

# The Catholic Record.

"CHRISTIANUS MIHI NOMEN EST, CATHOLICUS VERO COGNOMEN."—"CHRISTIAN IS MY NAME, BUT CATHOLIC MY SURNAME."—St. Pacian, 4th Century.

VOL. 3.

LONDON, ONT., FRIDAY, MAR. 4, 1881.

NO. 125

## LENTEN PASTORAL LETTER

OF THE

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BISHOP OF LONDON.

JOHN—by the Grace of God and the appointment of the Holy See, Bishop of London.

To the Clergy, Religious Communities and Faithful of our Diocese Greeting and Benediction in the Lord.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN.

At the approach of this holy season of Lent, we deem it our duty to address you some words of instruction and edification. Our Blessed Lord has laid on the bishop of his Church the burden of instructing the faithful committed to their charge in the great and saving truths of our holy religion. "Go teach all nations; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded." St. Matthew xxviii, 19-20.

It is the duty and the happiness of these "sowers" of the Gospel, to cast the divine seed of God's Word into the soil of human hearts, in the hope that, falling upon good ground, it may spring up and yield fruit a hundredfold—the fruit of Christian virtue and holiness of life here, and the reward of eternal life hereafter.

Now there is no more fruitful source of instruction and edification than the study of the life and actions of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "He is the way, the truth and the life; they that follow him walk not in darkness." St. John xiv, 6. "He is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we may be saved." Acts iv, 12. He is the model and pattern which we must imitate in our lives and actions if we would be saved, "for" in the language of St. Paul, "whom God foreknew he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son." Romans viii, 29. The knowledge of him is eternal life. He is our consolation, our hope, our happiness and our supreme good; "for what have we in heaven," said the Psalmist, "and besides him what can we desire upon earth; he is the God of our heart and the God that is our portion forever."

The study of the life of Jesus was the constant occupation of the saints; it formed their character and gave them the supernatural courage and strength by which they overcame the world, the devil and the flesh. St. Paul was so pre-occupied with it that he professed to know nothing else—"for I judged not myself to know anything among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1st Corinthians ii, 2. And again, "Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord." Philippians iii, 8. It was the knowledge of our Blessed Saviour that inflamed the heart of the great apostle with divine love and with the fire of apostolic zeal. He burned to impart this saving knowledge to mankind, and on his bended knees besought the eternal Father that he would communicate it to a perishing world, in order to save and to sanctify it—"For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his spirit with might into the inward man; that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians iii, 14-19.)

The more we study the character of our Saviour, the more brightly his divine beauty will shine out upon us, the more vividly the grand characteristics that stamped his mission as divine will present themselves to view. And it is well to study attentively this heavenly picture, it is profitable to look now on the face of our Christ, and, Veronica-like, to catch the divine image and stamp it on our hearts. We live at a time when a heartless and blasphemous philosophy is attempting to sap the foundations of Christian faith, and to rob the world of the blessings and consolations of the Christian religion. Hence, it is essential, in order to heal the bites of this fiery serpent of an anti-Christian philosophy and an anti-Christian spirit, or to save ourselves from their destructive influences, to look upon Him who was foreshadowed by the brazen serpent in the desert, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who alone can save us from the spiritual dangers that surround us, and heal the wounds of the soul. But who can adequately describe the life and character of our Blessed Lord? or what pen can do them justice? It is said that a great painter once undertook to paint the likeness of our Saviour. He had made a long and patient and prayerful study of the subject, his heart and his mind were full of it, his soul was aglow with the fire of a holy inspiration and with the light of artistic genius, he seized at last his brush, with the purpose of transferring to canvas the divine lineaments of our Saviour's countenance; but, alas, his heart failed him, his hand trembled, and, casting down the brush in despair, he exclaimed that it was indeed impossible for mortal man to express on canvas the divine beauty, majesty, and sweetness of the face of Jesus. A kindred feeling may well lay hold of the writer who undertakes to describe the life of our Blessed Lord, and the characteristics that marked his mission on earth. However, as men, in order to see and admire the beauty and brilliancy of a diamond, will turn it now on one side, now on another, so by the aid of study and pious meditation, we may catch some glimpses of the heavenly perfection of our Lord's character, and may be able to convey some idea of the characteristics of His mission amongst mankind.

