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A SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE VISITATION

OF THE

RIGHT REV. LORD BISHOP OF SYDNEY

AND METROPOLITAN,

IN

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH, SYDNEY,

On Wednesday, February 19th, 1862,

BY THE

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PUBLISHED AT THE DESIRE OF THE BISHOP AND CLERGY.

Sydney:

PRINTED BY JOSEPH COOK & CO.,
370, GEORGE STREET.

PRAYER BEFORE SERMON.

LET us pray for CHRIST's Holy Catholic Church, especially for that Reformed and Apostolical Branch, of which we are Members ;—and herein for our Sovereign Lady Victoria, by the Grace of God of the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland Queen, over all powers and in all causes ecclesiastical and civil, within her dominions supreme, for Albert Prince of Wales and all the Royal Family ;—for the Ministers and Stewards of God's Holy Word and Sacraments, and in this place more particularly for the Right Rev. Frederick, Lord Bishop and Metropolitan, and the Presbyters and Deacons of this Diocese.

And that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life in all godliness and honesty, let us pray for all who are in authority in this Colony ;—for His Excellency the Governor, their Honors the Judges, the Parliament, and Magistrates, that each and all in their respective stations may truly and impartially minister justice to the punishment of wickedness and vice, and to the maintainance of true religion and virtue.

Let us pray also for the people of the land, that they may live in the knowledge and fear of God, in dutiful allegiance to the Queen, and in Christian charity with each other.

To these, our prayers, let us add our grateful praises for the mercies that we have already received ;—for our Creation, Preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for God's inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST, for the means of grace which we now enjoy, and for the hope of glory which is held out to us hereafter.

Finally let us praise God for all His Servants who have departed this life in His faith and fear, beseeching Him to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of His Heavenly Kingdom.

These prayers and praises let us offer up in the name and through the merits of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST, who has taught and commanded us when we pray to say—

“ Our Father, &c.”

ACTS XX. 28.

Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

THESE well known words are found in that affectionate address delivered by St. Paul to the elders of the Church, whom he had summoned to meet him at Miletus, before his departure for Jerusalem.

There is not, in the pages of Inspiration, a passage more full of holy warning and encouragement, of weighty counsel and advice for the discharge of the duties of our office, as Ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, than this solemn and pathetic charge of the Apostle, in which appealing to their own knowledge and observation, he speaks of his labours in the service of his crucified Master, and proposes to the Clergy of Jonia, assembled at his Visitation, his own example of zeal and self-denial and devotion and faithful teaching, as a model of their imitation when he should be withdrawn from them.

The wise man has said, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be : and that which is done is that which shall be done : and there is no new thing under the sun." And the occasion on which we are met together seems to illustrate this, as it carries our thoughts back to that interesting scene recorded in this chapter. Interesting indeed to us, and interesting and marvellous must it be to the Apostle, if permitted to look down from the realms of happiness upon what is passing on this earth, to find those Asiatic Churches which his zeal had planted, and which he had nourished and watched over with tears and supplications, swept away from the Christian world, while in this far off region, of whose existence he had no conception, a scene is taking place not very dissimilar to that at Miletus ; and the chief Pastor summons his elders together before his departure from them, happily

for us not to go where bonds and imprisonment await him, but to receive the right hand of fellowship from his fellow prelates in our fatherland, and to take counsel with them for the confirmation and enlargement of the Church.

Happier too than the Ephesian elders, we sorrow not as those who shall see his face no more, but look forward in hope to the period when his mission ended and his expectations fulfilled, he will return with recruited strength again to preside over us.

May God pour upon him abundantly the spirit of knowledge and wisdom, while removed by distance, not in heart, from us, and to us who remain the graces of watchfulness and zeal and Godly concord, that we may "take heed to ourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost has made us overseers, to feed the Church of God which He has purchased" for His own use, "with His own blood."

Taking the great Apostle as our guide I propose to offer a few remarks on the manner in which he illustrated in his own conduct the admonitory precept which he delivered to the elders at Miletus.

Of all the men who have served Christ, from the commencement of the Church to the present day, St. Paul is the one who, humanly speaking, has been the most useful.

He was the first who comprehended the whole bearing of the new religion. He was the first who received as a principle and carried into practice that great truth that the Gospel belongs to the whole world, and that if Moses came for the sake of one people, Christ came for the sake of all: He was the first who saw with the eye of faith how far Calvary surpassed Sinai.

So also it was with St. Paul that Christianity went forth out of Judæa, and presented itself to the world, demanded its attention and homage, and obtained it from Jerusalem even unto Rome, through all the glory and pride of the Roman Empire.

