

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service
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“I will write upon him My new Name.”

WE are now come to that part of the Baptismal service, which all of us, perhaps, know best; that part which even when we were little children most drew our attention to it. For even very young children are apt earnestly to look towards the Font, and to mind what is going on, when it comes to this part of the service. When, after the prayer at the Consecration of the Water, there is silence, and the Priest takes the child in his arms according to the next direction of the Rubric, it is to the eye a very simple and ordinary thing, that the clergyman should receive the infant into his arms in order to christen it, but to the eye of faith that simple action is full of high mysterious meaning. For when we see it, we are not to think of this or that particular minister who happens to be then doing duty. As St. John Baptist many times told us, we are to think of the One only real Baptizer, Jesus Christ, of Whose Presence the mortal and visible Priest is but a type and figure and shadow. We are to think, as nearly as we may, just as we would have thought, had we been present when He took the little children in His arms, when He laid His hands upon them, sanctified and blessed them. Had any one of us been by at that time, we might perhaps have recollected in our minds what is written in the Old Testament, “He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd, He shall gather the lambs into His Arms, and shall carry them in His Bosom.” The good, the kind, the considerate Shepherd looks most especially after the lambs. Of all things He will not suffer them to be forsaken and neglected: not only because they are the hope of His flock, and, if they fail, there is no chance of His Shepherd’s work prospering in time to come, but also out of real pity for their helpless tender delicate condition. For which cause also the Prophet adds, “He will gently lead them which are with young.” Or we may call to mind the saying of the great Prophet Moses, when he puts the children of Israel upon considering the love and care, which they had experienced for so many years in the wilderness. “The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the Everlasting arms;” i. e. He bears thee up strongly, securely, and lovingly, as a nursing father carries his sucking child: there is no fear of His growing tired or letting thee go: you may feel His arms under you, and be quite sure that you are safe. Or, as the same prophet utters the blessing of Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob’s family, the child of his old age, his darling and best-beloved; “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him, and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders;”¹ i. e. on His Bosom, supported on both His arms, as one may often see fathers carrying young children. And as we feel, when we see it, what safe and tender care the children are in, so, and much more, may we imagine the perfect peace and security of these little ones, when Christ, the Great Shepherd, the Eternal Nursing Father, has just taken them up in His merciful arms. Of all which, the Priest

¹ Deuteronomy 33:12

receiving the infant from the nurse, and holding it in his arms by the Font, is a lively Image and Type.

We are also to consider from whom the Priest receives the child. Of course from the parents or sponsors: for the nurse who presents it is but their attendant and minister; and they themselves are in truth but attendants and ministers of the Church. This should be considered more than it is. The godfathers and godmothers are not there as friends of the parents only, but as persons appointed by the Holy Church to offer and present the young child to its Saviour, and put it into His arms. As Hannah brought young Samuel to Eli, who stood in the place of God to receive the child, so the nurse, the Godmother, or the mother, brings a little infant now to the Priest, who stands in the place of Jesus Christ, to take it up in his arms and bless it. And as, when you see the Priest, you are not to think of him, but of our Lord: so when you look upon a woman standing by the Font with a child to be christened in her arms, you are not to think of her, but of the Church of God, the Mother and Nurse of us all, who brings us one by one in her arms to our Saviour when we are infants, presents us to Him, and makes the engagements in our name.

