

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service
by John Keble

SERMON XXIII.

June 16, 1850.

ST. MATT, xxviii. 19.

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

THERE are two very solemn moments in our Lord’s Ministry on earth, to which we are carried back by the address at the beginning of the Prayer at Consecration of the water. The one, just after His Death: the other, just before His Ascension. The one, of which you heard something last Sunday, was the piercing of His Sacred Heart with a spear, for the pouring out of Water and Blood. The other, of which you heard in the catechising just now, was His meeting with His Apostles in Galilee, and giving them that great commission, in virtue of which the Holy Church has by their ministry gone forth into all the world: in virtue of which, from time to time, in presence of the Holy Angels and in all our presence, little children are admitted into fellowship with the Most Holy Trinity.

Now those two things are connected one with another, as the shadow with the Substance, the reality with the type. Christ’s Side pierced, the Blood and Water flowing out in the sight of those who stood by the Cross, is the shadow and token of the great things which He was about to do for His people one by one, invisibly and inwardly, to be witnessed not by sight, but by faith. As the Blood from our Lord’s Side flowed not alone, but mingled with Water, so we may understand that even His Perfect Sacrifice saves us not, except it be applied by His Sanctifying Spirit in Baptism and Holy Communion. We must be made and continue members of Him. *That* is being saved by Him. Again, although in Baptism water only is visible, faith looking back to what happened on the Cross, discovers in the Font precious Blood, saving Blood, the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ mingled with the water, to wash our souls clean both of the guilt and stain of our sins; so that the Almighty shall take off His Hand from punishing, the All-seeing shall cast our sins behind His Back, and no longer behold on us the sad taint and pollution of them. Thus, the flowing out of the Blood and Water has respect to the Baptism which was afterwards to be instituted; and the Baptism, when it was instituted, was understood to bring with it the virtue of the Blood which is not seen, as well as the cleansing power represented by the water which is seen.

When I speak of the Institution of Baptism, I mean, as you will all understand, what our Lord did at that meeting with His Disciples in Galilee, of which you heard just now. For although our Saviour had mentioned Baptism on more occasions than one before, especially in His discourse with Nicodemus, and although His Baptism had been distinctly foretold by St. John, yet He had never in form ordained and appointed it before His Death, as He had done the other Sacrament of His Body and Blood. His Disciples had indeed baptized, but not with His Baptism, but rather with such a Baptism as that of St. John, as a mere token of the purity and cleanness of heart which God requires, and which He would hereafter give by His Blood and His Spirit. They had baptized with water, but our Lord was now about to begin baptizing with the Holy Ghost, His proper Baptism; and

so, in a very solemn manner, He lays down a law concerning it, makes His people a covenant and an ordinance. He meets them, after long notice given, and three times repeated, on a mountain in Galilee. He appears in some very wonderful way, which caused some of them to doubt at first whether He was their very Lord Jesus or no. He comes close to them and takes away their doubts, and then He delivers the Law of His Baptism in those plain and well-known words, "All Power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth, Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."¹ Then He instituted Baptism, not before. His words to Nicodemus were but prophetic of what He would do by and by. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But then this could not be until the great Day of Pentecost; for then was the Kingdom of Heaven first set up. That saying was prophetic of Baptism, as the Holy Communion was foretold in St. John, "Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you."² What it was to eat the flesh and drink the Blood of the Son of Man, the Disciples could not well imagine, till they saw Him take Bread and Wine into His Sacred Hands, and heard Him say, "This is My Body," and, "This is My Blood." So neither could they at all make out, how people are to be born again, born of water and of the Spirit, until our Lord distinctly enjoined that all should be baptized in His Name. And although water was not mentioned, yet they would be quite aware that it must be done with water: for the Jews never baptized with anything else. Thus was the law of Holy Baptism first laid down in the Church.

