

But this holy Volume, this precious Word of God, was not to be flung, as it were, upon the waters, to float, as it might, down the stream of time, without any provision to preserve its integrity, and guard it from mutilation. There must be a "witness and keeper of Holy Writ;" and, as our twentieth article expresses it, the Church is constituted for that office. What is known, and what is taught of our blessed Lord, is contained in the Holy Scriptures; but the Church is, under God, the guardian and proclaimer of those truths. Her ministers and ambassadors are taught to urge them; and they are to dispense the ordinances by which believers are to be kept in visible union with Christ their Head. Our third Sunday in Advent, therefore, specially takes up the office of the ministry; and, in so doing, points specially to the organization of the Church, and its claim, as a divine appointment, upon the veneration, love, and obedience of all true believers.

When it is said, in the Acts of the Apostles, that "the Lord added unto the church daily such as should be saved;" when, as in the text, it is called "the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth,"—it is evident that it was our Lord's intention to organize and establish an institution which should comprise, as in a household, all his believing people; which should hold, and maintain, and teach the doctrines by which they were to be guided. In giving this a name, He gave it distinctiveness: he showed that the church was not to be an abstraction, but something visible and material; a society arranged and settled by laws and rules,—with such an organization as would ensure its perpetuity. When such laws and rules can, as in this case, be referred to a Divine head, we have a security that they will be firmly maintained; whereas if we let go this sanction, there could be no certainty about it, and the Church would partake of as many aspects as there are varieties in human opinion.