grant that on that day we may each one of us look back to the day of his Baptism with joy and not with grief!