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DISCOURSES
TO MIXED CONGREGATIONS.
BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN,
PRIEST OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI.

DISCOURSE XVII.

ON THE FITNESS OF THE GLORY OF MARY.

You may recollect, my brethren, our Lord's words, when, on the day of His resurrection, He had joined the two disciples on their way to Emmaus, and found them sad and perplexed in consequence of His death. He said, "Ought not Christ to suffer these things, and so to enter into His glory?" He appealed to the fitness and congruity of this otherwise surprising event, to the other truths which had been generally revealed concerning the divine purpose of saving the world. And so too, St. Paul, in speaking of the same wonderful appointment of God; "It became Him," he says, "for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, who had brought many sons unto glory, to consummate the Author of their salvation by suffering." Elsewhere, speaking of prophesying, or expounding what is latent in divine truth, he bids his brethren exercise the gift "according to the analogy or rule of faith;" that is, so that the doctrine preached may correspond and fit in to what is already received. Thus you see, it is a great evidence of truth, in the case of revealed teaching, that it is so consistent, that it so hangs together, that one thing springs out of another, that each part requires and is required by the rest.

This great principle, which is exemplified so variously in the structure and history of Catholic doctrine, which will receive more and more illustrations the more carefully and minutely we examine the subject, is brought before us especially at this season, when we are celebrating the Assumption of our Blessed Lady—the Mother of God into heaven. We believe it on the authority of the Church; but, viewed in the light of reason, it is the fitness of this termination of her earthly course, which so persuasively recommends it to our minds: we feel it "ought" to be; that it "becomes" her Lord and Son thus to provide for one who was so singular and special both in herself and her relations to Him. We find that it is simply in harmony with the substance and main outlines of the doctrine of the Incarnation, and that without it Catholic teaching would have a character of incompleteness, and would disappoint our pious expectations.

Let us direct our thoughts to this subject to-day, my brethren; and with a view of helping you to do so, I will first state what the Church has taught and defined from the first ages concerning the Blessed Virgin, and then you will see how naturally the devotion which her children show her, and the praises with which they honor her, follow from it.

Now, as you know, it has been held from the first, and defined from an early age, that Mary is the Mother of God. She is not merely the Mother of our Lord's manhood, or of our Lord's body, but she is to be considered the Mother of the Word Himself, the Word incarnate. God, in the Person of the Word, the Second Person of the All-glorious Trinity, humbled Himself to become her Son. *Non horruisti Virginis uterum*, as the Church sings, "Thou didst not shrink from the Virgin's womb." He took the substance of His human flesh from her, and clothed in it He lay within her, and He bore it about with Him after birth, as a sort of badge and witness, that He, though God, was hers. He was nursed and tended by her; He was suckled by her; He lay in her arms. As time went on He ministered to her, and obeyed her. He lived with her for thirty years, in one house, with an uninterrupted intercourse, and with only the saintly Joseph to share it with Him. She was the witness of His growth, of His joys, of His sorrows, of His prayers; she was blest with His smile, with the touch of His hand, with the whisper of His affection, with the expression of His thoughts and His feelings, for that length of time. Now, my brethren, what ought she to be, what is it becoming that she should be, who was so favored?

Such a question was once asked by a heathen king, when he would place one of his subjects in a dignity becoming the relation in which he stood towards him. That subject had saved the king's life, and what was to be done to him in return? The king asked, "What should be done to the man whom the king desireth to honor?" And he received the following answer: "The man whom the king wisheth to honor ought to be clad in the king's apparel, and to be mounted on the king's saddle, and to receive the royal diadem on his head; and let the first among the king's princes and presidents hold his horse, and let him walk through the streets of the city, and say,

Thus shall be honored whom the king hath a mind to honor." So stands the case with Mary; she gave birth to the Creator, and what recompense shall be made her? what shall be done to her, who had this relationship to the Most High? what shall be the fit accompaniment of one whom the Almighty has deigned to make, not His servant, not His friend, not His intimate, but His superior, the source of His second being, the nurse of His helpless infancy, the teacher of His opening years? I answer as the king was answered; nothing is too high for her to whom God owes His life; no exuberance of grace, no excess of glory but is becoming, but is to be expected there, where God has lodged Himself, whence God has issued. Let her "be clad in the king's apparel," that is, let the fulness of the Godhead so flow into her that she may be a figure of the incommunicable sanctity, and beauty, and glory, of God Himself; that she may be the Mirror of justice, the Mystical Rose, the Tower of Ivory, the House of Gold, the Morning Star;—let her "receive the king's diadem upon her head," as the Queen of heaven, the Mother of all living, the Health of the weak, the Refuge of sinners, the Comforter of the afflicted;—and "let the first among the king's princes walk before her," let Angels, and Prophets, and Apostles, and Martyrs, and all Saints kiss the hem of her garment and rejoice under the shadow of her throne. Thus is it that King Solomon has risen up to meet His mother, and bowed Himself unto her, and caused a seat to be set for the King's Mother, and she sits on His right hand.

