

# The Church Guardian

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## CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER.

Dec. 4th—2nd Sunday in Advent.

" 11th—3rd Sunday in Advent.—[Notice of Ember Days].

" 14th—  
" 16th—  
" 17th—

EMBER DAYS.

" 18th—4th Sunday in Advent.—[Notice of St. Thomas].

" 21st—St. Thomas,..... A. & M.

" 25th—CHRISTMAS DAY.—[Pr. Pss. M. 19, 45, 85; L. 89, 110, 112. Athan. Cr. Pr. Pref. in Com. Service till Jan. 1st, included.—Notice of St. Stephen. St. John and Innocents' Days].

" 26th—St. Stephen—First Martyr.

" 27th—St. John—Apostle.

" 28th—Innocents' Day.

## CHRISTMAS.

We hail the Christmas season, for it helps to bring brightness into our religion—to make it more real, more attractive—and it helps to make the world brighter and better. Some object to the gaieties and festivities attending the season, and think them inconsistent with the event we celebrate, and the religion Jesus came to establish. We do not think so. Some may misuse the occasion; but the spirit which prevails at Christmas time is essentially a good spirit, and does good.

We must not forget that the Gospel of Jesus has its earthly, as well as its heavenly side. It is full of promise for the life that now is—in this world—as well as for the life hereafter. Some Christians are in danger of making too little of the life that now is. They think if they secure the life that is to come, they have done nearly all. Not so. God gives us our present life. We are to improve it, to use it, to enjoy it. We are to do all we can to bring heaven into this life, and make it a foretaste of what is to be hereafter. This will make our religion attractive rather than repulsive. Children are sometimes afraid of religion, because they see nothing but gloom thrown around it. This is a great wrong to them, for it creates a feeling of prejudice which they are long years in overcoming.

Yet, at the same time, there is great danger lest we who are Christians engage in our merry-making and festivities as the world does—in total disregard of the presence of Him in whose honor we celebrate the day. Surely to the Christian "Christ should be the end, and Christ be the beginning" of everything, from first to last, that is done in connection with the Christmas rejoicings. It behooves each one of us who bear this high and holy name, to take to heart the solemn lessons of the Advent season, and settle, each for himself, as in the presence of God, questions such as these: How may I—not in appearance, merely, but in reality—do honor to my Lord and King? Is there anything in the preparations I am now making, or in the enjoyments to which I am looking forward, on which I cannot ask His blessing, or

at which I cannot expect His presence? Is His pleasure in any degree my thought in my preparations, or simply the natural gratification I take in the pleasure of others?

The questions may seem too close, too searching; but God does require the supreme homage and regard of His people in *everything* is evident from His own Word. We give one instance. In the seventh chapter of Zechariah it is written, Then came the Word of the Lord of Hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, saying, When ye fasted in the fifth and seventh month, did ye at all fast unto Me, even to Me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?

Could the Lord describe more plainly the whole-hearted service we must give in order to satisfy Him? That we give Him less than He requires is the secret of our own unrest and dissatisfaction. May He keep us, as this season or any other, from offering Him the mockery of a divided heart!—*Parish Visitor, N. Y.*