The constraining power that brought our Saviour down from heaven, was His infinite love for man. He had created man through love, He came to redeem him through love. When man fell by the original transgression he lost the justice and innocence in which he had been constituted, he lost the sonship of God and the heirship of heaven; he became an outcast from the face of his God, and the gates of heaven were closed against him; he became a ruin and a wreck, like some beautiful temple, overthrown by a sudden earthquake; his mind was darkened, his heart corrupted, his inclinations tended to evil as streams tend to the ocean, and he was condemned to the death, not only of the body, but to the everlasting death of the soul. Who can heal this wounded, blighted creature—*Quis medicabit ejus?* Who can undo these appalling evils? What mighty and beneficent power can lift up fallen man and restore him to his lost privileges? Who can atone to the justice of God for the sins of men, and reconcile the guilty creature to the offended Creator? What mighty arm can unloose the gates of heaven, and open them once more for man's admission into eternal joys? We find the answer to these questions in the mystery of the Incarnation. Our Blessed Saviour came down from heaven and became man in order to redeem and save us. "He emptied Himself," says St. Paul, "and took upon Himself the form of a servant." He stooped into the abyss of our nothingness in order to lift us up, and to make us once more the children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. The fact of

the Incarnation is a miracle of love far beyond the reach of human comprehension. The infinite condescension of God, implied in the Incarnation—the great and eternal God, infinitely perfect in all his attributes, all-powerful, all-holy, all-wise, and all just, stooping into the depths of our nothingness to save us; this is an abyss of mercy which the plummet-line of human reason can never fathom. Now we find that his whole life and conduct on earth were but the expression and manifestation of this infinite love and mercy as revealed to us in the fact of the Incarnation.

When St. John was in prison for having denounced the public sins of Herod, he heard of the works of our Saviour, who had just entered on his public life, and sending his disciples to Jesus, he said to Him: "Art thou he that was to come, or look we for another? And Jesus, making answer, said to them: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." (Matthew xi, 2-5.)

Our Blessed Saviour does not appeal in proof of his Messiahship to stupendous miracles that startle and terrify. He could have shown in a thousand ways the power that belonged to him in heaven and on earth; his voice could have controlled all the elements, arrested the motions of the heavenly bodies, and suspended all the laws of nature. He could in this way have amply proved his divinity, and that he was indeed the Messiah that was to come to save a lost world. But he appeals rather to his works of tender mercy and compassion; he appeals to his beneficent and gracious manifestation of Almighty power in healing the ills that afflict humanity, in relieving the wretched of the crushing burden of their sorrows, in comforting the afflicted, in healing the broken heart, and binding up their wounds. (Psalm cxlviii, 3.) "Go tell John what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them."

His whole life was marked by the most profound and active sympathy for the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the sorrow-stricken, and the care and sin-burdened men. His whole Sacred Heart went out to them in tender pity, and in practical and efficacious benevolence. For the poor He had a special affection and tenderness. When our Saviour came on earth, he found the poor crushed, ostracised, despised, and abandoned. The civilization of the Pagan world was then at its highest; but it was a cold, heartless civilization; it was like a marble statue by Phidias, exquisitely beautiful and radiant with the halo of artistic genius, but yet hard, cold, unfeeling and pitiless. All its honour and favours were for the rich, the powerful, the learned and the brave. Honours were lavished on the poet, the orator, the sculptor, the successful statesman and the victorious general; but the poor, as we have said, were utterly despised and abandoned; they stood outside the sphere of charity and even of liberty. Our Blessed Lord, who was the way, the truth and the life, came to destroy error, to correct false notions, to teach men the true value of things and the true relationship of man to man, and to establish society on the basis of truth, justice and charity. He sympathized with the poor, and by practising and embracing poverty himself, he made it a sacred thing, and lifted it up in the estimation of mankind. When he condescended to come on earth for our salvation, he might have come clothed with great power and majesty and surrounded by his angels; he might have revealed his law amid the awful scenes that witnessed the revelation and promulgation of the decalogue; he might have spoken his heavenly doctrines in a voice of thunder, and bade the trembling nations to listen and obey. But far different was the plan adopted by our Saviour. He is born in the poverty of a stable, his cradle is a manger, his royal robes coarse swaddling clothes, his retinue an ox and an ass, his luxuries darkness and cold. He grows up in poverty and associates with the poor; he said that whilst the foxes had their holes, and the birds of the air their nests, the Son of Man had not whereon to lay his head. He made poverty one of the beatitudes, "blessed are the poor in spirit, for such is the kingdom of heaven." He thus gave poverty a character of sacredness, exalted it in human estimation, made it an occasion of merit in the eyes of God, and reconciled the poor to their hard lot by lifting up their thoughts towards God's eternal kingdom, which is the heritage of the poor, and in which they will be eternally rich. And last, in the lapse of ages, his blessed example and teaching on this point might be forgotten and abandoned, and the poor be once again treated with contempt, neglect and cruelty, our Lord identifies himself with the poor, makes their cause his own, and declares that on the great accounting day our eternal lot will be decided by the manner in which we shall have followed his example, and obeyed and practised his teachings in relation to the poor. "I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; thirsty, and ye gave me to drink." And so, in every christian age, his true followers have esteemed poverty, have deemed it a holy thing, and have made it a duty and a happiness to be merciful and compassionate towards the poor, rendering their lot bearable and contributing towards their happiness. O! who can estimate the countless blessings bestowed on the poor, the lowly and the weak by this example and teaching of our Blessed Lord. The hungry have been fed, the naked clothed, the lonely and abandoned visited, the light of blessed hope has been made to shine in the darkness of the dungeon, the prison doors have opened to the captive, and the reign of blessed charity, with all its mercies and commiserations, has been inaugurated and perpetuated upon earth, making the "land that was desolate and impassable be glad, and the wilderness rejoice and flourish like a lily, making it bud forth and blossom, and rejoice with joy and praise." Isaiah lxxviii.