Thus we have explained what is meant by the Godmother or nurse presenting the child, and the Priest taking it up in his arms. The next thing is for the Priest to enquire the child's name, saying to those who presented it, "Name this child." Now why should the Child have a new name given him at Baptism? Because a new name is a token of a new nature, or at least of a very great change of condition. It signifies that the person receiving it is in some material respects not exactly the same as he was before. He may be better off or worse: but he cannot be exactly the same. Therefore those who seek the very best things for their children, naturally desire that God should give them a name, for a token and pledge that He will not deny the blessing. He having all power and wisdom, when He gives the name He will also give the thing, and when He changes the name, He will change the thing. So it was from very old times indeed; the times, of which we read in the Bible, the times of Abraham and Jacob, of Joshua, St. John Baptist and others. As often as we read of God's putting a distinct name upon any of those whom He delighted to honour, we may well think of Christian Baptism, and of the gift of God, properly so called; i. e. the Holy Regenerating Spirit. Thus, God changed Abram's name; changed it to Abraham, and we know the meaning of that change. Abram means simply a great father: but when God, in His Mercy, chose him openly for His own, and entered into solemn covenant with him by the sign and token of circumcision, He saw fit to change Abram's *name* also. He changed it to Abraham; a father of many nations; because not only so many peoples, in and around the Holy Land, were to be of the seed of Abraham after the flesh, but, what was a great deal more, all of us, all Christian people, all who to the end of the world shall be made members of Christ, are at the same time made truly and really children of Abraham, the father of Christ after the flesh. And so it came to be a custom, that to every Israelitish man-child, when he was admitted into Abraham's covenant by the solemn rite of circumcision, God gave a new name for a seal and token of that covenant. And this new name, to the people of Israel, signified always two things; first, that they belonged specially to God; secondly, that they had an especial blessing from God. Our Christian names, my brethren, signify the same two things to us. As often as ever we are called by them, it is a token and pledge to us (whether we consider it or no) that we do indeed belong to God, to His holy nation and peculiar people; we are bought with a price, and cannot be as if we had no Divine Master. Again, our Christian

name is, to every one baptized in infancy, a token how greatly Christ has blessed us: that we are among His highly favoured, His own family, whom all generations shall call blessed. In these two respects, as set apart to be Christ's own, and as looked upon by Him with extraordinary love and pity, we resemble our fathers, the Jews of old: but in that which I am next to mention, we have greatly the advantage of them. Our Christian Name, besides all that has been mentioned, is a token of our new and heavenly nature, given to us in Holy Baptism, because we are then made members of Christ. This is more than had been promised to the greatest Prophet before our Saviour: but it is given at our Fonts to every little child. And the greatness of the gift you may partly understand by considering what was signified and given to those, whose names were from time to time changed and made new by God Almighty: how Jacob, for example, had his name changed to Israel, because he should be a mighty prince and king before God. This was a token that we Christians should be to our God a sort of kings, to reign over our own hearts and imaginations, and to command and order all outward things so, as that they shall work together for our good, we truly loving God: for such is His Promise. Again, Joshua had his name changed and made new; it meant "a Saviour," and it was altered so as to signify, "The Lord shall save:" and this was a token and pledge to him, that he should bring the people into the Holy Land; as our Christian Name is a pledge to us, that the great Almighty God hath indeed come down, suffered, and triumphed, to redeem us, and guide us to our everlasting Home, and help us to win it. Again, consider the names which were bestowed on different persons by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and see what a blessing they brought with them in each case. We may reckon as one of them the name of St. John Baptist, which was sent down from Heaven by special message through an Angel: and was given him, when the time came, not without remarkable miracles. That name John signifies gracious, and was a sign and token of God's true graciousness to every one coming to Christ. Again, when Simon son of Jona came to our Lord and He gave him the name of Cephas or Peter; i. e. of a Rock, firm and immoveable; this betokens the sure and certain hope, the unswerving faith, of one keeping baptismal grace. And so all along: Christian names, or names which were meant to prepare men to be Christians, as they have always in reality been given by Almighty God, so have they no less really brought each one its special blessings from Him.

Such names we know are commonly chosen by friends and parents, for love's sake: for love of some departed one, whom the new name will always bring to remembrance. And it is very well indeed, so to call to mind earthly friends departed. But it is far better, if we call to mind the whole body of heaven-friends, the saints and martyrs of old time, those who now reign with Christ, but with whom we are truly now in Communion, by virtue of the Communion of Saints. It is far better that whatever a man's own particular name may be, he shall never forget the Name which he bears in common with all his brethren, the holy Name of Christ, by which all Christians are called.

