

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR JULY.

- JULY 3rd—4th Sunday after Trinity.
" 10th—5th Sunday after Trinity.
" 17th—6th Sunday after Trinity.
" 24th—7th Sunday after Trinity.—*Notice of St. James*.
" 25th—ST. JAMES. A. & M.
" 31st—8th Sunday after Trinity.

SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY FOR A FORM OF PRAYER.

By the Rev. George T. Stokes, M.A., Incumbent of Newtown Park Co. Dublin.

(Church Tracts No. 7.)—(Continued.)

Let us now see what this objection is worth, and whether such a radical change was effected in all previous religious arrangements at the precise moment that Christ died; that though forms of prayer were instituted by God in the Old Testament, and sanctioned by Christ, both in theory and practice, in the New Testament, yet that upon that event, forms of prayer which were previously lawful, nay, farther, imperative, in public worship, became immediately unlawful; though finding, as we do, the consequences of Christ's death very fully stated in the New Testament, we cannot discover therein even the remotest hint of any such effect flowing from it.

The objection which is brought against our practice may be concisely stated thus: "Though Christ gave a form to His disciples, and sanctioned the use of forms *before* He died, yet, since that event, it is unlawful for His people either to use or sanction them." This is, I think, a fair statement of it, no point being either suppressed or exaggerated, and yet it seems an objection of the weakest, shallowest nature.

First, I would remark, that if it is now wrong for Christ's people to use forms of prayer, or to be present at services where they are used, it must have been equally wrong for the Apostles to do so but a few weeks after the resurrection. And, secondly, if Christ's death was to cause such a change in the usual method of public prayer, that its continuance would be henceforth unlawful for His people, it would be most strange if Christ—who spent forty days after his resurrection speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God—did not warn them against an error into which they would naturally be led by Christ's own teaching and example. And yet we find that Christ cannot have warned His Apostles against using or sanctioning the use of forms of prayer, during those forty days of close,

intimate converse which they enjoyed with Him after His resurrection; since, if He had done so, that last parting command of their glorified Master would be most diligently cherished and obeyed, and we would not find the testimony left as to their practice—that after Christ was taken up they departed not from Jerusalem, but "were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God;" and again, after the Spirit was poured out upon them, that Peter and John went up *into the temple* to pray, at the ninth hour, being the hour of prayer. And, at a later period in the history of the primitive Church, when the Apostles had seen the great danger of sanctioning any Jewish custom which they did not intend to continue in the Church—which they had seen plainly developed the great tendency which exists in the natural heart to go back to the old ceremonial system, yet even then Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, with the rest of that glorious company—men who had been fully instructed by Christ—men who had been baptized with that Spirit which was to guide them into all truth—men who would sooner die than sanction what was wrong, or put a stumbling-block in their brother's way—yet these men sanctioned the use of forms of prayer by their presence at that temple and synagogue worship, where they were in constant use, and thus plainly decided their lawfulness under the New Dispensation.

It may be still farther weakly objected that the Apostles did not use forms of prayer in their own worship, and therefore we should not. Now, supposing for a moment this to have been the case, I have shown you that it is perfectly lawful for any Church which pleases to adopt forms of worship, inasmuch as the use of what the Apostles sanctioned cannot be wrong for the Christians of our time; however, there does not appear to be any solid ground for this assertion, that the ordinary public worship of the Apostolic Church was not by set forms; for, as I have pointed out to you, all the early associations and tendencies of the Apostles would be towards a form of prayer; and again, as they would naturally be inclined to act upon the slightest hint of their Master's will, they would remember that Christ did not forbid forms of prayer; nay, rather that he had expressly sanctioned and prescribed such forms; and they would consequently be led to continue the same arrangement, unless there was some clear, positive, overwhelming reason leading them to make so great a change in the only mode of public worship which had been known or sanctioned up to this period; and we may be sure that no such positive overwhelming reason existed; we may be sure that no such change took place at Christ's death as rendered forms of prayer, which had been previously lawful for God's people, thereafter sinful and unlawful; for, if such a reason existed, if such a change had taken place, the Apostles would not have authorized their use by their presence from the very day that Christ was taken from them, on to the very close of their lives.

