

# Canadian Churchman

Toronto, October 18th, 1917.

## The Christian Year

## Editorial

### PRAYERS FOR THE DEPARTED.

The 21st Sunday after Trinity, Oct. 28, 1917

There would seem to be a close connection between Collect, Epistle and Gospel for this Sunday.

1. Collect and Epistle. "Serve Thee with a quiet mind"—this is the picture brought before us in the Collect. "A quiet mind." What a boon! What strength is hinted at by these words! To be free from the weakening distractions which so often take possession of the mind! These are the strong servants of God, the people who "serve Thee with a quiet mind." And what is the secret of this? It is the possession, so the Collect tells us, of "pardon and peace," which they have because they are "cleansed from all their sins." And it is the same sort of picture we have in the Epistle—the fully-equipped, confident soldier, who stands firm and strong against his foes. Just as the people of the quiet mind in the Collect are secure in their sense of pardon and peace, so the soldier in the Epistle stands firm, because he has the whole armour of God. "Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breast-plate of righteousness." Indeed, I think "the breast-plate of righteousness" might be called the connecting link between the Collect and Epistle. "Pardon and peace" is the origin of the quiet mind; "the breast-plate of righteousness" is the source of the soldier's quiet confidence in which he stands secure.

2. Collect and Gospel. The Collect teaches that there is only One to Whom we can go for cleansing, without which there can be no pardon and peace, and, therefore, no quietness of mind. And so we pray, "Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins." And so the nobleman in the Gospel is an illustration of one going to that same merciful Lord for cleansing and healing for his son. "He went unto Him, and besought Him that He would come down and heal his son." "Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way, thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way."

3. Epistle and Gospel. The connection between the two would appear to lie chiefly in the words, "above all, taking the shield of faith." The nobleman believed that the Saviour could heal his son. He took His word when He said, "Thy son liveth." "To such minds faith in Christ is a shield, indeed, against the fiery darts of the wicked one; for their belief in Him enables Him to do signs and wonders of a spiritual nature, and establishes a power of co-operation between the weak servant and the Almighty Lord." He had the shield of faith, and well might he and all those who share his faith say with the Psalmist, as they rejoice before God for the great things which He has done in response to their faith, "The Lord is my Saviour, my God, and my might, in Whom I will trust, my buckler, the horn also of my salvation, and my refuge."

In view of the action of the recent Synod of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada, it is well that we examine briefly the position of the Church of England regarding this subject.

There is a natural desire on the part of the human being to continue the personal relationship with the soul of a dear one who has crossed the great divide. This desire led very early in the history of the Christian Church to the more or less common practice of praying for the dead, or, to use the more correct term, the departed. A distinction was made, however, between the faithful and the unconverted dead, as it was recognized that the period of probation was confined to life in this world. Regarding the faithful departed, the idea was developed that even the souls of such are subjected to a process of cleansing, hence the term *purgatory*, and the doctrine that prayers were "absolutely necessary to obtain for all Christians perfect pardon and peace." The doctrine of "justification through a living and working faith in Christ was thus obscured, and in place of it men were taught to trust in the prayers which should be offered for them after death." (See Evan Daniel, p. 359.)

In the Church of England the doctrine never reached the same limits that it did in the Church of Rome. In the first Prayer Book, that of 1549, we find the following in the prayer "for the whole state of Christ's Church": "We commend unto Thy mercy (O Lord) all other Thy servants which are departed hence from us, with the sign of faith, and now do rest in the sleep of peace; grant unto them, we beseech Thee, Thy mercy and everlasting peace," etc. This was altered in 1552 to the form as we have it now, "And we also bless Thy holy name for all Thy servants departed this life," etc.

We are not told why the Church of England made the above change, but it is fair to assume that it was in accordance with its determination that whatsoever is not read in Holy Scripture, "nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man." It is true that certain texts have been quoted in support of such prayers, but in all fairness it can scarcely be said that these are clear enough to serve as a basis for such an important doctrine. The substance of the whole matter, so far as the Church of England is concerned, is that it has considered it not only safer, but more in accordance with the teaching of the Bible to limit any prayer on this subject to an expression of thanksgiving for the lives of the faithful departed and a request that the living may profit by their godly example.

The Church has said nothing regarding private prayers for the departed except in so far as its action referred to above can be taken as applying to all such prayers, whether by private persons or by the Church in its corporate capacity. We have failed to find anything in the teaching of Christ in support of such prayers; nothing, with the exception of two doubtful passages, in the rest of the Bible can be cited in justification of such; and even the Roman Church, as has been pointed out, does not teach that prayers for the unconverted dead can avail anything.

We realize the longing for comfort and assurance that exists at the present time, and

is giving rise to an increasing demand on all sides for such prayers. We fear, however, that the demand is not for prayers for the faithful departed so much as for those whose lives on earth have left room for doubt regarding their present well-being. The Church should be exceedingly careful in these matters not to base comfort and assurance on conjecture, or to use the longing of the human heart as a sufficient foundation for a general principle. There is, we believe, very real danger of this at the present time, and it would seem, therefore, the part of wisdom to delay consideration of such a vital question until men's minds are in a more normal state.

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Lord Northcliffe has reminded Canadians that unless the food question is taken up as vigorously in Canada as it has been in Great Britain, there must be a cutting down of the rations of the soldiers at the front. This warning should be taken very seriously to heart by Canadians, as there has certainly been little curtailment as yet in the rations of those at home. We cannot afford to deprive our soldiers of any portion of their food.

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There is an increasing demand for a change, or rather for greater freedom, in the character of the regular evening service. A form that was good enough for the Church two or three hundred years ago is not necessarily suitable to every phase of present-day conditions. There are too many persons outside the Church to-day, and if a more evangelistic service in the evening will win them it is surely more important to do this than to lose them for the sake of preserving the present form intact. Moreover, under reasonable restrictions, the clergy can be trusted to do what is best suited to the conditions they are faced with.

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Readers of the "Canadian Churchman" can be of very great assistance in making it more valuable month by month. It is most difficult to keep in close touch with even the principal events in the life of the Church, to say nothing of the multitude of events of secondary importance. By remembering that the dissemination of Church news helps to develop and strengthen the corporate life of the Church, it is readily seen that by reporting events of general interest you are doing real service to the cause. One of the greatest needs in the Church at the present time is more knowledge of what it is doing. Send us the news items and we will guarantee to make good use of them.

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A Union Government in Canada is to become a reality. Thousands of loyal Canadians have, we feel certain, been longing and praying that this might happen, and we cannot thank Sir Robert Borden enough for the persistent efforts he has made in this direction. Those of us on the outside will never know how sorely his patience has been tried, not only by his political opponents, but by members of his own party as well. He has kept clear before his mind the call of duty and has bent all his energies in one direction. The difficulties have not, however, all been surmounted, and the same gifts of patience, persistence, and tact will still be needed to guide the new Cabinet safely through the many rocks that surround it. Let us thank God for the success that has attended these efforts thus far and pray that this success may be continued.

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