I would wish to put this very earnestly both to parents, kinsmen and friends, in regard of their children's names, and to each one among us in regard of his own name. Have we ever turned our minds, thoroughly and distinctly, to what Scripture tells us of the true meaning and virtue of the Christian names which we all bear? For instance we read in the book of Revelation in the verse out of which our text is taken, and it is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who pronounces the words, "Him that overcometh I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall no more go out, and I will write upon

him the Name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, new Jerusalem which cometh down from Heaven from My God: and I will write upon him My new Name.’² As much as to say: He that keeps his baptismal vow, Christ will give him a sure place in His Church, a strong place, a glorious place, where he shall be not only safe himself, but shall adorn and support in his measure the holy society to which he belongs, as pillars adorn and support a consecrated building. On that man, the finger of Christ will write, as it were, three names; the Name of the Father, the Name of the Church which is the New Jerusalem, and His own New Name. And these three names shall be so far one, as that they shall be written on each one of us by the gift of one Name which is called our Christian Name. Yes, Christian Brethren, however little we may think of it, the very name by which we are ordinarily named, the name by which our friends and neighbours address us, is the name of God sacramentally written upon us. As a man might write his name in a book, or have it engraved on an implement or article of furniture, or marked on a garment, that all might know it to be his, so the Almighty Everlasting God hath written His Own Name upon you and me, and upon all who have received a Name in Holy Baptism; from those who came to St. Peter on the Day of Pentecost, even unto the little babe, whose christening we have just now witnessed, we all truly bear written upon us the Name of Almighty God as our owner. Angels, good and bad, see the great Name written upon us: the bad with hate and fear and envy longing to steal us away for ever from Him Who so vouchsafes to own us; the good, with an earnest and longing desire to do His Will in watching and guarding us.

But further: as men for greater security commonly write the name of the place they belong to, as well as their own name in a book or anything else; so we see our Lord represents Himself as writing on each one of us, not only the Name of His God and Father, but also the Name of His City, New Jerusalem, the Church of God. Our Christian Name is a token that we are God’s Own, not only as all creatures are His, but as belonging to His holy Church.

Thirdly, our Lord says,—they are wonderful and mysterious words,—“I will write upon Him My new Name:” we are not only marked as belonging to His Father, and to His Church, but also as being parts and members of Him, in such sort that His Name is ours: the Name of Christ is the Name of each Christian: and the Name of Christ is our Lord’s new Name, because it was not His Name from eternity, but began to be His Name when He came into the world to redeem us: to be made Man, taking our nature upon Him. And thus each one’s Christian Name is in a manner three names in one, the Name of the Father to Whom we belong, the Name of the Church wherein we abide, and most especially the Name of Christ, Whose members we are, and through Whom we have our other blessings.

Now, Christian parents and friends, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, god-fathers and godmothers, kinsmen and kinswomen (I speak to you all, for which of you is there, who is not in one or other of these ways concerned with one or more of these little ones?) might it not be well for you to think more deeply than hitherto what a Christian Name is: what deep and high things we speak of when we talk of a Christian Name? You see a young child in the cradle, or an elder child moving about the house, and it is a delight to hear that child called by such and such a name, which brings back it may be the

thought of some dear parent, kinsman or friend far away, or departed this world. What if you were to think also of that other and greater and more blessed Name, which the same child surely bears written upon him, the Name of Christ, marking him as belonging to God, as abiding in His Holy Church, as a member of His Son? And if we think of this in respect to the young children in any way committed to our charge, surely we must think of it in respect of ourselves also. For we too, brethren, both old and young, have each of us a Christian name of our own. It was one of the first things we learnt in our early childhood: we may see by other children now, how we ourselves, many years ago, began to call ourselves by that name, and in our lisping way to make what we could of it. O that we would make much also of the Name of Christ, our Lord's new Name, which He wrote upon us also at our Christening, which we bear along with us through the world, and which unites us to the great Family in Heaven and earth, the Holy Catholic Church throughout all the world! O that Christians would learn to think a great deal of the name Christian, the true token of the real high birth of us all, and would take a holy and loving pride in walking worthy of their Baptismal Name! The Almighty Lord give us that good mind! that when the names of the whole world shall be called over at the last Day, we may answer to our names without that fearful confusion which must needs overwhelm all those, to whom their very Christian name will be a reproach, because they will be found to have led unchristian lives.