Nor farther, though but few records of the internal arrangements of the early Church have been preserved to us in the Acts of the Apostles, yet we do find therein a clear proof that their public congregational worship was conducted by set forms. We are told (Acts iv. 24), that when Peter and John had borne faithful testimony to the truth before the chief Priests, and through God's mercy had escaped their threats, the whole company of the Christians lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, "Lord, thou art God," &c.

Now, mark, we are not told here that one person prayed, and that all the rest accompanied him in their hearts, but that they all lifted up their voices to God *with one accord*; it is manifest that if any congregation was to attempt to follow a person praying *extempore*, in this manner, they would inevitably cause the

greatest discord and confusion, of which Paul himself declares God not to be the author in any of the Churches; while on the other hand you can clearly see that this perfect unanimity of voice and sentiment—unanimity of voice and sentiment such as the Apostolic Church enjoyed—could only be secured by the use of a liturgy such as ours, where for instance, it is enjoined, "that the General Confession shall be said of the whole congregation after the minister, all kneeling." And again, "that the minister, clerks, and people, shall say the Lord's Prayer with a loud voice, the people repeating every petition after the minister."

Let us look now at the argument which is brought forward from Scripture in defence of extemporary and unpremeditated prayer, as also of extemporary and unpremeditated preaching. It is objected, "Surely Christ has commanded (Matt. x. 19) Take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak." Thus it is that I have heard this very text quoted, or, rather, misquoted, in defence of this practice, and as a sufficient answer to all the weighty arguments which can be adduced both from the positive precepts and the clear examples of Scripture.

This constitutes a notable illustration of a well-known remark, that it is possible, by misquotation, and neglect of the context, to prove any doctrine, however monstrous, from the Scripture; as, for instance, by simply leaving out the words—"The fool hath said in his heart," there can be deduced a proof of Atheism equally as clear, and yet equally as fallacious, as that which is adduced from this text for the practice of extemporary prayer as the only lawful method of congregational worship.

Adopting, as I might fairly do, the argument which the persons who quote this text use against us, I might reply—"That was the Old Dispensation; Christ had not yet died when he uttered these words, and therefore, you cannot conclude from them that extemporary prayer is lawful under the New Dispensation." However, such a method of quoting or arguing concerning Scripture is most dangerous, since men can and often have explained away, even the plainest precepts of common morality under the same pretext, thus plainly fulfilling the words of the Apostle St. Peter—"Unlearned and unstable men wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction."

Now, look at this passage (Matt. x. 1-20) and you will see that Christ is not speaking about prayer of any kind, public or private, but of quite a different matter. Christ was, as we find from the fifth verse, sending forth His Apostles on their first missionary tour, and was directing them how and what they were to preach. To enable them the more effectually to do so, He endues them with special gifts of the Spirit, the power of casting out devils, healing diseases, &c., and at the same time warns them, that in the discharge of their ministry, they shall meet with persecution, and, for His sake, shall be brought before kings and governors; but, lest their minds be distracted from their great work by the preparation of any defence, Christ tells them that there will be no need to settle upon any words or line of defence beforehand, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit would speak through them when they should be delivered up. Thus you can see, by a simple reference to the words of the Bible, by an honest and impartial survey of the context, that these words have no reference to public prayer or the preaching of the Word, at any period of the Church's history, but are only a special promise of special aid given to a select body (the Apostles) under the peculiar circumstances of persecution which they were obliged to endure.

Again, it is urged that the use of forms of prayer are unlawful, because it is a quenching or restraining of the Spirit. If so, it is very strange that the Apostles, who were endowed