

It sets before us the true aspect of the Christian Ministry, for those who would use it as instrumental for the salvation of their souls.

The Greek word translated here "Ministers" simply means "attendants," being in the New Testament generally rendered "officer," as in the case of those sent by the chief priests to arrest Jesus. Its idea is merely that of one acting under the direction of another. The word "Steward" on the other hand has in it the sense of "manager of the household," with the general idea of distributing provisions and other necessities of life.

In the second passage we have an illustration of the truth expressed in the first. We see in the first place Christ Himself, as the source of all Church work and all Church life. In the second place we have a picture of the great truth which is one of the foundation principles in God's dealings with humanity—that, as in earthly things, so God's spiritual gifts are conveyed—His will is made known—growth in grace and knowledge communicated to man—through the agency of his brother-man. "He gave thanks, and distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down." As in earthly things, so in spiritual the object no doubt of this arrangement is that of fostering a spirit of unselfishness, of kindly and thoughtful care for one another's welfare, which in fact is the essence of the Christ-life,—of Christianity. It is true that much of needful grace is to be sought in direct and individual communion with Christ through the Spirit. This is absolutely essential to any kind of spiritual life. We need to know Him personally for ourselves, and to realize that we know Him and are known of Him individually, (as well as in a corporate sense as members of His Body);—to experience His love, and "out of His fulness" to draw "grace for grace," in the way of direct and immediate intercourse with Him—face to face,—if one may so say. But this form of communion must ever go hand in hand with that which we attain through the regular use of sacramental ordinances afforded through the instrumentality of, and in concert with, the organized methods of the Church. So in our bodies through the nervous system, every member and organ is always in direct communication with the brain, and depends upon it for sensation and power of operation;

yet also, in subordination to this, it depends immediately on the other members and organs, and its constant and regular communication with these, for its nourishment and well-being. Thus, in the miracle before us, we see—*first*, CHRIST, as the centre of all itude and of all Grace; *secondly*, the APOSTLES (1) His *Officers*, a chosen, constituted, commissioned order, serving under His direction, (2) His *Stewards*, intelligent and responsible dispensers of His mysterious gifts.

The question of which I am now asking your consideration, is that of the duty devolving on members of Christ's Flock in reference to these Ministers: and their ministrations. And this branch of Christian duty must take a very solemn aspect when we consider it as pictured in the scene to which I have just called your attention, and in relation to the (*now invisible*) directing, over-ruling presence of Christ Himself. Rightly regarded, its effect must be to banish at once any tendency to pride and self-exaltation on the part of the ministers; and also any tendency towards carelessness, indifference, or light esteem of the clerical office, on the part of the people. All boasting is excluded, when the servant regards himself as a simple attendant, the humble and unworthy instrument of conveying his Lord's gifts. At the same time—in his words and acts—so far as they represent the purpose for which he was appointed—the servant carries with him (inasmuch as he acts under) the authority of his Lord. Any separate or individual claim for honour must sink into insignificance, when set against the awful majesty of the Master of whose gifts he is the simple bearer, and whose presence and operations alone can impart reality to those gifts which He permits to pass through unworthy hands. The words of Absolution lose all their power and reality, unless the hearer is able to forget the mere Messenger and Agent who utters them, and to bow with hushed spirit before the Unseen Presence; and so listen to the gracious words which the Lord Himself utters in his own authority (as to the paralytic at Capernaum)—"Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." So in Baptism, the eye of faith sees Christ Himself in the same Invisible Presence, doing in reality what the servant does in outward symbol—"embracing" the little one brought to Him "with the Arms of His mercy, giving him