We should be prepared, then, my brethren, to believe, that the Mother of God is full of grace and glory, from the very fitness of such a dispensation, even though we had not been taught it; and this fitness will appear still more clear and certain when we contemplate the subject more steadily. Consider then, that it has been the ordinary rule of God's dealings with us, that personal sanctity should be the attendant upon high spiritual dignity of place or work. The Angels, who, as the word imports, are God's messengers, are also perfect in holiness; "without sanctity no one shall see God;" no defiled thing can enter the courts of heaven; and the higher its inhabitants are advanced in their ministry about the throne, the holier are they, and the deeper in their contemplation of that Holiness upon which they wait. The Seraphim, who immediately surround the Divine Glory, cry day and night, "Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts." So is it also on earth; the Prophets have ordinarily not only gifts, but graces; they are not only inspired to know and to teach God's will, but inwardly converted to obey it. Those then only can preach the truth duly, who feel it personally; those only transmit it fully from God to man, who have in the transmission made it their own.

I do not say that there are no exceptions to this rule, but they admit of an easy explanation; I do not say that it never pleases Almighty God to convey any intimation of His will through bad men; of course He turns all to good. By all, even the wicked, He accomplishes His purposes, and by the wicked He is glorified. Our Lord's death was brought about by His enemies, who did His will, while they thought they were gratifying their own. Caiaphas, who contrived and effected it, was made use of to predict it. Balaam prophesied good of God's people in an earlier age, by a divine compulsion, when he wished to prophesy evil. This is true; but in such cases Divine Mercy is plainly overruling the evil, and showing His power, without recognising or sanctioning the instrument. And again, it is true, as He tells us Himself, that in the last day "Many shall say, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, and in Thy Name cast out devils, and done many miracles?" and that He shall answer, "I never knew you." This, I say, is undeniable; it is undeniable first, that those who have prophesied in God's Name may afterwards fall from God, and lose their souls. Let a man be ever so holy now, he may fall away; and, as present grace is no pledge of perseverance, much less are present gifts; but how does this show that gifts and graces do not commonly go together? Again, it is undeniable that those who have had miraculous gifts may nevertheless have never been in God's favor, not even when they exercised them; as I will explain presently. But I am now speaking, not of having gifts, but of being prophets. To be a prophet is something much more personal than to possess gifts. It is a sacred office, it implies a mission, and is the distinction, not of the enemies of God, but of His friends. Such is the Scripture rule; who was the first prophet and preacher of justice? Enoch, who walked "by faith," and "pleased God," and was taken from a rebellious world. Who was the second? "Noe," who "condemned the world, and was made heir of the justice which is through faith." Who was the next great prophet? Moses, the law-giver of the chosen people, who was the "meekest of

all men who dwell on the earth." Samuel comes next, who served the Lord from his infancy in the Temple; and then David, who, if he fell into sin, repented, and was "a man after God's heart." And in like manner Job, Elias, Isaias, Jeremias, Daniel, and above them all St. John Baptist, and then again St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John, and the rest, are all especial instances of heroic virtue and patterns to their brethren. Judas is the exception, but this was by a particular dispensation to enhance our Lord's humiliation and suffering.

If then such be the case with those "to whom the word of God was made," what shall we say of her, who was so favored that the true and substantial Word, and not His shadow or His voice, was, not merely made in her, but born of her? who was not merely the organ of God's message, but the origin of His human existence, the living fountain from which He drew His most precious blood, and the material of His most holy flesh? Was it not fitting, beseeched it not, that she should be prepared for this ministration by some special sanctification? Do not earthly parents so by their infants? do they put them out to strangers? do they commit them to any chance person to suckle them? Even irreligious parents would show a certain tenderness and solicitude here, though they did not understand or regard what was good and pleasing in the sight of God; and shall not God Himself show it when He commits His Eternal Word to the custody of man? Nature witnesses in like manner to the communion between sanctity and truth; it anticipates that the fountain from which pure doctrine comes, should itself be pure; that the seat of divine teaching, and the oracle of faith, should be the abode of Angels; that the consecrated home, in which the word of God is elaborated, and whence it issues forth for the salvation of the many, should be holy, as that word is holy. Here you see the difference between the office of a prophet and a mere gift, such as that of miracles. Miracles are the simple and direct work of God; the worker of them is but an instrument or organ. And in consequence he need not be holy, because he has not, strictly speaking, a share in the work. So again the power of administering the Sacraments, which is supernatural and miraculous, does not imply personal holiness; nor is there any thing surprising in God giving to a bad man this gift, or the gift of miracles, any more than in His giving him any natural talent or gift, strength or agility of frame, eloquence or medical skill. It is otherwise with the office of preaching and prophesying, and of this I have been speaking; for the truth first goes into their minds, and is apprehended and fashioned there, and then comes out from them as, in one sense, its source and its parent. The divine word is begotten in them, and the offspring has their features and tells of them. They are not like "the dumb animal, speaking with man's voice," on which Balaam rode, a mere instrument of God's word, but they have "received an unction from the Holy One, and they know all things," and "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" and while they deliver what they have received, they enforce what they feel and know. "We have known and believed," says St. John, "the charity which God hath to us."