I would next remark that it seems to come in as the first, if not the chiefest law of the Pastoral care. When our Lord had spoken of the matter before, I mean of their meeting Him in Galilee, He had always seemed to allude to it in connection with our care of His flock. He speaks to them as the Head Shepherd might sometimes speak to the under-shepherds. Thus in the night of His Last Supper, while they were yet gathered round the Table; He told them, "All ye shall be ashamed because of *Me* this night, for it is written, smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered." I, the Chief Shepherd, in My Coming Agony and Death shall be forsaken of you the sheep: but fear not, I am not going to cast you off, much as you perhaps deserve it. "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." As shepherds go before their flocks, so our Lord promises to go before St. Peter and the rest, when they shall have to travel into Galilee. It was to be altogether a pastoral meeting. A Shepherd calling to Him those of His flock whom He saw fit to put in trust with the rest: calling them into a place apart, where all might be together "in peace." And the same expression, "going before into Galilee," is twice repeated after His Resurrection in directions to the same under-shepherds. To the women the Holy Angels say, "go tell His Disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see Him as He said unto you."³ And He Himself, afterwards meeting the same women, repeats the message: "Be not afraid, go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me."⁴ The whole was as when a flock that has been scattered is gathered again in a particular place.

And then observe, what place. It was not any where in Galilee, they might go to

¹ Matthew 28:18-19

² St. John 6:53. This is the only biblical citation made by Pusey himself in his capacity as editor.

³ Mark 16:7

⁴ Matthew 28:10

look for Him, but He appointed unto them one particular mountain; *the* mountain: perhaps the same mountain where our Lord with all authority spake His Beatitudes, and the rest of His gracious Sermon to His Apostles especially, as to those who should be the salt of the earth. The Mount of the beatitudes was a place for pastoral instruction: their meeting in that place, therefore, may be taken as a sign that the Great Shepherd was about to say or do something important as concerning the care of the flock.

And indeed what could be more important than what our Lord goes on to tell them, that now He has taken on Himself the full office of Universal Shepherd; saying, “All Power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth?”⁵ And next He gives them their commission as under-shepherds, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations,” not the Jews only, but all the nations, all the tribes and families of the earth. As all power was given Him, as He was to be not only King of the Jews, but King of kings and Lord of lords, nay, even King over all the Angels in Heaven: so they were to go with His message to all nations.

And what was their errand? Merely to say their message and be gone, like a person delivering a letter which requires no answer? Nay, it was much more than that. Our Lord’s word is, “Make disciples of them;” not merely, teach, but cause them to become My disciples. Now the disciples of Jesus, we know, were His inseparable attendants and servants, trusted to wait on Him in all things; nay more, they were His chosen friends, trusted to know His Heavenly secrets. For His Word is, “I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you.” In a word, the favour now to be offered through the Apostles to all the world, to all the Gentiles, to every one of the fallen race of Adam, was that they should come to be to our Lord as St. Peter and St. John, His chosen friends; not simply that they should hear and believe certain truths concerning Him and themselves, but that they should become His friends and followers, part of His family, nay, members and limbs of His Body. For so He had spoken to the disciples before, “I am the Vine, ye are the Branches;” and now He will have all the world to be His disciples.

So far then was plain: all people were to be made Christians: but how? Was it to be merely by teaching; as people are taught to understand and believe things, which they could never get to understand and believe of themselves? Would that be enough to make them Christians, simply that they should believe with the heart and confess with the mouth the great things concerning Jesus Christ? We, or some of us, might have thought so. But our Lord’s law is far otherwise. As He redeemed our whole race, not by teaching, but by making Himself one of us, and dying for us, so it is His Will to save us one by one, not by mere teaching, but by making us one with Him. He took our Flesh, that we might be partakers of a Divine Nature. And to seal and convey this blessing, and to work this wonder in us, He ordained His blessed Sacraments. “Make Christians of them,” He saith, not by “instructing,” not by “reforming,” not by “educating and training them up,” but by “baptizing them.” Baptism then is the beginning of Christianity, the pledge and means of our being in Christ at the first. “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.”⁶ Until one is baptized, he is not properly a disciple. This, my brethren, we all know and believe. I only wish we considered as deeply as we ought, what a deep and awful change this our Baptism made in us; such a change as we shall

