



HIS LORDSHIP, BISHOP CLEARY

temple in its solidity, in its costliness and beauty, in its deep foundations and in its height is but a manifestation and image of the living Church which the Son of God instituted on earth for the salvation of His people, it will not be out of place with the occasion that calls us together if we pass from the consideration of the material temple and its use to that of the living Church of God, which Christ built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, and of which He Himself is the corner stone. But as it will be impossible within the limits of this discourse to treat the entire subject, we will dwell for some time on the aspect of it, namely, the perpetuity and the indestructibility of the Church of Christ. We live, dearest brethren, in a world of change and decay. All human monuments are perishable; the greatest structures and the greatest institutions ever conceived by human genius and constructed by human power will one day crumble into ruin. In this world of change and decay, the image of which, says the apostle, is passing away even as the cloud's shadow passes over summer fields; in such a world there is but one institution that is unchangeable, but one institution that is indestructible, and that is the holy Catholic Roman Church, and the fact of its indestructibility proves that it is a divine institution. At this time, dearest brethren, when the most sacred truths are questioned and assailed; when a false science is doing its utmost to sap the foundations on which the Christian religion reposes, and when it is sought to substitute a cold, barren, cheerless unbelief for the truths, the graces, and the consolations of the Christian faith; when gifted minds are drifting away from the moorings of revealed religion and venturing out without chart or compass on the dark ocean of unbelief; at a time when modern forms of Christianity, based on human origin, are fast losing their hold on the intelligence and on the conscience of the age, it is encouraging, it is inspiring to behold the holy Catholic Roman Church successfully resisting the corroding influence of a false science, dissipating the destructible agencies of time and the influence of decay and death; standing erect with divine life as the strong image and reflection on earth of the eternal God, with no shade or shadow of alteration. The life which the Church was destined to lead on earth, was to be the interpreter of that which Christ, its founder, led: a life of toil; a life of suffering; a life of persecution; but also a

life of conquest and of victory. "On this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." For nearly 2,000 years the Church has been in the world doing the work of the Divine Master, and for 2,000 years she has stood the test. Let us glance, dearest brethren, at some of the trials which the Church encountered in the flight of ages; let us consider for a moment the condition of the infant Church, the insurmountable obstacles which stood between her and the accomplishment of her divine mission. Who were the apostles but illiterate fishermen, without education and without social distinction? They were the inhabitants of a despised province of the Roman Empire. The doctrines they preached were offensive to the pride of the Romans, because they soared far away above the flights of human intellect. They inculcated contempt for the world, of riches, luxury, honour and distinction. They taught love of poverty, chastity, and forgiveness of injury, and denounced as a wicked superstition the religion of the empire that had been associated with the habits, traditions and family ties of the people. Surely, there was nothing in this to attract, but a great deal to deter. What was the condition of the country? In a political and social sense the Roman Empire then comprised civilized mankind. It was then the richest and highest power in the world. Its capital, intoxicated with glory, revelled in luxury and wealth. There, in elegant ease, philosophers discussed various moods of human thought, which come down unimitated to our day. There immorality and corruption spread over the face of the empire. That empire, with its shining, tinsel surface of civilization was steeped to the lips in sensuality and moral turpitude. St. Paul gives an appalling description of its rottenness at the time when the Apostolic mission began, and yet before this austere religion, preached by One who met the death of the malefactor, preached by illiterate men, the paganism of the empire three hundred years after began to melt away as the sun melts the snow of spring. Here was the greatest moral revolution that was ever accomplished on earth; a revolution most truly complete. It did away with the past; it changed the basis of human history; the current of human thought; it introduced new principles of government; a new system of civilization. Brethren it was not a human institution that could accomplish this; it was the Saviour's great Almighty Arm. "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." Human reason and human experience tell us that every work performed by man can be destroyed; every monument, no matter how great, no matter how imposing that is built up by human power can be destroyed by human power. If therefore, we find an institution on earth that cannot be destroyed by human power that institution cannot be of man. We find such an institution in the holy Catholic Roman Church.

Let us glance for a moment at some historic facts that show exactly the truth of what I say. The greatest power that ever existed on earth up to that time was the Roman Empire; it was the iron power foretold by Daniel, because the greatest of other institutions were smashed down before it; there was never human power before it that did not crumble down. That power began to persecute the Church, declared war upon its teachers; penal laws were passed by magistrates declaring war upon Christians. They seized upon Christians, besmeared them with tar and set fire to them in the streets of Rome, to light the Eternal City; they took the sword of the tongue as well as the sword of steel; their writers ridiculed the Christian religion as superstition—the religion of foreigners, the religion of ignorance, one would imagine himself listening to the anti-Popery lecturers of to-day. Tacitus the mighty historian, calls the Christians, enemies of the human race. The persecuted Christians retired into the catacombs, often hearing the howlings of the battle reverberating round them. And yet, shortly after the victory of Constantine, the religion that had been persecuted by the empire for three hundred years with more or less intermission became the religion of the empire. The Christians came forth from the catacombs dripping with the blood of martyrs and set to work to build up great temples and legislation for the civilization of mankind. Is this a human institution? We see the finger of God here; we see His work. The Church, it might be said, could withstand external causes; that it could bind it-