

THE SEASONS OF THE CHURCH.

ADVENT.

THE Church of Christ, which has been founded by God for the regeneration of the human race, has had intrusted to her keeping certain distinctive doctrines; and these distinctive doctrines have been distributed into seasons; and these seasons are a series, each being a preparation for that which follows. The Church's teaching in these seasons is a *system of theology*. Thus the doctrines of Advent are meant to prepare us for those of Christmas. Without Christmas, the teaching of Epiphany would have no foundation. And by these three is introduced the lesson of Septuagesima and the following Sundays,—self-examination. And these lead to the doctrine and discipline of Lent, which are repentance and amendment of life. Without this preparation, the doctrines of Holy Week, and Good Friday, and Easter, and the Ascension, and Whitsuntide, could not be properly understood; and would lead, as is the case of those outside the pale of the Catholic Church, to a defective system of theology and practical teaching, which obscures or ignores certain necessary doctrines of the faith, and leads, by consequence, to a neglect of some most important Christian duties.

May it not be owing to the want of the teaching of the Church, as a system, that we have that maze of confusion which seems to have fallen upon men in these days, as to religious matters? They have some *general* idea of a salvation, a redemption, a heavenly Benefactor and Father, a merciful forgiveness, and a spiritual help. But when they come to details, nothing is distinct. They have no definite idea of the separate offices of the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity. They do not see, and at last cease to believe in, the necessity of a sacramental union of the Christian soul with its God, by which in Baptism we are born again, and in the Communion our soul's life is continually sustained with the Lord's Body and Blood; and so we have the sad spectacle of people "who profess and call themselves Christians," denying the grace of baptism to their children, and of others, alas! who have been baptized, neglecting that great

means of grace which God has appointed "for the strengthening and refreshing of their souls,"—the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, our Saviour and our God. And this is in some measure, we conceive, owing to the overlooking of the yearly system of the Church: the whole revelation becomes to men, in the absence of this, a maze of facts and feelings, and in it the definite line of faith and duty becomes hidden and lost. We may be sure that there is a system, and a distinct arrangement, by which each truth, in its due proportion, and as a necessary part of revelation, is meant to be brought before us, and which, if we follow it in our minds, will prevent that confusion of religious ideas which is now too common.

Now, the sum of the Gospel is "Christ, and Him crucified;" that is, God as the anointed King, and God in a state of humiliation; that in Christ are joined together two whole and perfect natures, the Godhead and the Manhood, distinct, yet united. "for though He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ."

And just so the doctrines of our Lord arrange themselves in the teaching of His Church. There are two great divisions,—Christmas and Easter, bringing before us, (1) the humiliation of our Lord God by His union with our manhood in its weakness; (2) the exaltation of our manhood by its union with the power and glory of God. These are the two main heads of the Christian doctrine, and around these two points are grouped the truths which carry out these two leading ideas. For our better understanding them, they are all distinctly marked by the Church; the one class by the fixed festivals, which depend on Christmas; the other by the moveable festivals, which depend on Easter. The one class seems to point to the duties of the Christian in this life, the other to his hopes for the life to come.

And these are subdivided into seasons, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, the Ascension, and Whitsuntide. Each season presents one idea at a time, so that as the year passes by, all the revelations of God