

SERMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY.

By H. GOODWIN, D. D., LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

[Epistle.]

"They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."—REV. iv. 8.

There is a remarkable resemblance between these words and some which occur in the First Lesson for Trinity Sunday—a resemblance, in fact, between that which was revealed to St. John, when 'a door was opened in heaven,' and that which had been revealed to the Prophet Isaiah some eight hundred years before, when in a vision he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, and His train filling the temple. Perhaps, if it were the same door that was opened to both, it is not to be wondered at that they both saw and heard the same things; but it is certainly a striking thought that the worship of God in heaven should have been witnessed in a vision centuries before the coming of our Lord, and that the same worship should have been seen nearly a century after His coming by His beloved disciple. Such heavenly service is no doubt independent of time; but to us, who conceive all things under the conditions of time, the comparison of these two distant peeps into heaven gives a striking emphasis to the words, 'They rest not day and night saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.'

It has been a very ancient practice to read the passage from the Book of the Revelation which contain these words as the Epistle on Trinity Sunday. Many passages might have been chosen from the Apostolic Epistles which would have been most appropriate; but I suppose that the striking triple repetition of the word 'Holy,' as addressed to Him Who sits upon the throne, was regarded as giving the portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle a claim of precedence over any passage from the Epistles, just as the occurrence of the same triple invocation must undoubtedly have led to the selection of the First Morning Lesson. In truth, there is something unspeakably grand in the invocation. Who can fail to be struck by it, as it occurs in the Church's hymn, *Te Deum*?

"To Thee all Angels cry aloud; the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.

To Thee Cherubin, and Seraphin continually do cry,

Holy, Holy, Holy: Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of Thy Glory."

And you will remember, also, the magnificent use that Bishop Heber has made of the same in his well-known hymn—

"Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee:

Holy, Holy, Holy! merciful and mighty;
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!"

and each successive verse of the hymn re-echoes the invocation, 'Holy, holy, holy!'

I do not at all wonder that the use of this triple ascription of holiness to Almighty God, both in the vision of Isaiah and in the vision of St. John, should have commended itself to the minds of those who arranged the Scripture readings for Trinity Sunday. It conveys no logical proof. If any one should undertake to prove the doctrine which the Church holds upon the basis of the words, 'Holy, holy, holy,' I conceive that he must necessarily fail; to the doubting, or unbelieving, or scoffing, they convey no proof, nor anything approaching to it. Even the most sincere believer would not like to hang his faith upon so obviously insufficient a support. But the words are just of that kind

which is so helpful and satisfactory to the mind that does not look for proof, that believes on other sufficient grounds, that deems the offering of more proof an impertinence. The very fact that the words do not prove, but merely suggest; that they speak to the initiated, and not to those without; that they sing the doctrine, rather than discuss it;—all this makes the cry of the cherubim and seraphim more grateful to the ears of worshippers on Trinity Sunday than whole volumes of divinity written by St. Augustine, or Waterland, or Pearson, or any other divine, whether ancient or modern.

But there is a feature in the passage chosen from the Revelation of St. John for Trinity Sunday, which is not so much upon the surface as the triple ascription, and which, therefore, it may be worth while to exhibit, and to dwell upon for a time. You will observe that the whole passage represents a service of worship on the part of the inhabitants of heaven before the throne of God. 'The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.' There can be no doubt as to who it is that sits upon that throne; it is 'God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.' Now, please to look on to the next chapter. There we find St. John saying, 'I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain;' and then you will find that the slain Lamb is admitted to the same kind of worship as that which had previously been rendered to Almighty God. 'They sang a new song . . . Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.' Observe, 'Him that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb;' the two put side by side. Whatever is ascribed to one is ascribed to the other—a marvelous and mysterious union; unity asserted between the two which would seem to involve blasphemy, or rather impossibility, unless that Lamb was the Apocalyptic representation of a divine Person, Who might be worshipped even as God is worshipped, Who, in fact, might claim to be worshipped as God.