## CONCERNING WEEK-DAY SERVICES.

### In Country Parishes and Missions.

The maintenance of frequent hours of public prayer through the week, but the attendance of the few souls that may be drawn to them is to be determined upon on narrow grounds of wordly economy or policy, of mere personal benefit or interest, but upon the larger and more generous ground of the Church's Catholicity. Now some of our dissenting neighbours charge us with being "just like the Catholics." We ought to be, and I would to God that we were; but there are not many of us, I fear, that can "plead guilty to the soft impeachment." All are not Israel that are of Israel. But that we may become more generally in practice what we are in name, Catholics, is the object of these lines. And now what do we mean by the Church's Catholicity, in this connection? We mean that the liturgy of the Church, in all its offices, whether celebrated on a Sunday or week day, whether on her great festivals, in glorious temples, and amid the circumstance of great congregations, or at some quiet evensong, in a small country church, where two or three only are gathered together, is by no means a mere office of private devotion, and cannot possibly be measured, in its uses or blessings, by the question how much good it may do me, or simply those who are present. The Church's worship, though uttered by a single voice, comprehends the whole body of believers, and intercedes for all classes of men, whether in the parish, in the diocese, or in the wide world. Her songs and prayers ascend in behalf not only of such as in any particular place are offering them, but of all men whatsoever who may be the proper subjects of them. Two persons, then, may take part in a service, and hundreds, or, for aught we know, hundreds of thousands, may be benefited by it. Thus the Church's worship is Catholic, because, while her congregations may be never so small, her prayers embrace the spiritual interests of the whole world. No part of the Prayer Book more forcibly illustrates this than the Lord's Prayer itself, which finds a place in every office of worship, both public and private. If you examine it thoughtfully, you will observe that every petition is so worded that even the soul that prays in secret must go out of himself and beyond his own wants, and must include and pray for all who are, with him, spiritual children of God. It is pre-eminently a Catholic prayer.

In like manner we may regard the entire offices of Morning and Evening Prayer, for all days alike, as embracing the whole spiritual membership of Christ's kingdom. As this fact

lends great dignity and value to every occasion of divine service; it ought to sustain and animate every lonely worshiper who lifts an almost solitary voice in a well-nigh empty house of prayer, which, yet, is not empty, since the Lord's minister and the Lord Himself are there; and that is better than crowded pews. Such reflections, surely, ought to shame and silence the thoughtless and unworthy expressions we hear in many parishes in disparagement of week-day services to which "nobody goes."

But, on the other hand, true though it be that numbers are not of essential moment, yet it is well for the members of the flock to consider what wide reaching blessings the Church's worship involves, and what they themselves lose in the way of daily spiritual help by neglecting week-day prayers. If they had real faith, and were as earnest about religion as they are about other matters, would not some find opportunity to attend more constantly than they do, and would not others attend who now are never present? It is well worth while to stop sometimes and look squarely at ourselves. We get into the habit, first, of making excuses to ourselves for non-attendance, and then of accepting those excuses as real and valid. But a little honest scrutiny might reduce them all to ashes.

One of the commonest pleas for this neglect is the pressure of business or of household duties. More than one priest has been reminded that "If a man does not provide for his own household, he is worse than an infidel." But this Scripture does not mean that a man is to provide for his own household with such exclusive wordly devotion as to become a practical infidel. A part of that provision consists in training them by his own influence and example to go to church regularly, to worship God faithfully, and to maintain consistently the services and activities of the parish. But, it is said, the services on week-days are appointed at hours when it is impossible to get away from one's secular engagements. The man cannot leave his shop, and the woman cannot leave her house; and so life goes on from year to year, telling the same tale of spiritual loss, bearing the same doubtful and unsatisfying fruit.

Let us, now, ask ourselves whether, if we were rightly disposed, if we really wanted to avail ourselves of the Church's helps, we could not, in some way, through the ingenuity of a right loving heart, make it convenient to attend the appointed services of the week a great deal oftener than we do, and thus countenance and encourage the rector, help to make the services more edifying, and reap manifold blessings to ourselves. It is really a grave question, and worthy of serious and searching application to many communicants in every parish, whether, if they wanted to do so, they could not easily arrange their affairs so as to provide for certain hours of attendance on the Church's worship two or three times a week, and do it without inconvenience or harm to any earthly interests. Have you ever tried to do this? If not, is it not worth your while, as a layman, upon whose character and conduct depends much of the Church's prosperity, to make the trial with the same admirable wisdom that you would throw into any venture of great financial or social concern to you?

A single practical suggestion may be added as a help to the solution of these questions. It is hardly to be expected that any great number of people should be present at week-day services. Neither would we imply that the same persons should be at all of them. But among all the families in a parish, of which some members are communicants and nearly all are baptized, cannot some household order be established so that one person from each family shall attend service and represent the home circle in God's house? This would materially increase our week-day attendance, would greatly strengthen the heart of many