

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service  
by John Keble

## SERMON XXI.

June 2, 1850.

COL. i. 23.

“If ye continue in the Faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which ye have heard.”

IN taking up anew the course of Catechising which has been interrupted this year by the holy seasons of Lent and Easter, I may remind you that we were going through the Baptismal Service, and had entered on the consideration of the short prayers, which follow after the replies of the godfathers and godmothers, and come immediately before the Consecration of the water. They are four in number, and the last time we considered three of them.

The first begs for the Child the grace of regeneration: that “the old Adam in this child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him.” The second begs for him the grace of conversion, or continual, gradual, silent turning towards God: “that all carnal affections may die in him and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him.” The third supposes him (as he is sure to be) in a state of warfare and asks for him the grace of victorious resistance: “Grant that he may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world and the flesh.” And the fourth and last of those short collects, prays for the crown of all, final perseverance. “Grant that whosoever is here dedicated to Thee by our office and ministry, may also be endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded: Through Thy mercy, O Blessed Lord God, Who dost live and govern all things, world without end.”

Consider first, for whom we offer this prayer: not for the child only which is waiting to be christened (to whom the other short collects plainly refer), but for all, “Whosoever is here dedicated to God by our office and ministry.” What is “*here*”? It may mean at this Font, in this particular Church, and congregation: or it may mean generally, in this evil and trying world. The Priest, when he offers that petition, may mean something similar to that which Solomon offered concerning the Temple, to Him Whose eyes were open all night and all day towards that Holy place, that God would hear the prayers offered to Him there, or by Israelites afar off, turning that way in prayer. Or he may mean more generally, for all who have been duly baptized anywhere and by any Christian. Being so dedicated to God, they are an especial mark for the devil to shoot his arrows at: they have special need therefore to ask for perseverance, and to have it asked for them. It is a prayer of great, extensive, unbounded charity, taking in all the baptized, as the like prayer in the Communion office does all the members of Christ, in that it says; “we Thy humble servants entirely desire Thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our Sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching Thee to grant, that by the merits and death of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in His Blood, we and all Thy whole church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His Passion.” That collect, as you may perceive, is a charitable intercession, extending the benefit of the holy Sacrifice and Sacrament which has just been offered up, far beyond

the Communicants present, even to all God's whole Church, everywhere, according to their needs. Such is the love and such the prayer of the Holy Catholic Church. From every Font and from every Altar, it flows and spreads itself all around, until it have filled Heaven and earth: like a holy fire which, wherever it is kindled, will naturally lay hold of things on every side, where it can find proper materials. So that as the Apostle says, "no man liveth unto himself,"<sup>1</sup> in like manner we may also say, no Christian is baptized for himself alone, no Communicant receives for himself alone. All the members rejoice and are the better for the grace imparted to each one, and for the prayer of the church accompanying the gift of grace.

Consider secondly, what this prayer teaches of the condition of those newly baptized. It represents them as dedicated to God by the office and ministry of His Church, put in a way of being endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded, yet capable (alas!) of falling away also for ever. It is then, in short, a prayer for the gift of Perseverance. Perseverance is the great and awful subject, on which we are led to think to day. But first I would say a few words on the account here given of the state, in which the Church prays that we may persevere.

1) It is a state of *dedication*. The child is dedicated to God by our Office and Ministry. What "dedication" means, you know. It is solemnly setting apart any person or thing to God's service. A Church is dedicated, when it is consecrated: when the Bishop, as you know, comes and blesses it with the ordained Psalms and prayers and ceremonies. From that hour the building and its furniture are taken out of ordinary and common use, taken in a manner out of this world, and made part of the heavenly world. For as the glorified bodies of the saints in heaven have no other employment, so far as we know, than to shew honour and praise to the Most Holy Trinity (as it is written, "They fall down before Him that sitteth on the throne and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the Throne,") so these outward and visible Churches or holy buildings, once dedicated, are never more to be put to any profane or temporal use. No more then are Christian children, once dedicated in Holy Baptism, to profane themselves by serving any other master. They are all anointed; all Kings and Priests. If I may say a bold word, they are all Christs. Woe to him who shall try to use them in ways unworthy of their heavenly dedication and nature! Woe to themselves, if they forget it, and behave as though they had not been born again, not specially consecrated to our Lord, not called, as saith the Apostle, to be saints! All this the Church would have us remember, when we acknowledge ourselves *dedicated* to God in Baptism.