But our Blessed Lord not only practised poverty and rendered it sacred, but he also embraced labour and toil as the occupation of his private life, and gave them a dignity and a merit which they had never before enjoyed. At the time of the advent of our Saviour, labour had fallen into utter contempt, was a badge of degradation and considered as only fit for slaves. Working men were deprived of the rights of manhood, were robbed of their liberties and civil rights and were reduced to the position of slaves. Both in Greek and Roman civilization work had been made servile, and working men slaves. At the time of Augustus Caesar, there were upwards of sixty millions of slaves in the vast empire over which he ruled. And those slaves were not men on whose brows an Indian or an African sun had burnt the brand of slavery; they were in blood and race the equals of their masters. In Roman law, a slave was not a person, but a thing; he had, of course, no civil or political rights, he had no power to receive a legacy, no power of civil action, and was entirely beyond the pale and protection of law; he had not even religious duties or hopes. He was in everything absolutely subject to his master's will, who had the power of life and death over him. Such is the frightful condition to which millions of working men were reduced in ancient civilization, when they were described by Seneca as having "fettered feet, bound hands, and branded faces."

Our divine Saviour became a working man, was a carpenter and the reputed son of a carpenter, and for years laboured and toiled with St. Joseph for his daily bread. He thus made labour sacred, he exalted it in human estimation, and gave it a dignity in the eyes of men and a power of merit in the eyes of God. In the christian system,

labour having become ennobled by the action and example of Christ, the working man rose in the scale of human estimation, he ceased to be regarded a thing, and was looked upon as a man possessing human rights and liberties and duties. Men, whether free or bond, were taught the doctrines of equality before God, who was their common father; they were taught the doctrine of human and christian brotherhood, that in the language of St. Paul—"in one spirit they were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free." 1 Corinthians xii, 13. "That they were all children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, that there was neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, but that they were all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians iii, 27-28. These blessed sounds broke through the power and magic of delightful music on the ears of the fettered slaves. Millions of human beings bowed down under the intolerable burdens and unspeaking sorrows of slavery, lifted up their heads, raised their eyes towards heaven, and began to hope. Gradually, under the blessed and fruitful influence of the example and teachings of our Saviour, the fetters began to fall from the festering limbs of the slaves, men learned their rights and dignity as well as their responsibilities, labour was ennobled and sanctified, and the curse of slavery has disappeared from all christian lands, never to return. Who can estimate the value of this mighty result, this great moral revolution! What blessings has it not conferred upon mankind! What fountains of tears has it not dried up! What broken hearts has it not healed! What unspeaking sorrows has it not banished! What burdens of grief has it not lifted up from the heart and soul of man! With what hope, what joy, what sunshine of liberty and gladness has it not flooded the world, transforming it from a pen of slaves into a home of christian freemen.

