

A Pastoral Letter.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST,

God is laying upon us, at this hour in our lives, a great trust. Never in the world's history have such things happened as are happening now. And our Heavenly Father trusts us to face the solemn hour in quietness and confidence, with unshakable resolve, in the power of prayerful hope.

The Bishops of our English Dioceses, at their Whitsuntide meeting, resolved, in words now made public, that we should do what in us lies to rally Christian folk to loyal service and to persistent prayer. At their united wish we give you this message.

After ten months of war we see more clearly than at first the greatness and the severity of the ordeal which is putting the spirit of our Nation to the test. What is at stake is not only the honour of our plighted word, but our safety and freedom, and the place entrusted to us among the Nations of the earth. The spirit arrayed against us threatens the very foundations of civilized order in Christendom. It wields immense and ruthless power. It can only be decisively rolled back if we, for our part, concentrate the whole strength of body, mind, and soul which our Nation, our Empire, holds.

We therefore look with confidence to the Government, deliberately chosen to represent us all, that it shall take, and take with courage, whatever steps it considers to be necessary to summon and control every possible resource which we have of body and brain, of wealth and industry. We solemnly call upon all members of the Church, and urge upon all our fellow-citizens, to meet with glad and unstinted response whatever demands of service or of sacrifice the Government decides to make. A great war righteously waged calls out that spirit of willing sacrifice with a plainness and an intensity which nothing else can rival. On behalf of righteousness and in our country's cause there is no one, there is nothing, too dear or too sacred

to be offered. God has so taught us. Let us obey. By what we give and by what we are, may His will be done.

But we have more to say, and it matters most of all. It is the office of the Church of Christ to quicken and to guide the spiritual forces on which the strength, the steadfastness and the nobility of the national spirit depend. Are these forces as alert, as watchful, as persistent now as they ought to be? We have cause to fear that they have languished a little since the earlier weeks of the War. A reaction comes, and it may be that the Whitsuntide message of the Holy Spirit's gift is falling upon ears which have become less swift to hear. The reiterations of many months have been allowed to mar and dull the eagerness with which we prayed when the leaves were yellowing last autumn.

We are girding ourselves afresh for the material conflict, and for providing whatever is needed to insure its full and final success, but we lack determination and persistence in the output of our spiritual force. Foremost therein we place unhesitatingly the power of prayer. Twice since the War began we have bid people set apart a day for solemn intercession. Successive Forms of Prayer which we put forth have been everywhere used to help and guide the spirit of prayer, which we trust has taken a wider range and found more free and varied utterance. What we chiefly need at present is not a new appointment of special days or a new set of published Forms. Rather we want a more literal fulfilment of the plain duty of "continuing instant in prayer." The duty lies imperatively upon all who profess and call themselves Christians, but it grows incalculably in weight by the solemnity of these tremendous weeks of tense conflict, of crushing bereavement, and of continuous suspense and strain. Are the Christian people of our land putting into the high service of prayer anything like the energy and resolution, or the sacrifice of time and thought, which in many quarters are forthcoming with a ready will for other branches of national service?

Remember always that prayer means something even larger

and deeper than asking wisdom for our King and his Ministers, protection for our sailors and soldiers, comfort for the anxious and the bereaved, victory for the cause of our Nation and its Allies. Prayer implies a reverent sense of the Sovereignty of God, a hold even when we are bewildered in the darkness and confusion upon the certainty that He is set in the Throne judging right. And prayer means—for without this we dare not come into His Presence—the humble, deliberate, heartfelt confession of our sins : sins of selfishness and self-indulgence, sins of hardness and complacency, sins of sheer laziness and lack of thought. We have in days of quiet made too little of the claim of God upon our lives. Can we wonder that in stern hours like this it is hard to kindle afresh the deep and simple thoughts which we have allowed to grow languid and uncertain ? But such rekindling there must be. Give earnest heed to this most sacred of all duties. Set yourselves, even in the midst of the exigencies and passions of war, to be loyal to the spirit of Jesus Christ. Strive to keep openness of mind and soul for such message as the Holy Spirit may reveal to us at an hour when God is judging what is base and inspiring what is best in England's life. He may speak in the ordered ministry of word and sacrament, or in the roar of battle, or in the silence of a shadowed home. He does, for we have all seen it, give, to those who lie open to His gift, courage and understanding and patience and high hope. "O put your trust in Him always, ye people ; pour out your hearts before Him ; for God is our hope."

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Whitsuntide, 1915.