⁵ Matthew 28:18

⁶ Galatians 3:27

feel through all the endless ages that are to come: we shall feel it more and more through all Eternity. We who are baptized shall be for ever and ever more like Angels, or more like devils, than as if we had not been baptized. This is our blessing, this also is our burthen. God give us a heart to know and feel it rightly. And that we may do so, consider the next words, the words in which our Saviour appointed the very Form of Baptism; for He did not only appoint the water, but the Word also. "Make disciples of them by baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." He does not say with water, because that would be understood, as it has been understood and practised by all Christians. But the form of words He expressly adds; and it is such a form, as ought to fill every one of us with deep fear and dread and anxiety, lest he lose a soul, his own soul; lose it for ever, after that Jesus Christ has spoken such a word to it. Attend, brethren. When the Priest says, "I baptize thee in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," or rather, when our Lord says it by the Priest, he does not merely mean, "I do this by the authority of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost," and by their commission which they have given me: as a constable or magistrate among ourselves might say, I do this or that in the Queen's name and on her behalf; or as one standing for another speaks, our own godfathers and godmothers for example; "they did promise and vow three things in our name." Far more than that was meant when our Lord commissioned His Apostles to baptize in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. The Form, "in the Name," here means "into the Name." It means that we are partakers of the Name, and may in some sense be called by it: that we are joined to the Almighty God, the glorious Being, whose Name it is; as I said before out of St. Peter, "We are partakers of a Divine Nature;" as it is written in the Psalm, "I said, ye are Gods." What could be said or done for us more?

There will perhaps be more hereafter to be said of this Form of Baptism. The chief thing now to be noticed is, how in our Lord's way of appointing it, it is connected with keeping His commandments—not one commandment, but all. For after fixing the sacred Form, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," He adds, "teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." If we are wholly joined to God, we must be wholly His: we must not leave out any part of our Sacrifice, but purpose and endeavour to do *all* that He bids us. And it may be that our Lord in this saying, "All that I have commanded you," meant especially what He had been saying to His Apostles during those forty days, in which, as St. Luke says, He was speaking to them of the things which concern the Kingdom of God. They were to build up the Church by Baptism, and to order it by the rules and laws in which He had been instructing them. So doing, He promised them His Own especial Presence, the greatest of all encouragements. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "I am with you always;" with you My Apostles, with those whom you shall ordain to be in your place, with the Church which you shall establish. "I am with you always," with all Christians, faithfully desiring and endeavouring to abide in your Communion.

If Christ is with His Apostles and with all faithful Christians always, we are to make sure that He is not absent when He is called upon to sanctify the water, in which one of those for whom He died is presently to be baptized. The child cannot have done anything to drive Him away; and no one's unworthiness, but our own, can possibly hinder the effect of a Sacrament upon us. We are not then to doubt of the grace of our Baptism, but to give God thanks for it day and night. But one thing we must never forget:

that at the same time when our Lord commanded us to be baptised, He commanded that we should be taught also to observe all that He had told His Apostles of: all the rules of holy and Christian living. If we be wilfully wanting in any of these, Christ indeed will be with us in a way in which He is not with the heathen, but it will be to our judgment and ruin, not to our salvation.

As then we bear His Name, as we carry about with us (in some sense) the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as He is with us in all our days; so in all our days and in all our doings, let us remember Him.

What sort of days, in the world's account, the days which are to come will be, no man can tell. This only we know, that if He be with us, they will be good days to us: and He will be with us, if we drive Him not away by our sins. Thus, the remembrance of our Baptism may be an anchor to our souls, sure and steadfast. Thou art among us, O Lord, and Thy Holy Name is called upon us. Thou wilt not forsake us, if we do not forsake Thee.