2) Whereas the Church prays that the baptized may also be endued with heavenly virtues, this reminds us of another thing, not to be doubted, nor forgotten, in our condition, viz. that for those who live beyond infancy the one gift of Baptismal Grace will not suffice to carry them to Heaven, except they have the further grace to improve the first gift by holy care and obedience, by continual turning towards God Who gave it: even as the first gift of natural life in this world will not abide either in a child or a grown up person, unless care be taken to preserve it by supplies of food and other seasonable helps. We pray then, that the spark which was lit in the soul in regeneration, may in after-life be kindled into a flame by the Unceasing Wonder-working Breath of God, i. e. by His Holy Spirit, enduing the child or man from time to time, as he becomes capable of it, with more and more of heavenly virtues. This is a Christian's intended condition, the best he

---

<sup>1</sup> Romans 14:7

can arrive at in this world, a condition imperfect and to himself always unsatisfactory, but, by God's great Mercy, always silently and secretly improving.

3) A third remark here to be made on it is, that the things in which we should be always improving are *heavenly* virtues, not the good qualities which are most in sight, and which the world loves most to praise, but *heavenly* virtues; thoughts and ways and turns of mind which can only come from heaven, and which are continually tending up thither, like fires from an altar. These heavenly and Divine virtues are more especially Faith, Hope and Charity: looking off the world and the things which we see, to the great and awful things out of sight: hoping to see God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: and loving Him above all for His unspeakable mercies in Christ Jesus. This is what we mean when, standing around the Font, we beg that all the little infants that are brought there may be endued with heavenly virtues; that the tender clinging hearts, which we know to be naturally so full of love, may be early opened to receive that perfect love, which never can in any wise fail or pass away. The sons and daughters of this world, when they look at their young children, look forward to what they will do and what they will become in the matters of this world: how they will one day take the place of their parents, and thrive, and enjoy themselves, and be respected and comfortable. But the true believer, when he looks at his young child, waiting to be christened, says to himself, "here is one who will live for ever and ever: Christ has died for him, and will now give him His Spirit, in order that eternal life may be spent with Him in Heaven, and not with the Wicked one in the place of torment. O God, grant him all heavenly virtues: give him a heart to abide in Christ: let it not be said of him, He had better never have been born."

And this is the meaning of the concluding words of the Prayer, that those who are here baptized, may be everlastingly rewarded. It is in short, as I said before, a prayer for perseverance. Perseverance is a very special grace, to be added over and above the grace of regeneration, that God's great mercy may not have been received in vain. For it is too certain, as our article teaches, that, after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may fall from grace given, may fall into deadly sin, and if we die in that state, the sin is unpardonable. Therefore our Lord so earnestly exhorts His disciples again and again, as the one thing needful, "Abide in Me, and I in you:" and as soon as we can speak, we learn in our Catechism not only to thank God that He hath brought us to a state of salvation, but also to pray for His Grace that we may continue in the same unto our life's end. This is the great thing: persevere, continue, abide. Continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel. *Keep* Christ's commandments, and *abide* in His Love. We learn the Prayer in our young days, that we may continue in the same unto our lives' end: and we must never, never leave it off: in heart we must be praying that prayer night and day; for night and day there is one watching to take our crown from us. He cannot bear to see a virgin soul, a soul and body as yet unspotted with wilful grievous sin: he hates the pure white robe, and will do his best to defile it, and he surely will get us to defile it, if we permit him. He watches, to tempt and defile us: we cannot do less than watch, to keep ourselves pure. He says, "time enough, by and by, to repent and serve God; you may as well enjoy yourself a little for the present." Let us say, "the time is short; if I persevere that little while, I shall be everlastingly rewarded." O think on that word *everlastingly!*

Finally, take notice of God's most loving Condescension in counting that unutterable glory a reward for our poor services: and understand by it, how sure our place

in Heaven will be, if we lose it not by our own fault: as sure as the labourers' wages in our Lord's parable, the penny a day, promised by Him Who cannot lie. He calls it our wages, though we cannot properly earn it, because He is sure to treat us as though, we had earned it. Persevere, and it cannot fail you.

You perhaps know something of the joy of heart [<sup>a</sup> which God sometimes gives upon one strong earnest purpose to do, or leave undone, something, out of love for Him. You know the joy of having strongly broken off one sin, for the love of Him Who loved you and gave Himself for you." Every good choice has such a joy. Pray God, day by day, that you may persevere in making anew, for that day also, that good choice, and you will persevere to the end. God gives the grace of perseverance to all who ask Him. And then not one thing will you have done, in any one day, for God, which will lose its reward. Not one kind word or one act, done for the love of Jesus, but you will find it there; not one fear or anxiety borne meekly for His sake, but it is stored for you there; not one tear shed for past sin, not one wish for the love of God, that you had not done it, but it will have its reward in the Infinite love of your God].

a The Sermon must have been finished orally. I have ventured to add some thoughts of the kind which seem to have been in the writer's mind, without attempting to imitate his simplicity. E.B.P.