

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

(By the RIGHT REVEREND MONSIGNOR POWER, V.F., for the N.Z. Tablet.)

15—THE CHURCH A SOCIETY.

In this and the following chapter we shall see that, in sending the Apostles, Our Lord formed a Society of which they were the germ, and through which the souls of men should be brought into union with Himself. Two courses were open: He could take each individual soul and deal with it directly without the ministry of men, or He could gather all believers into one visible society, through which He would ordinarily convey to them His graces. That He chose the second method is the teaching of the Church. Christ did not ignore the fact that man was a social being, destined to pass his earthly span of life in the society of his fellowmen, and as a social being He made provision for him, provision that was in harmony with his constitution.

While we insist upon the Visible Church as the covenanted means of union and the ordinary channel of God's grace, we must be careful to bear in mind that each individual human soul has also its direct approach to God and its thousand direct ways of obtaining His favor. But this again, provided His own established Kingdom of grace, the Church, is not culpably repudiated. It is sometimes said by thoughtless critics of Catholicity that the Church, by insisting on the ministry of a Visible Kingdom, destroys individuality in her children. Such critics have never read the lives of the saints, and have never suspected their intimate relations with Christ, the dear Lover of their souls. It is really because of their secure position in the Kingdom that the saints were enabled to give free scope to their originality. Indeed, in every generation of Christian time the saints of the Church, from Agnes and Cecilia to the Little Flower of Jesus just canonised, have exhibited to the world such arresting individuality as has never, and can never, be found outside. Can I not go direct to Jesus? Of course you can, but you are not likely to win His favor if you reject the ordinary means of grace set up by Him for the sanctification of "every creature."

So much said, let us now see how and why Our Lord set up His Visible Kingdom of God, which we call the Church. Ecclesiastical writers draw out the analogy between the office of Adam the first father of the race, and that of Christ, Who came as a second Adam to redeem it and restore the original gift of divine sonship. Will the reconstructive process be analogous to the destructive? Will the social predispositions of man be still taken into account by Christ, or will they now be changed for the purpose of his redemption? It was as a social being that man received the gift of Original Justice. Will Christ now reverse the process in the work of reconstruction, ignore man's social instinct, and treat him merely as an individual alone and apart?

Let us consider in greater detail how the original gift was made to Adam, and how it was to be passed on through him to all mankind. Having decreed to make man to

His own image and likeness, God necessarily endowed him with intellect and free will; but in all other gifts He was free both in the manner of giving and in the degree and on the conditions on which He would give. Therefore we are not discussing what God could do in this case, but what He has been pleased to do. The gift of divine sonship or grace was not a necessary part of Adam's nature, it was a free addition to his nature. What were its conditions, in what capacity did Adam receive it? Not simply as an individual, but as head of the race that was to spring from him. There is an absolute unity between the head and the members of the human race. That every member of it, including Eve, sprang from Adam, is revealed in the mysterious manner of Eve's creation described in the Sacred Scripture. Not only was she, as the inspired Adam declared, one flesh with him, but the race springing from them both was one flesh with him likewise. Thus, as head of the whole race, one flesh with them all, he held in his keeping for that race the supernatural gift of grace, he had it in his power to pass that magnificent inheritance to every member of it. It would be a supernatural race because it would have a supernatural father. To Adam then as head of the human society the gift of grace was made, and to all others only in and through that society of which he was head and they were the members.

But this power of passing on to his race the supernatural gift of grace was to repose in Adam only so long as he remained faithful to God, and Adam did not remain faithful. He broke the Divine command and lost the gift, and, losing it, lost it not for himself alone, but for the race also. Henceforth, he can communicate only disinheritance. This is what we call Original Sin, a personal sin in Adam, but a sin of the race likewise, since the race was summed up in him. From the day of Adam's fall human history makes sad reading. His children, with darkened intellects and weakened wills and a propensity to evil, began to add their own personal sins to the original sin of the race, until at the time of the Incarnation the world had become so corrupt that it was all but beyond redemption. That human nature that was sent as God's champion on the earth to do battle with Lucifer, proved recreant in the fight. Men now found themselves hopeless in face of the double debt they had to pay, for the sin of the race and for their own personal sins. To pay this debt flesh and blood were powerless. But just then, God sent His Son into the world to rescue and restore poor, fallen man.

"O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,

A second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.

"O wisest love! that flesh and blood
Which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail.

"And that a higher gift than grace
Should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and His very Self,
And essence all divine."

Christ has come to redeem man; what provision will He make for man's constancy? To give a safe answer to this question we must bear in mind the nature of man and his position in the world around him. Human nature is now a fallen nature and must bear henceforth the consequences of its fall. Though fallen, it remains social, so that the social life in the midst of which the individual man finds himself is a fallen social life. The forces of this life are arrayed against the individual that would rise above them. A social being is influenced by the life in the midst of which he lives. Now, in very fact this influence has become an evil influence and is under the sway of an evil power, under the power of the Devil, who is the great enemy of man. The ideals, the education, the culture, the habits, the companionships, of social life are set out in battle array against the individual. How could one man, left to himself, hope to stand against such an entrenched and organised foe?

In the reconstruction of the human race, therefore, Christ will make wise provision: He will not leave man to fight as an individual against a powerful and organised foe. He will form a new society, whose headship will be permanent in Himself, and in which all the members will form one new race with Him. It will be known as the Kingdom of Truth, the House or Temple of Christ, the Body and Bride of Christ. It will be fitly compacted and jointed together by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. Its divine life, first communicated in Baptism, will be perfected in the Blessed Eucharist through which there will be a mutual abiding between Christ and the Christian, and between Christian and Christian, a coherence of the natural and mystical Body, making Christ and the Church one, as Adam and his race were one. Henceforth we shall have two Kingdoms or Societies, one of evil and one of good, one founded upon sin and one upon grace, the children of grace no longer separated into individuals but joined together in a common spirit. Common ideals, the same supernatural education, the same culture, the same spiritual companionship, will create in them a solidarity that will enable them to withstand and triumph over the fiercest onslaughts of a common foe. The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, will stand now in organised opposition against the body set up by Satan, and God's people, united in a compact body, need no longer fear the issue. Such, as we shall see in the next chapter, is the dispensation of Christ and the teaching of the Sacred Scriptures.

Man's greatest enemy is himself. If everyone should be as careful of deserving an honest opinion of himself as he is of securing the good opinion of others there would be a vast difference in the standing of the majority of mankind. Look carefully into yourself and discover your own flaws.

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