

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR MARCH.

MARCH 4th—3rd Sunday in Lent.
 " 11th—4th Sunday in Lent.
 " 18th—5th Sunday in Lent.
 " 25th—6th Sunday in Lent.—*Annunciation of Virgin Mary.*
 " 26th—Monday before Easter.
 " 27th—Tuesday before Easter.
 " 28th—Wednesday before Easter.
 " 29th—Thursday before Easter.
 " 30th—GOOD FRIDAY. Pr. Pss. M. 22, 40, 54, 69, 88.
 " 31st—EASTER EVEN.

THE AIM, PRINCIPLES, AND MEANS OF PERSONAL RELIGION.

From a Pastoral by Bishop Gillespie, of Western Michigan—(Continued.)

What are the Means of Personal Religion?

All service of God is described as "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II. Peter iii. 18). The divinely sanctioned "working out" is familiarly known as the use of public and private means of grace.

1. PUBLIC MEANS.

A. Public worship and the Holy Communion.

The devout soul must ever have "a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord." The neglected Church is the sad evidence of "the form of godliness without its power." No professing Christian is sound in mind and heart, who can be content with a single presence in the Church on the Lord's Day, and occasional presence, as in Lent, or on a week day. A healthy soul needs more spiritual food than this. *You do not know what the Church is to you when you can neglect it.* "He that made the great supper in the Gospel called in new guests; but he sent out no meat to them who had been invited, and might have come, and came not." Donne, (1573-1631).

Let me add in behalf of services on other than the Lord's Day, that they are as necessary that "the soul may prosper," as that the Parish may be healthful. The scene of the temporal must be broken in upon by "the power of the world to come," in solemn approach to our Maker in his Sanctuary. We are too feeble spiritually to go from one Lord's Day to another without "the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews x. 25).

The Holy Days of the Church have in them even the blessing of the Church's long observance; while setting forth evidently before us the persons of the followers, they give us in them His most holy life in those who were "men of like passions with us."

The Holy Communion is the very fountain of God's grace. We were all catechized into this feeling. When there is a neglectful communicant "the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint" (Isaiah i. 5). The discipline of the Church may not reach him, but God has set against his name: "if any man

draw back my soul shall have no pleasure in him" (Hebrews x. 38). I say not that in these days of multiplied Communion, the obligation reaches to presence on every occasion, but to every confirmed man or woman, I say "in the name of God," that if anything but most decided providential necessity keeps you constantly from the Lord's Table, great is your ingratitude to God, and sore punishment hangeth over your head for the same." (The second Exhortation to the Holy Communion).

2. PRIVATE MEANS.

A. Family and private Prayer.

Next to the congregation of "all sorts and conditions of men" is the little Sanctuary in the home. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," is the call and the promise to a household group to daily meet around a family altar. How strangely neglected this blessed help to every member of the family, so neglected that even the Clergyman, "the stranger in the gates," is not asked to offer a prayer. And in this neglect we find the explanation of the wayward youth, the marriage tie so hastily formed, so rudely broken; yes, my dear brethren, for the wretched apology of many lives among us, for "studying to serve God in true holiness and righteousness all the days of our life" (the Holy Communion office).

It is unnecessary to urge Christian people to private prayer, but not unnecessary to say and to urge, that the closet with its shut door should be oftener entered, longer occupied, and that it should witness more of the "lifting up of the soul unto the Lord" the "pouring out the heart before God"; while there should be "in everything and anywhere," the "by prayer and supplication letting our requests be made known" to the divine source of all help and comfort.

Ah, my fellow seekers of the things above, how little we realize what untold grace we have in "the prayer of faith," what wonderful help from God awaits us at the mercy seat. Probably there is nothing in the life of the average Christian that needs more adjusting to the divine standard than private prayer. "Lord teach us to pray."

B. Searching the Scriptures.

Speaking to God and listening to God naturally go together. The Bible in our hands affords the latter. The old title "Appointed to be read in Churches" has an unhappy significance in our day. How the spiritual mind would come to the Church and to the individual believer, from the daily "hiding the Word in the heart" (Psalm CXIX. 11).

Dearly beloved, what does it say to your own consciences, how does it appear to God, when every printed line has more attraction than the lines, "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"; and there are hours for the newspaper and the novel, and not even minutes for the Book of God.

C. Meditation and self-examination are the outcome of faithfulness in prayer and in Holy Scripture. They lead us to what, mechanically attempted, is only irksome and disheartening. They are glorious signs that "the old things" of our fleshly life are passing away, and "all things are becoming new," in the clearer perception and deeper love of God and His kingdom.

D. Religious reading is a necessity of Christian intelligence and a means of edifying and quickening the soul. How strange the ignorance in which most Christians are content to live of the testimony of that truth which they profess to love, and of the progress of the cause to which above all others they should be devoted. Where in our homes are the shelves of sacred literature? How many Communicants make it a rule to have constantly in hand some book in the wide range of theological fact and thought.

E. Personal beneficence and pecuniary bestowment. These might have been placed

among the principles of personal religion, so essential are they to the actual being of the follower of the Lamb.

We name them, however, as means of grace. Holy Scripture places side by side alms and prayers—"Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts x. 4). "Alms are the co-relative of prayers. The two exercises are branches from a common stem that binds them together—the moral Law of God," "Our goods are nothing unto Him," "whose are the silver and the gold"; but it is something for us to give them away from ourselves, and God, who "giveth to all men liberally," draws closer to himself the "cheerful giver." The liberality of the purse, whatever its capacity, is one of those opportunities of growing in grace of which selfishness has deprived us. Yet the blessed reward has never been taken away, and a disciple's money is in his hands like all other service, his hope of eternal life through Christ. And if this may be said of earthly substance, how much more of the services in which we are associated with Him who would "draw all men unto Him," and "who went about doing good." Our modern devices of Church work that send our people out to buy and sell and get gain—and more ignorable than these—to supply the Lord's Treasury are crowding out the higher, holier ministries of the heart. Go forth, dear brethren, on the ministries of peace and comfort to the needy ones who line our path, on the ministry of recovering the lost soul to a sense of its need of a Saviour's love, its hope in a Saviour's blood. Then shall your own souls be refreshed, and you shall enter into the feeling of our Master when he said at the well of Sychar, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (St. John iv. 32).

I believe that in our day personal religion is suffering from neglect of private means of grace. The Church cannot do all, and under the most favorable circumstances many will be often detained from the Sanctuary. More religion, in such holy exercises as have been referred to, brought into the daily life, the strange inconsistencies of Communicants would disappear, and Christ would be "admired in them that believe."

How much there is to stir us up to "lay hold on eternal life" (I Timothy vi. 12)—life is fleeting with many, uncertain to all; responsibility of the holiest cast belongs to every age and position; the Church is so dishonored by lives, careless and defective even in immorality. And then the awful warnings—"Many I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke xiii. 24). "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (St. Matthew vii. 21). "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (II Peter iii. 11).

"Wherefore, according to mine office, I bid you in the name of God, I call you in Christ's behalf, I exhort you, as ye love your own salvation," not merely "that ye will be partakers of this Holy Communion"—that may be the mere act of the body; but that ye will rise to the inward devotion, the outward conversation, the simple faith in Christ and subjection to his will in all things—that constitute "the worthy partaker of that holy table."

THE PRAYER BOOK IN SUNDAY-SCHOOLS.

By the Rev. Samuel Hart, D.D.—(From the February Number of the American Church Sunday-School Magazine.)

The Sunday-school has come to have a recognized position in every parish—a position which can hardly be thought to need special