

# The Church Guardian

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## Special Notice.

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### CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER.

NOV. 1st—ALL SAINTS' DAY.

" 7th—20th Sunday after Trinity.

" 14th—21st Sunday after Trinity.

" 21st—22nd Sunday after Trinity.

" 28th—1st Sunday in ADVENT.—Notice of St. Andrew.

" 30th—ST. ANDREW, A. & M.

### ADVENT 1886.

Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Watch ye, for ye know not when the Master of the House cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.

### REASONABLENESS AND EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

If God does not grant every prayer, it is because He knows what is good for us far too well to do so. Were all the wishes for things external to our spirits granted which even the best of men from time to time conceive, what wild work would it make of their lives and of their usefulness! How many prayers, too, are offered up which could not be fulfilled in favor of some without injuring, perhaps destroying, others! How many prayers clash with each other! Can God be expected to answer prayer quite irrespective of benefit or mischief; quite regardless of the mutual interferences of the requests preferred by different sets of men; quite neglectful of the advancement of His own designs for mankind at large? When Scripture represents the Deity as promising that He will never disregard prayer, does it really mean that the supreme government of the world is to pass out of the hands of the Omniscient and All-wise into the hands of beings who are always more or less ignorant and often very foolish, though they may be very well well meaning? "Prayer moves the hand that moves the world." But does it move it mechanically? Christian feeling, quite as much as common sense, must answer—No! But this does not mean that anything, no matter what it be, is outside the scope of prayer, as many persons—I am sorry to say many divines even—are now telling us? It is not that we have

no right to pray for external blessings, or what we deem blessings. But it is that we must offer all our prayers for them with due submission to God's better wisdom. "Not My will, but Thine be done!" Thus prayed our Lord: thus should all his followers pray. Only one prayer needs no such qualification: the prayer for the Holy Spirit, which, in the Christian doctrine, is the direct influence of the Deity on the spirits He has created, bestowing on them the highest wisdom, purifying them even as He, the Fountain of Purity, is pure, and leading them up to Himself and to the possession in Himself of that eternal life of which He is the source and fullness.

I am conscious that I have, in the last portion of my discourse, passed beyond the thesis I had undertaken to argue in favor of—that thesis simply being, that prayer is intrinsically reasonable on the supposition that there is a Personal God, and that His character in respect of goodness and truthfulness is not inferior to ours. It is very difficult for a Christian minister to sink for a time below the level of his own belief, to argue on grounds common to mere Theists. Yet those grounds and the arguments based on them are so strong that they materially confirm the positive precepts regarding prayer, which Scripture multiplies, and which no personage in Scripture enforces with such energy as Christ. In one singular, almost startling passage, He shrinks not from comparing the God of Justice with an unjust judge, in order the more forcibly to exhibit the absurdity of supposing that God will not reply to prayer. It needs such encouragement; for, of all Christian duties, whilst none is more necessary, none is more difficult, than prayer.

The pomps and ceremonies of public worship—I mean this in no unfriendly sense—the concurrent hymn, the stupendous concert of thousands of voices lifted up in consonant harmony or in even more overpowering unison, the chant of the trained choristers, the majestic swell of the solemn organ as it rolls its vastness of sound through the long-drawn aisles and fretted vaults of some huge cathedral, the solitary voice of the intoning priest which makes the succeeding stillness only the more felt—all this magnificence of worship, costly though it be, enormous as has been the lavishness of wealth and genius requisite to establish and maintain it, is yet only on the threshold; and thousands are doubtless impressed by it who yet never cross the threshold—never realize the Unseen Presence that dwells in the Holy of Holies beyond it. But to feel that God is actually there, that one is speaking to Him just as one man speaks to another; that He most absolutely and certainly hears everything said to Him though He does not audibly reply to the supplications put up, sometimes in voiceless agony—this, which is true prayer, and which can be even better transacted in the solitude of the chamber, where no human eye can see and no human ear can hear—this is indeed difficult. Yet, till this has been once attained, prayer has never been really put up at all.

I have been endeavoring to remove difficulties which, if I may judge of others by myself, sometimes paralyze the soul in the very act and attempt to pray. To appeal to feeling in dealing with such difficulties—to treat them with offensive rhetoric—is worse than useless, for it is apt to be taken as a virtual confession that on grounds of reason these difficulties are insurmountable. I have therefore dealt with them in what some of you may probably consider a coldly logical, an almost repellant manner. For unless these difficulties are shown to be really unreasonable and groundless—not only contrary to feeling and affection, but contrary to reason—they will come back again and again, and "restrain prayer" more and more. The most ardent faith must be shown to be entirely consistent with the coolest reason, if faith is to overcome the world, and to mount

up to Him whose Incarnate Son is declared by the Apostle to be the very Word or Reason of God. One word more, but that the crowning word. The considerations I have adduced are infinitely reinforced by our blessed Lord. He came, above all things, to disclose unto us God. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." He has enjoined on us to pray: to pray always and not to faint. He hath taught us how to pray. "When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven." The Lord's Prayer is a summary of Christianity. Its opening words are a summary of the character of God. "Our Father." If these two words do not bring us to the feet of God in prayer, then nothing can.—Bishop Reichel (Wakefield Church Congress Sermon).

### HOLDING ON.

We lament and get discouraged if "our parish" does not flourish just as we would like or think it ought. Parishes are like individuals in some things. Hopefulness and earnest, faithful work, as a rule, advance them as they do the individual. It is just as much the duty of the parish collectively to be cheerful and hopeful, to frown down all cries of feebleness and slowness of advancement, as it is the duty of the individual Christian.

The true way is to do the very best always, and leave the results to God. Here and there, all through the Church, are parishes and rectors that need to consider just these things. In many a place the Church of God, as there manifested, is "a day of small things," and one great difficulty in the way of making it a day of greater things is, that it is not only "despised" by those without, but by those within the camp as well. The cry is: "We are such a feeble folk, and there are so many who are indifferent, if not opposed to us." All such need to consider that, whatsoever their condition, they are set in their place for the manifestation of the truth. It is the Holy Catholic Church which God has called them to represent, and the true, honest way is to press faithfully on, although it be a struggle. The feeling that prompted the exclamation of the great Apostle, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel," should be the animating influence of every baptized member of Christ's fold. The faithful standing in the breach and contending, even unto death if need be, is the only manly discharge of duty that is upon them.

It was not because of what he accomplished that twenty-one hundred years have praised the heathen Horatius, but because he had the courage to be faithful to the trust imposed upon him, and all along the track of the ages the world's greatest heroes were men of just this very stamp, who, whatever the odds against them, have dared to do right. In worldly concerns it may perhaps at times be best "to run away;" but of parishes, no less than of individual Christians, are the words of our blessed Lord true: "No one, having put his hand to the plough and turning back, is worthy of the Kingdom of God." It is true that sometimes the work does seem almost hopeless, but it is God's work; and sooner or later the tide must come which, if the ship be ready, will carry it out on its way to the desired haven. In all such places, if we cannot have the active exertion, we want more of that sublime patience of the feeble folk by Bethesda's pool—the quiet waiting for the angel to come down. They need also to ponder such words as those of their Master, intended for these very desponding ones: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." There is more real strength than is generally supposed in the quiet determination to "hold on"—a determination that has, again and again, though