

The National Mission and the Need of Instruction in a Method of Prayer.

THE war has brought to many of us a realization of the state of religion amongst the ordinary men who compose our armies at the front such as we hardly grasped at all before. What we have come to see is that for the most part they know little of the facts of our Lord's life. The instruction they received in Day and Sunday Schools has been almost entirely forgotten, they passed the Diocesan Inspector, but the teaching never awoke personal religion, never entered into their lives; it began and ended with their lessons, and naturally faded away from them when they left school and went to work, just as their Churchgoing came to an end at the same time. It is true that they still vaguely believe in God, but they have no idea that it is necessary for men to approach Him in prayer. They think that it is sufficient, as they say, to do no harm to any one, though this has been a good deal upset by their having to fight. Many a man has said to me that he could not be religious when he is trying to shoot Germans. Churchgoing is not considered as a duty, but as a means of passing away a spare hour happily, and, since they could not understand the service, they found it dull and gave it up.

And I think we may see how this state of things has come about in spite of all our teaching, catechizing, and church activity. In spite of all our Religious Education we have never been able to teach these men to pray in such a way that they might learn to believe in and dwell upon Christ, and to plead with God through Him. The Collects which we taught them have never opened for them the one Way in which we may approach God, the Way which is Jesus Christ, but have tended rather to fix their minds on themselves, their sins, their failings and their weaknesses, and to leave them there.

Compare the result of our teaching and the teaching of St. Paul. In 1 Corinthians i. 2, we read that the Christians were known as those who "*in every place call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" which seems to mean that when they prayed their minds were filled with all that Christ is, all that He has done, and still does for us now in Heaven. And they pleaded with Him by the

merits He won for us by each event of His life, from His Nativity in Bethlehem to His Agony in the Garden, His carrying of the Cross up Calvary, His precious Death and Burial—to His Resurrection, Ascension, and prevailing Intercession for us in Heaven. The result in the case of those early Christians was that they gained such love to our Lord in their Prayer, that rather than forsake Him they were enabled to endure the terrible persecutions of which we read in history, and at last conquered the Roman Empire which had done all in its power to stamp them out. I believe that we shall never get our people to grasp that our Religion involves a real approach to God in prayer, and that they need salvation through Christ, until, like St. Paul, we teach them to “*call upon the Name of the Lord.*”

There is a method of prayer which has been used in the Church for hundreds of years, by which I think we may best do this. According to it we repeat in order the principal events of the life of our Lord, and turn them into prayer. We may say each petition either three times, as our Lord said the same words three times in His prayer in Gethsemane, or even ten times, followed by the Lord’s Prayer, in order that we may gain more time to ponder on each event as we plead it. Thus—

“By Thy holy Nativity in Bethlehem, save us and help us, O Lord.”

“By Thy carrying of the Cross, save us and help us, O Lord.”

“By Thy precious Death and Burial, save us and help us, O Lord.”

“By Thy glorious Resurrection, save us and help us, O Lord.”

“By the sending of the Holy Ghost, save us and help us, O Lord.”

And so on, “save us,” that is, from sin, from our enemies, from all that would harm our soul or body, and from eternal death.

I believe that in such a simple recollection in prayer of the Gospel mysteries we should find a return to the prayer of the early Christians, when they called upon the Name of the Lord. We should plant more deeply in our hearts and memories the knowledge of our Lord’s life. We should be pleading His merits as our one ground of acceptance. Such a prayer as this we can use anywhere, or at any time, for it can easily be remembered, since it leads us through the life of our Lord in order. It can never be outgrown, for we can never exhaust the significance of each of the sacred mysteries which we plead. Hence the child, or the newly con-

verted man or woman, can use it side by side with the saint far advanced in the spiritual life. It will be found to create an atmosphere of religion enabling us to withstand the constant depression of the world's atmosphere.

Perhaps the same events in our Lord's Life that we follow in order in our prayer might be made also the basis of the teaching in the Mission—thus: The Annunciation—the secret impulses given us by the grace of the Holy Spirit, only partially understood at the time. The Visitation—the sympathy and help we get from those older than ourselves, and more advanced in the spiritual life. The Nativity—Christ's personal coming to us at a definite time. The Presentation—our offering of ourselves to God. The Finding in the Temple—Christ lost in the sin and turmoil and criticism of the world, and found again in His House of Prayer. And so on, to the Cross, with its teaching of the sinfulness of sin, and its consequence, and remedy. The Resurrection—the new life we must find and live while still in this world. The sending of the Holy Ghost to guide and strengthen us, and the continual Presence of our Lord with us, alway even unto the end of the world. At the conclusion of each sermon on one event or other of our Lord's life we should turn the thoughts elicited into prayer; and so by our recollection of the mysteries of the Incarnation we should be *calling upon the Name of the Lord*, sure of our acceptance with Him as we do so. My own experience assures me that in this way, as I explain in my little book "A Chaplet of Prayer," a habit of prayer might be built up, begun in the preparation for the National Mission, that would not be lightly given up after it is over. I believe it would be found the means by which many a man would be enabled to hold on to Christ in the dark days we have all of us at some time or other to go through, who without some such method might all too easily drift away, and be lost.

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