You will find this view strengthened if you look on to the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation, where the worship of the Lamb forms a prominent feature. St. John describes the great multitude, which no man can number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and he tells us that they 'cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' Observe, 'God and the Lamb.' Who and what can that Lamb be which is thus coupled with God? But, still further, we read that this vast multitude had 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood! And, lastly, this same multitude of white-robed worshippers are to hunger no more, and to thirst no more, because 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters.' 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne.' Note the words. The position of the Lamb, the office attributed to Him of washing the robes of saints white in His own blood, the declaration that the eternal life and peace of those same saints are safe in the hands of that same Lamb,—all these mysterious things are simple and credible enough if we recognize that He Who is thus described in vision is the Lamb of God, Who, by the shedding of His most

precious blood, has taken away the sins of the world; if, in fact, we recognize the truth that He Who, as having been sacrificed for the sins of the world, is described as the Lamb which had been slain is indeed the only begotten Son of God, Who, being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, made Himself of no reputation, and in the form of man suffered upon the Cross of Calvary. The Catholic faith makes all plain. When the Lamb was seen in the midst of the throne, there was no usurpation of divine majesty by a creature, but only the vision of the Son of God, who shares the Father's throne by eternal right.

Thus it seems to me that the Epistle of Trinity Sunday carries us further into the mystery of the Holy Trinity than we might gather from simply reading the words, 'Holy, holy, holy.' It reveals to us a throne, which we find to be in reality occupied, not by the Father only, but by the co-eternal Son too. He Who dwells in light which no man can approach, and He Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, alike occupy that throne. And if we realize as much as this, I think we may say that we have 'acknowledged the glory of the Eternal Trinity.' For it is, I apprehend, distinctly the Second Person in the Holy Trinity, not the Third, with Whom the difficulty, when there is a difficulty, may be said to rest. That there should be a Holy Spirit, Who sanctifies men's hearts, Who lives in us as in a temple, Who speaks to our consciences, Who strives with us and will not cease to strive until He be driven away by persistent rebellion against His loving efforts,—all this, I think, presents no great difficulty. I do not say that we should have put the truth exactly in this form for ourselves—perhaps not; but when we find it so stated in Scripture, and so presented to us in the Church Catechism, it seems to me that it is a doctrine which any one, who thinks about the nature and being of God, and about his own nature and his own needs, may easily accept. It is the Second Person in the Holy Trinity concerning Whom a difficulty of belief may be so easily felt; nay, I go further, and say that unless a man has felt a difficulty about the divinity of this Second Person, it may be doubted whether he has really grasped the greatness of the mystery which that divinity involves. For what we have to do is, not to worship some revelation of God in the distant region which we call heaven, but to fall down before One Who carried our nature and the trappings of human life and human poverty, and to say to Him, like St. Thomas, 'My Lord, and my God!' It is God made man that is so difficult and so wonderful; it is the Incarnation which is so passing strange; it is the Lamb taking away the sins of the world, and yet claiming a place in the midst of the throne of God, which needs a divine revelation in order to assure us that the doctrine is true.

Therefore, I say that if the mind has mastered the mystery of the Son, it will not find it hard to accept the mystery of the Holy Ghost. And, in reality, although the divinity of our Lord must be, and ever will be, a mystery, yet it seems to me that much help may be gained from considering the question as we have now been considering it. The peep into heaven which was vouchsafed to St. John, and through him to us, seems to make it easier than it otherwise would be to believe in the Son of God. St. John seems to have been in nowise shocked (if I may use such an expression) by the adoration of the Lamb which he witnessed. Neither was any one else. All seemed just as it should be. The adoration was the spontaneous outcome of thankful hearts. They whose robes had been washed white in the Lamb's most precious blood felt that they could not do otherwise than adore; and to be permitted to join in imagination St. John and the great multitude whom no man can number, as we have done to-day, may help us to perceive that, although the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the worship of the