

## THE SEASONS OF THE CHURCH.

## LENT.

**W**E have now passed through three seasons of the Christian year—Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany; each one of which has its own peculiar doctrine, and its own duty. These are three distinct subjects, but they all bear the same general character: they depend exclusively on the great doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and set forth clearly what we are to believe on that all-important subject.

But here comes a sudden break. The glowing words of the prophet Isaiah are succeeded by the sad histories of Genesis; and instead of the wonderful miracles of our Lord, we have His parables and warnings. This change begins on Septuagesima Sunday, the seventieth day from Easter.

As has already been said, there are two great divisions in the Christian year, bringing before us (1) the humiliation of our Lord God, and His union with our manhood in its weakness; (2) the exaltation of our manhood by its union with the power and glory of God. The first of these has been brought before us by Christmas and its attendant seasons. The second is illustrated by Easter, and the Sundays connected with it.

The season of Lent, then, is connected with Easter. It is in a certain sense its forerunner, as Advent goes before Christmas. But it has its own distinct doctrine and object, and those are, repentance and amendment of life. And in connection with these, and as a means to attain them, are increased devotion, both public and private, fasting, abstinence, and self-denial. Yes, forgotten or ignored though it be, this is the time when, after the example of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, who fasted for forty days and forty nights, are we to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit we may ever obey all godly motions in righteousness and true holiness.

God's creation of man; man's wilful disobedience and his fall; the consequences of that fall in the corruption of the nature of man; the flood upon the ungodly, and the promised Deliverer,—these are first set forth as the general

workings of sin marring God's creation, and then comes the work of individual repentance and amendment of life.

Now, what is *true* repentance, which this season especially brings before us? I think we shall best learn what the Christian Church thinks it is from the lessons she teaches during the six weeks of Lent. Repentance is a feeling of the soul, and itself cannot be seen any more than faith; but, like faith, it becomes visible by its works. The Church teaches us how repentance will, and must, show itself whenever it is sincere.

On the first Sunday in Lent we learn that repentance is a voluntary mortification of the flesh with its natural desires. "Then," that is, after He was baptized, "was the Lord led by the Spirit into the wilderness" to prepare for His temptation. Then, after we are baptized, shall we be led by the Spirit into the wilderness of this world; and as our Great Example prepared for His temptation, so must we.

On the second Sunday we learn that repentance is a humble sense of our spiritual weakness. Then came the woman of Canaan, and acknowledged that it was not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs; but, while acknowledging her unworthiness, she desired even the crumbs under her Lord's table.

On the third Sunday we are taught that repentance is a firm confidence that He who has cast out the strong man from our souls, which in former times were his palace, will still preserve the goods of which he has spoiled him.

On the fourth Sunday we read of the nourishment, which, if a man eat, Christ shall raise him up on the last day, and that real repentance means seeking for the means of grace which will preserve us from a second fall.

On the fifth Sunday by the example of Him whose Passion is then first brought before us, and who to the end endured such contradiction of sinners, we are taught that repentance comprehends the grace of perseverance.

And in Holy Week, through a variety of Gospels, is set forth the voluntary humiliation of Christ, teaching that repentance is the conforming ourselves