It was with St. Paul that Christianity went forth to combat not only Pharisaism in its Synagogues, but Idolatry in its Temples, and Philosophy in its Schools. The Apostle obeyed faithfully the command of CHRIST to "go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," but from city to city, after the blasphemies and rejection of the Jews, he turned to the Gentiles; where he failed to succeed in convincing a Jewish Synagogue, he converted an Heathen Temple, and so astonishing

was his success that in every place in which he preached CHRIST and Him crucified, he left at his departure a Christian Church.

1.—One element of his success, under the blessing of GOD, consisted in his ability to "*make himself all things to all men.*"

He taught everywhere the same Christianity, while he adapted his teaching to the genius, and to the circumstances of the people whom he addressed. He never made the slightest concession to error, nor parleyed with impurity, nor lowered his voice before vice in high places; but preaching the same faith, and the same morality to all, "testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks, repentance towards God and faith in our LORD JESUS CHRIST," he accommodated his exhortations with surpassing wisdom to the comprehension and the feelings of his hearers.

To the Jews he spake of their prophets—to the Gentiles of their philosophers and poets. His eloquence is Jewish at Jerusalem, Athenian at Athens. In his sermons and epistles, he never loses sight of the place in which he is in, nor of the peculiarities of the people whom he is addressing. His letter to the Judaizing Christians of Rome, whom he had not then visited, is very different from the touching letter which he writes to the blessed Church at Philippi.

The same hand which commends with a love so affecting the slave Onesimus, brands with an epithet of infamy the tyrant Nero; and availing himself of every topic that could be turned to the benefit of his hearers, even of paganism in order to convince the pagans, he declares the unknown God to the Athenians on the hill at Athens, as on the steps of the temple at Jerusalem he proclaims Jehovah.

In this way he made his ministry conform as it were to the spirit of the age, without ever abating one jot a title of the truth; and if I may make use of an expression homely but expressive, St. Paul in order to convert the world took the world as he found it.

My brethren in the ministry, with the authority of so great an example, we must take the world as we find it. Unworthy as some of us are to be reckoned among the same order, yet clothed with the same sacred ministry, as the apostle, however faintly we may be following his glorious steps, yet if we aspire to the same end we must walk by the same rule.

It is a great error to enter upon our holy work without well considering the people among whom we are called to labour. To imagine that all sinners are led into sin in the same manner—that all worldly-minded have the same worldly-mindedness—all the incredulous the same incredulity—all the indifferent the same amount of indifference, is to set up a system of which a very brief experience will show us the fallacy.

The Clergyman in his parish ought, so to speak, to take his people in the fact, to place himself in such a position towards them, by the careful study of their characters as to be able to say with Nathan of old "Thou art the man."

Then will his work be really useful. Then like St. Paul he will be all things to all men; he will have regard to their habits and their opinions, to their position and their circumstances, to their prejudices and their failings; and by this course of conduct, without surrendering or compromising one holy truth of doctrine or of morals, if God approve and bless his humble but faithful efforts, he will have a right to say to his own congregation as St. Paul did to the assembly at Miletus "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God."

2.—Another feature in the Apostles character was his entire renunciation of self, and universal devotion of body, soul, and spirit to the service of his LORD.

Numerous and differing as are human callings, there are in reality but two ways of passing through life and occupying our station in the world. A man is either a public or a private individual.

The individual in private life, belongs, so to speak, to himself, he passes his time as he wills: leisure, recreation, work, are things which he arranges at his own pleasure—he has to render account of his time to no one but to himself and to God who will demand it.

The man in a public station does not belong to himself; he has devoted whatever he possesses, his ability, his time, his labour, to the service of others; he stands pledged, and he must keep his pledge, he has abdicated the right of saying, my time, my life is my own.

Again the individual in private life may spare himself as much as he chooses; it is true that this liberty has its dangers, it too often ends

in sparing himself too much, for men are always inclined to follow the dangerous principle of giving themselves as little trouble as possible.

But the man in a public station cannot spare himself if he is faithful ; if he spares himself he leaves a void in human affairs which was intended to be filled up. By his unfaithfulness he gives himself his own dismissal without first seeing that his place is supplied by another.

And if these remarks apply generally to the secular ministries of this world, they do so with tenfold force to the sacred ministry.

In one of the many professions which have the social interests, the science, or the vanities of this world for their object, to spare ourselves is to do wrong to our fellows *in this life* ; eternity loses nothing from this absence of work—all the mischief resulting from this negligence is in this world where the results and advantages of labour would have been felt.

