

# The Church Guardian

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## CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY.

FEBRUARY	1.—SEPTUAGESIMA.
"	2.—PURIFICATION OF VIRGIN MARY.
"	8.—SEXAGESIMA.
"	15.—QUINQUAGESIMA.
"	18.—ASH WEDNESDAY.
"	22.—First Sunday in Lent.
"	24.—St. Matthias, Ap. and M.
"	25.—EMBER DAY.
"	27.—EMBER DAY.
"	28.—EMBER DAY.

## First Sunday in Lent.

The first step is taken, in the services of this day, in that spiritual course which leads, through fasting and mortification, to sanctification and holiness. The example of our blessed Lord is proposed to us, and we are reminded that He fasted forty days and forty nights before he entered on his ministry. We are taught that he did this for our sakes; for his own, we know that this could not be necessary, either to subdue sin or to acquire strength to resist temptation. It was that all righteousness might be fulfilled, and that we, led and strengthened by His example, might, through the means He deigned to sanctify, be enabled to attain unto holiness. The prayer, then, of the collect is, that He would give us grace to use such abstinence that, our flesh being subdued to the spirit, we may ever obey His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness. Abstinence is not here spoken of as having any virtue in itself, but *such* abstinence as may conduce to the end proposed. This may vary in different persons, but in all it is to be *such* as to subdue the flesh to the spirit? Israel is reproached that when he had "waxed fat and grown thick, and become covered with fatness, then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." (Deut. xxxii. 15); and we are constantly warned in the Apostolic writings of the struggle that is taking place between the flesh and the spirit, they being contrary the one to the other. Who does not know this also by practical experience, that the spirit and the intellect, to be clear and unclouded, must be brought to this by such abstinence or temperate use of food as will not give an unhealthy preponderance to the flesh over the spirit. Such, then, is to be our state, that, in this solemn season of preparation, we may be ready to obey whatever godly motions the Holy Spirit may breathe into our hearts, in righteousness and true

holiness; that, in our outward demeanour and devout carriage of ourselves during this season of humiliation, the honor and glory of our Heavenly Master may be promoted—men, by our good works which they shall behold, glorifying our Father which is in heaven. The subject, in the peculiar view taken of it in the collect, is continued both in the epistle and gospel. In the one—the epistle—we have the prayer of the Apostle, that his disciples in Corinth may not "have received the grace of God in vain"; and in this we may read our caution against misunderstanding the nature of the exercise our Church proposes to us. The flesh is to be subdued to the spirit; therefore it is that in various ways we are to prepare to submit ourselves to a wholesome discipline; afflictions and trials are among the most ordinary means of subduing the soul to God, and purifying it unto holiness, and through them it constantly happens that we are brought to think more earnestly and deeply of those great truths that concern our salvation. These, then, have the same effect as that intended in humiliation and abstinence; both bring us to obey the godly motions of the Spirit in righteousness and true holiness. These, then, and their effects are set before us in the epistle as teaching us to receive them with thankfulness, and apply them to our spiritual profit. The gospel brings under consideration the example of our Lord, and teaches us to weigh well its application. He was led up to be tempted. It was after he had fasted forty days and nights that He was assailed by the tempter. And how did He resist the temptation? Why, with the same arms which He has placed in our hands. Who can doubt that with a word He might have put an end to the temptation? Or who, when considering Who it was that underwent the temptation, can doubt what the collect teaches, that it was for our sakes? Being, then, for our sakes, he used the same weapons that we have through His grace received. He fasted forty days and forty nights, thus wholly subduing the flesh to the spirit, and then, in the spiritual armor of God, and with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, defeated the tempter. Many are the lessons which each answer of our Saviour's from God's Word would teach; but let us confine ourselves to the general deduction that it is by such abstinence as our circumstances require, and by the use of the Word of God, that the purpose the Church proposes to us is to be accomplished; that, whatever be the means, whether it be abstinence, or affliction, or trial, God's honor may be promoted in our obedience to His godly motions in righteousness and true holiness.—*Ext.*

## A Word to Sunday-School Teachers.

Whatever was once the case, to-day no Christian man or woman can ignore or despise the Sunday-School. It is part of our social life and religious system, and compels attention; it is *here*, and must be considered. And yet, perhaps no institution has so completely changed its character since it was first established. Originally contented—in days of little education—with giving instruction how to read, it has grown into a most important department of religious instruction, and the teacher has become very largely a sub-pastor to his class. Now it is not merely Scripture history, geography and biography that is to be taught, but the end chiefly and mainly in view is the bringing of the young souls into contact with the living Christ, to

be their Saviour and Lord. If that be so, it will be worth while to re-examine our plans of working, to see if they have developed with the matured aspects of Sunday-School work.

The first question which intelligence asks concerning its acts is, Why do I attempt it? Man is a thinking being, and to act without reason is to unman ourselves. Besides, in God's esteem actions are weighed, and the balances turn with Him on the agate bearings of "motive." The rich man who gives his cheque for a hundred dollars to add a relish to his morning reading of the newspaper where he sees his name in the subscription list, has his action weighed as well as the servant girl who gives her mite, and who cannot afford to buy a newspaper to see it acknowledged in the gross as, "sums under \$1," so much. It is as well, therefore, if we have undertaken to teach, to ask, Why? Surely the answer ought to be, *because we love the young, and wish to save them.* We must be right here or all else will be wrong; only love will endure the strain in times of depression, trial and disappointment. Love is the philosopher's stone which transmutes all it touches into gold; love is the soul's armor, which blunts the shafts of pain, weariness and ingratitude; love is the secret force which keeps the flame of zeal alive and glowing, for love suffers long and is kind, and because it "believeth all things, hopeth all things and endureth all things." It was love that helped Moses to bear with Israel, and be ready to be blotted out of God's book if only the people might be blessed; it was love that made St. Paul willing to be accursed for his brethren's sake, and it was love that, hanging on a cross, cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." We must catch flame from this altar of love if our work is to be persistent and constant. This love for the children, however, must be joined to great love for their Saviour and ours. This is put second, not because second, but because it is the climax of the first. Formality is the "dry rot" of Christian work. The only antidote to it is love. George Eliot once described a lady's pianoforte playing as "correct, but wooden," there was no soul in it. Is there not a danger of our bible study and class teaching becoming "correct, but wooden," too, through sheer repetition and continuance? If so, all the music, and poetry, and gushing life of it will be gone, and only the monotony and drudgery remain. Now the only power that will keep our service perennially fresh as a mountain spring is doing it out of a personal love to a personal Christ; being able to say, in all our study, prayer and teaching, "The love of Christ constraineth me." This will beautify the smallest act, will turn prose into poetry, and labor into delight. We shall not dare to teach the thing that comes uppermost, without thought or study, when we think of the loved Master for whom we work. This, too, will keep us from impatience and fainting in our task. There is the profoundest philosophy, as well as the sweetest suggestion, in that little incident of the Old Book, which says, "Jacob served seven years for Leah, and they seemed to him but a few days, *for the love he had to her.*" Love gave wings to the days, love made the years to roll as happy dreams, love took all bitterness out of the labor, and made the yoke easy and the burden light. So, to-day, love for Christ, kindled at Bethlehem's manger, Calvary's cross, Olivet's hill, will help us to run without weariness, and walk without fainting. Watches generally go wrong at the spring. Is