

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

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

(24) THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS THE OTHER MARKS.

THE MARK OF HOLINESS.

The Catholic Church is the one, unbroken Church of Christ that has come down to us from Apostolic times; therefore, she is holy in her Founder. Nothing could be holier than her purpose, which is the sanctification of the souls of her children. The means which she uses in carrying out this purpose are holy. Holy are the sacraments with which Christ dowered her, and which she has preserved in all their purity. These she has at all times defended and protected, it is by means of these she produces holiness in her people. History attests her struggles in the days of her infancy with lustful kings and a licentious soldiery, how she overcame them all, and gained her greatest victory by turning many of them into saints. In the view of history she has been the constant upholder of a high morality, never swerving from her path, defying alike both bribes and threats. The world still admires and wonders at her high moral standards. Indeed, a chief complaint of the world is that those standards are in their essence above the powers of human nature. But she will never lower them, for she has forces within herself to raise her children above nature. To each several child of hers, her constant cry is "*ascende superius*," higher still! History marks the sound principle upon which all her sanctity is based, that faith without good works is dead. History declares that it was she who taught the purity of marriage and the sacredness of the home; that it was she who gave birth to the virgin-bands that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes, that it was she who produced the priesthood that has girdled the earth with the Holy Mass.

And what history attests for the early and succeeding ages, the current news in the daily press witnesses to in this adulterous and sinful generation. Who stands by the fount of the race to-day? Who is the defender of marriage? Who confronts tyranny in high places, and in defence of marriage braves imprisonment and fine? Who has Christian schools to mould her youth to sanctity? Who but the Holy Catholic Church alone? No wonder she should have saints, no wonder she alone should be the mother of saints, no wonder that those outside her fold, when they would honor sanctity realised in holy lives, must come to her to borrow the names of her heroes, the athletes of Christ! She alone has been able to produce and hold up to the admiring gaze of the world men and women and children who have been eminent for holiness in all ages. Thus she manifests herself to the world as the unspotted Bride of Christ, the Blessed Vision of Peace, the Holy Mount of Sion.

The names of her saints are "sweet as honey in every mouth, and as music at a banquet of wine." In their lives they show the beauty of the life of Jesus, and make it easy for us who love them to walk in the way of perfection. They make us ashamed of our sloth and stimulate us to better things. They

keep the power of Jesus Christ still with us to strengthen human life, and foster in us the love of God. They are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. They teach us that holiness does not depend on circumstances of place, of birth, or education, but, under God's grace, on our own individual will fortified by prayer, discipline, and the Sacraments. Their head-roll has the names of men and women from every walk and condition of life. Kings and queens, soldiers, statesmen, lawyers, physicians, merchants, domestic servants, peasants, slaves, beggars, are found in the court of the King of Kings, taking precedence by the degree of holiness they had attained. Some of them wrought the conversion of nations. Some of them cultivated desert wastes, unhealthy swamps, rugged heights, and taught the principles of agriculture to barbaric men, whom they later made the civilised fathers of many of our present European races. Some guided the Church through great trials, some set the world ablaze with intellectual light, some devoted themselves to the poor, to the slave, to the outcast, to the incurable and to the else deserted dead. Some saved the people from the tyranny of cruel oppressors. But the litany would be unending. They were all children during life of the Catholic Church. It is she who trained and matured them, who inspired, directed, and supported them, and finally, setting the aureole of sanctity on their brows, raised them to her altars. The Catholic Church has the mark of sanctity: she is holy in her Founder, in her great purpose, in the holy means she uses to carry out this purpose, and in the number of her children who have been eminent for holiness in every age.

SHE HAS THE THIRD MARK OF CATHOLICITY.

The Catholic Church teaches all the doctrines of Christ. She makes no distinction between "fundamentals and non-fundamentals." She claims and exercises the right to go everywhere and teach all men. This is Catholicity, and she, therefore, is Catholic. She was Catholic even when she was a small body, a mere mustard seed in Jerusalem, she had a capacity for growing, and expanding, and filling the whole earth. She was not a century old before she had passed the limits of the great Roman empire and converted barbarous peoples; and in each succeeding century since, her power of expansion and her actual fruitfulness are the wonder of those outside her fold. In her the name Catholic and the thing Catholicity are in harmony. Such is the claim of Cardinal Newman: "Christianity is not a matter of opinion, it has a bodily occupation in the world. It is one continuous fact or thing. Where is this thing in this age which in the first age was the Catholic Church? The answer is undeniable: the Church called Catholic now is that very same thing, in

hereditary descent, in organisation, in principles, in external relations which was called the Catholic Church then. The name and the thing have ever gone together."

Her growth may be traced in historical works from the days of Pentecost to post-Apostolic days, through the centuries immediately following, through the time of the dispersion of the Roman empire, through the middle ages, and the sixteenth century and the centuries since. It may be all read in the glowing pages of Mr. Belloc's *Europe and the Faith*, or in the writings of other reputable historians.

That Catholicity is necessary for the due performance of the Church's work, Cardinal Newman illustrates by the victory of St. Thomas of Canterbury over Henry II. "Of course: a branch Church, with the Catholic dogma and with saints, cannot be; but supposing the English Church had been such at the time of that contest, it would, humanly speaking, have inevitably been shattered to pieces, or else its saints got rid of, its Erastianising bishops made its masters, and, ultimately, its dogma corrupted, and the times of Henry VIII anticipated; this would have been but for its intercommunion with the rest of Christendom and the supremacy of Rome.

Indeed, who could ever entertain such a dream as that a circumscribed religious society, with the awfulness of a divine origin, the sacredness of immemorial custom, or the prestige of many successes, while standing on its own ground, and simply subject in its constituent members to the civil power, should be able to assert ecclesiastical claims which are to impede the free action of that same sovereign power, and to insult its majesty?—a native hierarchy, growing out of its very soil, challenging it, standing breast to breast against it, breathing defiance into its very face, striking at it, full and straight—why, as men are constituted, such a nuisance as they would call it would be intolerable. The rigid, unelastic wooden contrivance would be shattered into bits by the very recoil and jar of the first blow it was rash enough to venture.

But matters would not go so far; the blandishments, the alliances, the bribes, the strong arm of the world, would bring it to its senses, and humble it in its own sight ere it had opportunity to be so valiant. The world would simply overmaster the presumptuous claimant to divine authority, and would use for its own purposes the slave whom it had dishonored. It would set her to sweep its courts, or keep the line of its triumphant march, who had thought to reign among the stars of heaven."

Thomas of Canterbury won because he had the Universal Church with him; but modern English religion has fallen into the sad state described by the Cardinal because it is not one thing with Catholicism.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC

From the Apostles she clearly traces her unbroken descent: the Pope succeeds St. Peter, and the bishops in union with him are the legitimate successors of the Apostles, who themselves were bound to Peter in unbreakable bonds. The parent trunk remains while

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