

# The Church Guardian,

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## OBSERVANCE OF LENT.

We are entering once more upon the season which the Church, in her wisdom, has set apart as that of sober self-examination, of consequent sorrow for sin, of renewed determination to approach nearer to God, of withdrawal from the worldly allurements which in the course of our ordinary lives often make it so difficult a matter to fix our thoughts and affections on things above. We have come once more to Ash Wednesday, and before us opens the solemn vista of the forty days of fasting, prayer and penitence. The prospect may not be an enticing one, and yet the children of the Church have learned to welcome it with thankful hearts, as they do every other ordinance of their faithful Mother. Without doubt the due observance of it has proved to be of incalculable value to unnumbered souls whom it has led to a closer fellowship with Christ, and a deeper realization of His Love than they could otherwise have attained to. To such no words from us are needful to bid them avail themselves of the aids to faith and holiness which the Lenten Fast offers, and which they already know so well, but we would urge upon those who, perhaps, hitherto have regarded this Season with indifference or even with distaste, nay, who perhaps have thoughtlessly ridiculed its observance, to acquaint themselves with its true meaning, to familiarize themselves with its duties, to listen to its teaching, before once more turning aside with cold neglect from what may be the last opportunity offered them of obeying the Lenten call to repentance.

Very quickly the sum of our brief years is made up; the Seasons succeed each other with startling rapidity, and for each one of us the last Lenten Call must come all too soon. We earnestly beseech our readers, then, such of them as have not in the past paid due regard to the Church's solemn warnings or to her admonitions and her laws, at least to reflect before they disdain to heed her. Let them remember that it is the Voice of God speaking through His Church to which they turn a deaf ear. It is He who bids us repent and turn to Him who will abundantly pardon! Let the careless remember that Fast of forty days in the Wilderness which we commemorate—that Life of infinite self-sacrifice which we should humbly strive to imitate and to which a faithful and humble observance of this Holy Season may best assimilate our own.

## WHY SHOULD WE KEEP LENT?

THIS enquiry cannot surely come from the lips of the Christian; from him or her who has anxiously sought pardon for sin and a nearer approach to the life of Christ? They look back on Lenten Seasons in which they have been brought more clearly to see the foulness of their sins and the amazing great Love of the dear Saviour Jesus Christ. By them Lent will be hailed with thankfulness as a blessed penitential season, and all that the Church directs them to do they will gladly and willingly perform. But, it may be, and indeed we know too well, that there are very many who, while claiming the Christian name and profession, love to sneer at all the efforts of Christians to make themselves holier and better. They profess to see no reason why such efforts are needful, and they like to consider them as a source of unhappiness to those who engage in them, or as mere evidences of formality and hypocrisy. To such, if there be any such among our readers, we commend the words of a secular paper, the *New York Tribune*, which, in an article a year ago upon this subject, gave expression to the following:—

"Nothing can be more certain than that if any reader of the *Tribune*, man or woman, lawyer, tradesman or laborer, sets out with any settled purpose or occupation in life he must find time occasionally to go apart a little, to take stock of his capital, sum up the progress he has made, and gain a clearer light on his future work. This is only what the Christian does, or ought to do, in Lent. He has professed to take the Saviour of Mankind for his guide in all his actions and words. He withdraws, therefore, from the world for a season to come closer to Him; to examine rigorously his own motives and doings; and to see where he stands in his path upward. He puts his soul on trial as it were. It is quite true that any season of the year is as suitable and good for such an examination as this; if other Christians observe such seasons they will not be likely to jeer at Lent, so long held sacred in the old historic churches. But there seems something eminently fitting in the union of the idea of this annual retreat of the individual Christian with the remembrance of the withdrawal of Christ to the wilderness and the dread solemnity of His Passion.

"Every man of us to-day is tempted to be greedy, presumptuous, ambitious and selfish, and there is only one philosophy, one religion that helped humanity to combat it successfully—that of Jesus. It surely is not unwise, therefore, to go with the Teacher apart into solitude to learn of Him how to resist the every-day temptations which waylay us from birth to death. The idea of such a withdrawal seems, to even a secular observer, not fantastic, but most reasonable and practical."

But more. As a recent Christian writer has said: "It is more than proper, it is necessary, that there should be time for serious meditation, and devout reflection; a season when we may go apart from the world which so fatally lays its snares for us—and ascertain our true spiritual condition, and realize what the Holy Scriptures require as a true evidence of having passed from spiritual death, to the blessed light and glorious liberty of God's children. The dangers that imperil us are not imaginary—a low standard of Christian duty and obligation; false and most pernicious views of the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints; an indifference to the means of grace; a faithless use

of Christ's own institutions—are sufficient manifestations of the perilous times in which we live; times in which, to use the Apostle's words, 'men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy—lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.'"

## CHURCHES OPEN ALL DAY.

WE rejoice to find efforts being made to have our churches open for prayer and meditation the whole of every week day as well as on Sundays. There can be no good reason why our churches should be closed; and the propriety of opening them during the week must be apparent to every thinking person. The fact is the practice of having them shut from Sunday to Sunday is the result of the unhappy notion so common at one time, but, thank God, becoming more and more a thing of the past, that our public religious duties belong to Sundays and to no other days.

It is not, however, chiefly from the standpoint of public prayer, although we are glad to know that week day services are being multiplied everywhere, but with reference to the private devotions of the people, that we would urge the opening of our churches during the days between the Sundays. Not only will it encourage some to enter the Courts of the Lord's House and find a peaceful place to pour out their petitions, their thanksgivings, and find His Presence very near to comfort and bless them in their earthly pilgrimage, but in addition it will enforce the duty, it will emphasize the obligation, which rests upon all God's children, to seek Him in their every day life. Their duty will make increasingly apparent their needs; and coming into His Presence will promote the feeling of entire dependence upon Him in every work and pleasure, and in every relation of life.

Many a day now prayerless, because of difficulties in the way at home, might be begun by a few moments prayer in church, and many a life now vexed with its troubles, might find a place to lay its load on Christ, and enjoy the blessed assurance, "My strength is sufficient for thee," in response to its cry for succour.

The admirable little paper of the Open Church Association for the Dioceses of Chester and Liverpool, speaking upon this subject, says:—

"It is difficult to explain on intelligible grounds why our churches, with the exception of a very few hours, should shut their doors during the whole week from Sunday morning until Saturday evening. Most people lament the habit, and agree that they ought to be open. Still the process of opening them is slow. Public opinion on this subject has still to be educated, and perhaps the publication of the sentiments of many of our Bishops may be useful at the present time.

"A copy of the published Report\* of the discussion by the Liverpool Diocesan Conference on churches open all day having been forwarded to the Bishops, the following replies have been received:—

"The Archbishop of Canterbury is in favour of the general principle of the Resolution.

"The Bishop of Rochester states that 'the idea is beautiful,' adding, 'I should rejoice to see it everywhere made practicable.'

"The Bishop of Truro offers his thanks for the interesting report of the discussion about Free