So has it been all through the history of the Church; Moses does not write as David; nor Isaias as Jeremias; nor St. John as St. Paul. And so of the great Doctors of the Church, St. Athanasius, St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Leo, St. Thomas, each has his own manner, each speaks his own words, though he speaks the while the words of God. They speak from themselves, they speak from the heart, they speak in their own persons, from their own experience, with their own arguments, with their own deductions, with their own modes of expression.—Now can you fancy, my brethren, such hearts, such feelings to be unholy? how could it be so, without defiling, and thereby nullifying, the word of God? If one drop of corruption makes the purest water worthless, as the slightest savor of bitterness spoils the most delicate viands, how can it be that the word of truth and holiness, can proceed profitably from impure lips and an earthly heart? No, as is the tree, so is the fruit; "beware of false prophets," says our Lord; and then He adds, "from their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Is it not so, my brethren? which of you would go to ask counsel of another, however learned, however gifted, however aged, if you thought him unholy? nay, though you feel and are sure, as far as absolution goes, that a bad priest could give it as really as a holy priest, yet for advice, for comfort, for instruction, you would not go to one whom you did not respect. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh;" "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil."

So then is it in the case of the soul; and so it also

in the case of the body; as the offspring of holiness is holy in spiritual births, so is it here also. Mary was no mere instrument in God's dispensation; the Word of God did not merely come and go; He did not merely pass through her, as He may pass through us in Holy Communion; it was no heavenly body which the Eternal Son assumed, fashioned by the Angels, and brought down to this lower world: no, He imbibed, He sucked up her blood and her substance into His Divine Person; He became man of her; and received her lineaments and her features as the semblance and character under which He should manifest Himself to the world. His likeness would show whose Son He was. Thus His Mother is the first of Prophets, for of her came the Word bodily; she is the sole oracle of truth, for the Way, the Truth, and the life, vouchsafed to be her Son; she is the one mould of Divine Wisdom, in which It was indelibly cast. Surely then, if "the first fruit be holy, the mass also is holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches." It was natural, it was fitting, that so it should be; it was congruous that, whatever the Omnipotent could work in the person of the finite, should be wrought in her. It was to be expected that, if the Son was God, the Mother should be as worthy of Him, as creature can be worthy of Creator; that grace should have in her "its perfect work;" that, if she bore the Eternal Wisdom, she should be that created wisdom in whom "is all the grace of the Way and the Truth;" that if she be the Mother of "fair love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope," she should give an odor like cinnamon and balm, and sweetness like to choice myrrh. Can we set bounds to the holiness of her who was the Mother of the Holiest?

Such then is the truth ever cherished in the deep heart of the Church, and witnessed by the keen apprehension of her children, that no limit but those of created nature can be assigned to the sanctity of Mary. Did Abraham believe that a son should be born to him of his aged wife? then Mary's faith was greater when she accepted Gabriel's message. Did Judith consecrate her widowhood to God to the surprise of her people? much more did Mary, from her first youth, devote her virginity. Did Samuel when a child inhabit the Temple, secluded from the world? Mary too was by her parents lodged in the same holy precincts, at the age when children begin to choose between good and evil. Was Solomon on his birth called "Dear to the Lord?" and shall not the destined Mother of God be dear to Him, from the moment she was born? But farther still; St. John Baptist was sanctified by the Spirit before His birth; shall Mary be only equal to him? is it not fitting that her privilege should surpass his? is it wonderful, if grace, which prevented his birth by three months, should in her case run up to the very first moment of her being, outstrip the imputation of sin, and be beforehand with the usurpation of Satan? Mary must surpass all the Saints; the very fact that certain privileges are known to have been theirs, proves to us at once, from the necessity of the case, that she had the same and higher. Her conception was immaculate, in order that she might surpass all Saints in the date as well as the fulness of her sanctification.

But, though the grace bestowed upon her was so incomprehensibly great, do not therefore suppose, my brethren, that it excluded her co-operation; she, as we, was on her trial; she, as we, could have chosen the worse part; she, as we, increased in grace; she, as we, merited the increase. Here is another thought leading to the conclusion which I have been drawing. She was not like some inanimate work of the Creator, made beautiful and glorious by the law of its being; she ended, not began, with her full perfection. She had a first grace and a second grace, and she gained the second from her use of the first. She had the power of rejecting grace, and therefore the power of meriting evil in proportion as she had been visited with good. She was altogether a moral agent, as others; she advanced on, as all saints do, from strength to strength, from height to height, so that at five years old she had merited what she had not merited at her birth, and at thirteen what she had not merited at five. Well, my brethren, of what was she thought worthy, when she was thirteen? what did it seem fitting to confer on that poor child, at an age when most children have not begun to think of God or themselves, or to use the grace He gives them at all; at an age, when many a Saint, as he is in the event, is still in the heavy slumber of sin, and is meriting, not good, but evil at the hands of his just Judge? It belittled the sanctity with which she was by that time beautified, that she should be raised to the dignity of Mother of God. There is doubtless no measure between human nature and God's rewards; He allows us to merit what we cannot claim except from His allowance. He promises us heaven for our good deeds here, and under the covenant of that promise we are justly said to merit it, though heaven is an in-