

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR MARCH.

MARCH 1.—Second Sunday in Lent.
“ 8.—Third “ “
“ 15.—Fourth “ “
“ 22.—Fifth “ “
“ 25.—ANNUNCIATION.
“ 29.—PALM SUNDAY—next before EASTER SUNDAY.

Third Sunday in Lent.

“Fear them not; for I am with thee.”—Isa. lvi. 10.

Such is the promised support of God to His faithful people, through the mouth of the prophet, and for such support and aid we are taught to pray in the Collect of this day. We entreat God to look upon the hearty desires of His humble servants, and, according to the desire of the heart, to stretch forth His right hand to help and defend us against all our enemies. We have attained another step in our preparation. If we have been cleansed outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, as in the last collect we prayed, we now beseech God that in mercy to the weakness of our natures, He will accept the desire of the heart, the will in place of the deed, which we are unable of ourselves to do as of ourselves, and to stretch forth the right hand of His majesty as our defence against all our spiritual enemies. The house having been swept and garnished, we pray for protection against the seven other spirits, mentioned in the Gospel, even more wicked than those dispossessed. In the services of the preceding Sunday we have been taught to cleanse the body—the outward temple of the Holy Ghost. We are here taught that there are other defilements besides those of an unclean nature, and that from these also the soul, the innermost temple, must be both cleansed and guarded. The Epistle both warns us against them and shows us what they are. It teaches us that as light and darkness are opposed, so may not the Gospel and any uncleanness be so much as once even named together among the saints. “As light in the Lord, we must walk as children of the light, for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth.” As then we have cleansed the body of all uncleanness, so must we see that the spirit also is in the light. The Gospel shows us that our blessed Lord Himself was accused of this spiritual uncleanness. They said He cast out devils through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that is, not

through the opposing force of light to darkness, but in order to favor darkness; and the accusation afforded him an opportunity of warning us of the danger of such spiritual wickedness. He first refuted the accusation as inconsistent, even with the power and the wishes of Satan, and then warned them, lest light and darkness be confounded, that truth and error could not be reconciled. We must take our part and our side in the Christian warfare, and “he that is not with Christ is against Him; he that gathereth not with Him scattereth.” It is not, then, sufficient that we cleanse the body from sin; we must put on also the graces of the Christian, and when the body is freed from uncleanness, guard ourselves anxiously and earnestly against the spiritual enemies that are ready to take possession, lest our last state be worse than the first. This state, perhaps, we may consider fairly represented in that of the Pharisee. He paid tithe of mint and cummin, and of all that he possessed—he was exact and scrupulous in all the duties of a proud and worldly morality, but the weightier matters of the law, and the spirit of his religion, he overlooked; he had cleansed the body, perhaps, from outward defilements, but in the place of this one evil spirit had admitted seven others to take possession of his heart. These came under the garb of hypocrisy, censoriousness, uncharitableness, and their usual train of evil spirits; and his heart was then further estranged from the gospel of love than even when oppressed with darkness and ignorance. He was more the child of Satan and of sin. From the example of the Pharisee, so often condemned by our Lord, we shall learn to take our warning. Pride and censoriousness are the most dangerous of all our enemies. We may not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but we must think soberly. We are neither, on the one hand, in a false humility, to underrate the blessings of God by which He may have distinguished us, or, on the other, to overrate them as possessed by ourselves. Thinking soberly implies that we have a true value of our own spiritual state. Having put away all uncleanness, we are not to rest in a cold, proud, unprofitable morality, but to clothe the body, so cleansed, with the various Christian graces. If we leave it merely swept and garnished, be assured, other spirits will possess it. Like the strong man in the Gospel, the soul must be armed and occupied at all points, lest, if it trust in mere worldly armor for its defence in spiritual warfare, a stronger than he come, and, stripping from him his armor, spoil his goods. The world is the strong man, and the victory that overcometh the world is faith. For this faith let us pray, that being cleansed both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls, we may have the right hand of God as our defence against all our enemies, whether worldly or spiritual.—Hon. and Rev. S. Best, M.A., Fellow King's College, Cambridge.

One Duty of Lent.

What is Lent? Why should we observe such a season? Why should the church-bell call us at this season to the House of Prayer more than at any other? These are questions which naturally arise in many minds, and they are questions which deserve an answer. We propose this week to give one which will, perhaps, be new to some of our readers, and which will bear a re-statement even to those who have heard it before.

Every year, on GOOD FRIDAY, we call to remembrance the sufferings of our dear Lord on the Cross. But Christ did not suffer on the Cross only; He suffered as much, or more, before one nail had pierced His hand or touched His foot. There is something beside bodily pain; there is something more than corporeal anguish. There is the agony of the *mind*, there is the grief of the *soul*, there is the anguish of the *spirit*. And Christ endured all this before the time of His crucifixion came. “My soul,” He had said in the garden of Gethsemane, “is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” His agony brought from Him great drops of blood, and drew from Him that terribly earnest petition, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” Are we to think of these things, or not? Shall we Christians forget the pains of our dear Lord? Shall the captive, when loosed from his chains, forget the sufferings of Him who Himself was bound that he might be set free? Shall the condemned man forget the pains of Him who died that he might live? The commonest sense of gratitude forbids the thought, and LENT—a period of forty days previous to the commemoration of the completion of Christ's sufferings—has been set apart for this, among other reasons, that we may think on these things. We are to “tarry” during these forty days, and “watch” with Christ, and pray with Him. The special duties of Lent, therefore, are *watchfulness* and *prayer*, and to help us to the performance of these duties, we have given to us special services, special times for prayer, special times for meditation and for the hearing of God's Word. As the church-bell calls us to the House of God at an unusual time, it seems to echo the words of Christ our Saviour, “TARRY YE HERE, AND WATCH.”

Let us, then, this Lent—we may have neglected others, we may not be spared to the next—let us, *this* Lent, at least, watch with Christ. Let us communicate with Him at the Passover; let us accompany Him across the brook Cedron; let us with the favored three approach nearer and witness (not sleep through) the agony that He then endured; let us not draw our sword, as St. Peter did, but yet be ready to defend our Saviour, in word or deed, against any insults that may be offered to His name or memory. Let us not forsake Him and flee when we find that the following Him is attended with some difficulty and danger. Before the assembly of the High Priest, before the judgment-seat of Pilate, let us be by to show our sympathy and sorrow. As He is led away for execution, as He is crowned with thorns and dressed in mocking robes, let us be with the women who followed and bewailed Him. When the worst is over, and the raging of the people has ceased—when death has received its Victim—let us, with Joseph of Arimathea, accompany Him to the tomb, there to wait till the morning of the Easter Resurrection comes.

Thus we shall show that we are real disciples of Jesus; that we really love to be with Him; that we remember with affection what He has done for us; that we desire to be partakers of His Cross and Passion. And if our Blessed Lord can be supposed to feel either sorrow or joy, then surely will He rejoice over us who are mourning at this Lenten season, and He will say to us, “Blessed are ye that *mourn* now, for ye shall be comforted; blessed are ye that *weep* now, for ye shall laugh.”