But in the offices of the sacred ministry, to spare ourselves is to do wrong *throughout eternity* to those who ought to have been saved ;—it is to put the world in the first place, and Heaven in the second—it is to offer only those easy sacrifices which the living piety of David rejected—it is to serve CHRIST as little as possible, and to prefer self to Him.

The Clergyman who does only half his duty, does it not at all ; the half which he neglects turns to his shame, and will serve to his condemnation ; it testifies that he has been a slothful and unfaithful servant. If a Paul overwhelmed with humility at his short comings could say “who is sufficient for these things ?” what a solemn lesson does it read to every one of us, to strive, to labour, to work diligently while the day lasts. It is as impossible to be almost a Clergyman as it was for Agrippa to be almost a Christian.

3.—Another principle in which the Apostle acted in taking heed unto himself, and to the people amongst whom he laboured, was to endeavour so to live as “to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.”

If under every circumstance of life a good reputation obtained by accident or fraud, if unmerited thanks and praises embarrass and humiliate a man, how will it be for the unfaithful Clergyman, the minister of a Church which he is deceiving, and of a God whom he cannot deceive. ☩

A private individual if he is moved by interest to act dishonestly, can conceal himself when the blush of shame comes upon his face, and can withdraw from the observation and intercourse of his fellow men.

But where shall the Clergyman go, when the Church is everywhere? Can he hide himself when the people are waiting for their accustomed instruction? Can he hide himself when the sick are about to die and call for his ministrations? Can he hide himself when the mourners are in trouble and ask for words of comfort at his lips?—For it is not in our public functions only,—in these holy courts—that we have need to be true, and to be able to lean upon the testimony of our consciences for encouragement and support. A Clergyman is a Clergyman everywhere. His ministry accompanies him wherever he directs his steps, wherever he uplifts his voice.

And not only so—but in our retirement for meditation or for study, in the course of our daily recurring labor of preparation for the pulpit, if our consciences do not bear us testimony, how shall we dare to undertake the task? Every text we turn to will be a reproach; our choice will not be free; our very preaching will be continually accusing and condemning us. This passage will be too pointed—this subject too direct—this example too full of allusions to embarrass and confound; and the unhappy minister will be driven to search the pages of Holy Writ, not to seek out the most salutary counsel, or the most appropriate example—or the most timely warning, to set before his people, but some vague and general truth, which is applicable to all, and which carries with it no condemnation to himself.

One of the greatest privileges of the minister of CHRIST, is to be able to go amongst his people, to remind them that they are only stewards of the property which their LORD has committed to their trust, and to tell them of their duty to minister these things for the service of God and His poor; but how shall that man exhort others to be charitable and self-denying if his own conscience does not bear the testimony of his “being merciful after his power?” And so of all other duties. How will *he* be able to speak of resignation who is impatient at the will of God concerning himself? Of forgiveness, if he has not forgiven his brethren his trespasses? Of peace, if his house is a scene of confusion and domestic tyranny? Of holy joy, if he has no share in it—of sorrow,

if his heart is selfish and hardened—of death, if he is living in the terrors of it—of immortality, if he has no expectation of its glories ?

We must endeavour so to live before our people that they may have confidence in us ;—that we may be able in all godly sincerity to appeal to them, how that “ from our first coming in among them we have not only declared to them the whole counsel of God,” but by our walk and conversation have set before them the example of how they ought to live.

Unless we have this testimony from them, what fruits can we look for ? What good can that Clergyman expect to effect whose people distrust him ? Who will open his heart to him for advice ? Who will consult him on his perplexities and misgivings ? Who will confess his sinfulness in order that he may be taught the way of repentance ? Who will send for him in his hour of sickness or of sorrow ? Who will seek comfort, when the shadows of death are gathering around, from the prayers of a man whose fidelity he questions, or the Holy Sacraments at the hands of one whose purity he disbelieves ?

The Sacred Symbols of the Body and Blood of our atoning LORD lose nothing of their virtue even though administered by sinful men, and the waters of Holy Baptism flow pure and undefiled from the hands of the profane—but what a solemn mockery and awful thing it is to the wretched man who ministers them in unbelief of their efficacy, or in indifference to their holy design.

If, brethren, we are not in our place here, there is no place for us in the world. What good results can we expect by sermons however eloquent from a people who have no faith in our sincerity. What influence will the words of one day have with those who see them at variance with our actions on the other six days of the week ? What moral power will exhortations have with those who will judge us as our Lord did the Pharisees, “ They say, but they do not ? ”

If our people have no confidence in us, if they distrust our sincerity, our ministry will be in their eyes a scandal and a stumbling block.

And now Brethren, I will not detain you by any further observations from those weightier words of counsel and wisdom which we have been called together to receive this day.

