

The Church Guardian.

Upholds the Doctrines and Rubrics of the Prayer Book.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."—Eph. vi. 24.
"Earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3.

VOL. VII.
No. 47.

MONTREAL, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 1886.

\$1.00
PER YEAR

HELP FOR A HOLY LENT.

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There are many, very many mistakes about Lent. People generally speak of it as a time of fasting, a season of self-denial, and so it is; but this is not all. There are many persons in the Church who have no definite idea about this holy season, whose notions fall as far short of the truth as those of persons out of the Church. To think or speak of Lent, merely as a season of abstinence from food—or as a time in which we are to eat coarser food than we usually do—is very wrong, very much short of the truth.

It is a season in which the Church requires her children to "turn unto the Lord with all their hearts, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning,"—"worthily lamenting their sins, and acknowledging their wretchedness, that they may obtain of Him, Who is the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness."

The observance of a fast before Easter is of every early origin. It is mentioned in the Apostolic Canons, and by various writers in the second and third centuries. Origen speaks of forty days before Easter being set apart for fasting, and at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) this period was taken for granted. Both the Council of Nicea and Laodicea (A.D. 365) speak of Lent as an institution generally observed by the Church. It is a very precious legacy of the Primitive Church, and if we make a proper use of it we shall find it a means of grace full of blessing to our souls.

IT IS ESPECIALLY A SEASON OF PRAYER AND PENITENCE.

It is a season in which the Church demands more than ordinary devotion from her children. Her services are increased—are of a more solemn character—are such as are best adapted to lead our thoughts away from the things of this world to contemplate the mysteries of Redemption. Every day she would have her children prostrate themselves in God's House and pray that He would "create and make within them new and contrite hearts." True, she offers us no excitement. Her aim is to instruct us in a sober, constant, and Scriptural piety, steadily building us up in a knowledge of "the faith," and in ripeness of Christian character. She would have us withdraw from the enjoyments and pleasures of the world that we may commune with God; and she keeps two facts prominently before our minds through all the Lenten-tide—our sinfulness, and Christ's holiness; our need, and Christ's sufficiency. To secure a blessing in full measure from our prayers, we must subject ourselves to careful and diligent self-examination. To do this well and thoroughly, we should carry our scrutiny back to the earliest recollections of life, and judge ourselves by a rule that will not fail us when we shall come to our great examination and trial at the last day.

It is well to use some such plan as the follow-

ing, when we can take time to it, and work out each part carefully:

Let our life be divided into periods, such as childhood, youth, early manhood, active life, or such other periods as may be marked in each one's own history. Then let us take the Baptismal vows and promises, and search and examine ourselves to see how close we have lived up to our profession—"which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto Him." Or, let us take the Ten Commandments as applied to the various duties of life, and especially those "two things" which we "chiefly learn by these commandments"—our "duty towards God," and our "duty towards our neighbour." Let us think carefully whether we have kept God's holy laws faithfully during one period of our lives, before we go on to another. Of course this way of proceeding will be a work of days, and possibly of weeks, but being well done, it will be a real step in our lives—the groundwork of a thorough conversion to God. Prayer must go before and follow after each examination. And we should endeavour to be regular as to time and place. We read of our Divine Master that "He went, as He was wont, to the Mount of Olives," "and when He was at the place." And so we should use ourselves (as far as we can) to pray always in the same place; we should reserve that place for devotion, and not allow ourselves to do anything common in it; never be there ourselves but in times of devotion. Any little room (or, if that cannot be), any particular part of a room will answer very well. Praying always in the same place gives it a sort of consecration, as a place holy unto God, and helps us in our devotions.

LENT IS A SEASON OF FASTING.

Some good people think they can get along very well, and live a godly life without fasting. But they are mistaken. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And His Church is the same; the same in its Ministry, in its Sacraments, in its Word; it has the same means of Grace now as it had at the first. On the subject of fasting, our Lord has not left us in doubt. He refers to it as an undoubted duty, and gives us rules for the proper observance of it. He says: "When ye fast be not as the hypocrites." He does not enjoin his followers to fast—He assumes that they would do so. He does not say, "If ye fast be not as the hypocrites"; but, taking it for granted that His followers would fast, He tells them how to fast, and says, "When ye fast"—"When thou fastest," etc. So He had said just before, "When thou doest alms"—"When thou prayest." It is taken as a matter of course that those who desire to serve God acceptably will do these things, according to their ability and opportunity, with glad and willing minds, without questioning or doubt. And we have recorded, for our instruction, the examples of holy men in all ages, who chastened themselves by fasting and watching unto prayer. Of course, there may be cases in which it would be wrong to fast, in which a man may have no alms to bestow, in which even retirement for prayer may be impossible; but these are the exceptions, not the rule. The Church wisely leaves her members, each one to determine for himself, how much

self-denial he can put upon himself. She gives us no specific rules. She would have us know that fasting is a help to and instrument of repentance, and only so far of consideration with God, and wise men, as it contributes to spiritual and holy purposes.

So the Church bids us "give alms of our goods," but lays down no other rule than that we are to be merciful "after our power." "If thou hast much, give plenteously—if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little, for so gatherest thou thyself a good reward in the day of necessity."

And just so her rule about fasting. She has appointed "days of fasting and abstinence through the whole year," and on these days and during these seasons she "requires such a measure of abstinence as is more especially suited to extraordinary acts and exercises of devotion."

THE SEASON OF LENT IS A SEASON OF WITHDRAWAL FROM WORLDLY PLEASURES AND AMUSEMENTS.

It is, indeed, the part and duty of every person who by Baptism has put on Christ, at all times "to walk answerably to their Christian calling, and as becometh the children of light." All baptized persons have renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and how far, under ordinary circumstances, they may mingle in the amusements of the world, is a question which each individual must determine for himself; but it is well always to bear in mind the saying of St. Bernard, "What a shame, to be the delicate member of a Head crowned with thorns."

Yet there are times and seasons when there can be no mistake; when the Church has decided that her children must retire, in a peculiar manner, from this world to think of that which is to come. Lent is such a season. Listen to the tones of earnest repentance which the services of the Church now breathe, and say if, after giving utterance to these, you can rush at once into the embraces of a world from which you have just prayed to be delivered. Is it not a miserable mockery to go into the Lord's house and pray—"Turn Thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Be favourable, O Lord, Be favourable to Thy people, Who turn to Thee in weeping, fasting and praying,"—and then go out into the world to mingle in all its lightness and vanity?

LENT IS A SEASON OF ALMS-GIVING.

"Fasting," says St. Augustine, "without alms-giving, is a lamp without oil." God has no need of our help to relieve the poor, but He commands it for our own sakes. Giving is just as much an act of devotion as is prayer, for we minister to Christ when we relieve the poor. What we give to the poor for Christ, God gives back with interest; He repays with liberality the crumbs that are given for His sake; His rewards are laid up, even for the cup of cold water. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and He will repay him." (Prov. xix., 17.) If you can, make some special offering for Church work through your pastor.

"What I squandered for self—I wasted.
What I saved—I lost.
What I gave away—I have."

I have thus told you plainly how you must