Another characteristic of our Lord's earthly mission was his care and tenderness for the sick. His delight was to bring hope to the bed of the sick, to cheer their drooping spirits, to relieve their sufferings and heal their diseases. He cleansed the lepers of their most loathsome disease, and by his healing touch restored their putrid flesh to its original freshness and purity. By his merciful power the blind saw, the lame walked and the deaf heard. Fever, the bloody flux, palsy and the dropsy, every manner of disease that racks the poor body with pain, fills the mind with sad forebodings of death, and finally dries up the very fountains of life, all fled at his omnipotent command, or disappeared at his healing touch. They saw in him the author of all life, and vanished in confusion from his Holy presence. "And all that were sick, he healed," said St. Matthew, viii, 16-17. "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:—*He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.*" How beautiful is this characteristic of our Redeemer, and how fruitful it has been in lasting benefits for the sick and the infirm in all the christian ages! Those who have been sick know how dependent the sick are on the kindly offices of others, how they crave for sympathy and yearn for one word of hope. The example of our Lord, and its blessed influences, have soothed the agonies of the sick bed and lavished sweetest sympathies on the sufferers, and have shed upon them the blessed sunshine of hope. Under the potent creative power of his divine example, men and women have, in every christian age, devoted themselves exclusively to the care of the sick, for Christ's dear sake, and hospitals have sprung up in every centre of population, like blessed Protobatics, for the care and comfort of the sick and suffering.

Then what shall we say of his profound sympathy for the sorrow-stricken and afflicted? He knew that sorrow and suffering would be the portion of the great masses of mankind that in this valley of tears man would have to drink the chalice of sufferings to the bitter dregs. He therefore became a man of sorrows himself, in order to sanctify sorrow, and to make it holy and even expiatory of sin and its consequences, and in order, also, by the magic power of his example, to teach the sorrow-stricken, in every age, how to carry the burden of their grief, and how to do so in a manner submissive to the will of God, and pleasing to him. "We have seen him," said the Prophet, "and there was no comeliness that we should be desirous of him; despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity, and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted; but he was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed." Isaiah liii. And, through the mouth of Jeremiah, he exclaims, "O! all you who pass by the way, come and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow." Lamentations i, 12. He drank the cup of suffering and sorrow to the bitter dregs, not only to expiate our sins, but also to sanctify our sorrows, and to teach us how to bear them.

Perhaps amid all the grand and beautiful characteristics of our Saviour's life, there is none more endearing to the human heart than his blessed compassion for the afflicted, the mourners and weepers. The instances of this trait in our Saviour's character, related in the gospel, speak to the heart with a sympathetic power which human language is impotent to command. We shall only refer to two of them. The first to which we wish to call your attention is the case of the widow of Naim. As our Redeemer, accompanied by his disciples, approached, on one occasion, this little town, he met the funeral of the only son of a widow, as it proceeded slowly and mournfully towards the cemetery. There were in that funeral procession the usual circumstances that mark such an occasion—the kind-hearted and sympathetic neighbours, the weeping relatives, the corpse-stiff and cold in death, and there was the broken-hearted and widowed mother following the coffin in which her earthly joy and hope were enclosed. The sad spectacle was too much for the heart of Jesus; he was moved to deepest pity for this weeping, crushed and broken-hearted woman, and approaching her, he said, "O! woman, weep not." He then went to the bier and in a voice of command he said, "Young man, I say to thee arise." Death heard the voice of the author of life and obeyed; the young man awakened into life and went home with his mother, to be the comfort and the staff of her old age.

The second instance of our Saviour's touching sympathy for the bereaved and the sorrowing which we shall adduce, is that which relates to the raising of Lazarus from the tomb. A beloved brother, the guardian, prop and pride of two orphan sisters, is torn from the family circle by the cruel hand of death; he is taken away in the prime of manhood, in the midst of his usefulness, and at a time when his presence seemed essential to the well-being and comfort of his sisters, and he is now four days dead and buried away in the silent tomb. His place is vacant at the family hearth, there is a sad void in the household that cannot be filled up, there is a beloved presence wanting; and grief bitter and overpowering, and sorrow speechless and inexpressible, because too great for utterance have filled the souls of the bereaved and broken-hearted sisters. Our Lord came to console them in their heart-anguish and agony, and the sisters rushed out to meet him, and in an outburst of passionate grief, and in those piteous accents that smite the heart, exclaimed, "O Lord, if thou hadst been here our brother would not have died. But now we know that whatever thou shalt ask of God, he will give it to thee." To their

(Continued on 5th Page)