

OUR CALLING AS CHRISTIANS.

A SERMON PREACHED IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL,
HAMILTON, ONT., AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD OF
NIAGARA, BY THE BISHOP OF WESTERN NEW YORK.

The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.—ACTS xi, 26.

PART I.

WHEN we meet in a Synod of the Church, we enjoy the sweetest assurance of our Master Himself, that He is present with us, in a special manner, by His Holy Spirit. Through him and by that blessed Spirit, we have special access to the Father in the prayers we offer and in the praises with which we celebrate and adore the Divine Majesty. It has seemed to me, my Rt. Reverend brother, that in these opening solemnities of your Diocesan Council, we have all felt, as with one heart and mind, the reality of these consoling assurances and of the great promise, "Lo, I am with you always." In endeavoring to fulfil the duty which your brotherly love imposes upon me, at this moment I rely upon that promise.

My reverend brethren, and my dear brethren of the laity, it is under a deep sense of responsibility that I speak to you, by the command of your Rt. Reverend and beloved father in Christ; but I do so in token of that cherished fellowship, which we have, one with another, in the Apostolic Communion. I come from a sister Church; nay, rather a daughter. We of the Church in the United States are the first-born, since ancient times, of the Church of England; we delight in that relation, and in the privileges we enjoy thereby. Let me speak to you then as your nearest neighbor, anxious to perpetuate the endearing ties which unite our Churches. There is no moral Niagara between these dioceses; no great gulf to separate us spiritually. The art of the engineer bridges the natural chasm, and we come and go, hither and thither, without hindrance; but there is an art divine which yet more effectually obliterates all lines of division and makes us absolutely one in the brotherhood of the Holy Ghost. May I do something to-day to perpetuate this brotherhood; and may the solemnities in which we are about to seal it, sacramentally, be the prelude of our eternal hymns of rejoicing before the Throne of the Lamb.

The text reminds us that, in that fraternity and communion of Saints, we belong to an ancient family. As the disciples of Christ, we go back to Antioch, and there we find the title-deeds of our inheritance as Christians. We are that same people called Christians, who started there; that same people, despised and persecuted by the world, who, nevertheless, have overcome the world, by the might of the Crucified and in the power of that "Name which is above every name." We are "Christians." Would to God it were not necessary to add—we are Apostolic Christians. We are

they who still adhere to the apostles' "doctrine and fellowship"; and we continue, steadfastly, in the same breaking of bread, and in the same liturgic prayers which were the inspired ordinance of the apostles.

From their communion and fellowship we have departed not. Let us animate our convictions of the value of such communion by examining the text more especially in three points: (1) in what is meant by "the disciples;" (2) in the significance of their name as "Christians;" and (3) in the import of the historic fact that they were first called by this name "in Antioch."

1. "The disciples." These are they who had responded to the Apostolic Commission—"Go ye into all the world and *make disciples*, baptizing them, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." They were the Alumni of Christ,—learners in His school; they were taught of the Lord, through the Ministry of the Word. This is the record of their origin: "Then they that gladly received the Word were baptized." We infer that "the laying on of hands" is here included, for in the Scriptures, baptism is treated as incomplete until the Seal of the Holy Ghost is added. Then comes the description of those who were "complete in Him;" words which I have already cited: "They continued steadfastly, in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in the prayers" Such were the primitive disciples.

Let us look at these disciples more closely; all disciples of one Master, but here distinguished as the teachers and the taught; the Apostles setting forth that doctrine which the Spirit brought faithfully to their minds and memories; and the rest, sitting "at the Apostles feet," as humble and diligent learners, to be taught in "the Word of God," and in "the Way of God," both of which are emphatically particularized in the sacred narrative.

The scene of what is thus far noted is at Jerusalem. Peter and John are chief speakers, but St. James apparently presides, in that city, on all occasions. There the good olive-tree of Abraham is not yet grafted with the wild branch of the uncircumcised. The school of Christ has not yet received us Gentiles; the earliest processes of preparation are going on; but already there is recognised doctrine and discipline and worship. We may be sure that all we now recite in the creed was already prepared, if not also formulated, because every article of that creed, substantially, if not in express words, may be found in the Acts of the Apostles. We infer from the language of St. Luke that "disciples" were actually "catechised." St. Paul teaches us what were the elements of their instruction over and above that creed-formula, "the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." These, he says, are the fundamental truths, "the principles" (or primary elements) "of the doctrine of Christ," viz.: "Repentance and Faith; Baptism and the laying on of hands; the Resurrection of the dead, and