

Bishop Wilson's Meditations on His Sacred Office, No. 4.-- Wednesday--(Continued)

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-denial, fasting, and the responsibilities of a clergyman in leading a life devoted to God and service to others.

Scripture: Malachi 2:7, Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:19, John 12:25, Romans 8:13, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 1 Timothy 4:16, 1 Timothy 6:10, James 1:22, 1 Peter 5:2

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches on the dangers of being rich and living a luxurious life without caring for the poor, emphasizing the need for repentance, mortification, and self-denial to lead a Christian life. He highlights the importance of fasting, temperance, and dedicating oneself to God through prayer, alms, and selfless service. Newman urges clergy members to sanctify themselves first, to be zealous in their ministry, patient with their flock, and to avoid complacency or neglect in their duties. He stresses the significance of setting a holy example in speech, conduct, and the management of church resources, always keeping in mind their accountability to God.

Transcript

Luke xvi. 19. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." For a man, then, to be rich, to be clothed magnificently, and to take no care of the poor, is sufficient to send him to hell, because he cannot lead a Christian life. Repentance, mortification, and the cross, are utterly inconsistent with a soft, sensual, voluptuous life; the desire of happiness, with the love of this present life. It is, therefore, a most miserable state, for a man to have everything according to his desire, and quietly to enjoy the pleasures of life. There needs no more to expose him to eternal misery. "He that loveth his life, shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal (John xii. 25.) He that loveth life, (that is, is fond of it) for the sake of the pleasures, advantages, it affords, will soon lose the love of heavenly things; the love of God, of his soul, and of the duty he owes to them: He hates it, who does not value it in comparison of eternal life, which he hopes for. A Christian gives proof of this, by mortifying himself; a Pastor, in spending his life in the works of the ministry, &c. Those whom God loves in order to an happy eternity, He weans from the pleasures of this present life.

Temperance consists in a sober use of all earthly, visible things, and in confining ourselves within the compass of what is necessary. With God all things are possible. The Almighty God enable me to conquer the temptation of riches, and to get above the allurements of this present life. There is much more reason for a man to humble himself, on account of his self-denial, than to boast of it, since the corruption of his nature is so great, that he cannot follow even the lawful dictates of nature, without hazarding his soul. Christian self-denial is, to resist and crucify in ourselves the spirit and inclinations of Adam,--the flesh, its affections and lusts,--to die to our passions, in order to follow the motions of the Spirit.

Fasting,

Necessary, to bring our hearts to a penitent, holy and devout temper. Our Church requires this, and appoints days and times, &c.; and it has been the honour of this Church, that she hath kept up to her rules, where others have shamefully neglected them. Fasting necessary, to perform the vows that are upon us all. By fasting, by alms, and by prayers, we dedicate our bodies, goods, and souls to God in a particular manner.

Meditations proper for a Clergyman during Lent.

The primitive Bishops had places of retirement near their cities, that they might separate themselves from the world, lest teaching others they should forget themselves; lest they should lose the spirit of piety themselves, while they were endeavouring to fix it in others.

Prosper, O God, the good thoughts, the good purposes, which Thou Thyself shall inspire. I acknowledge Thy goodness, which hast raised me above my brethren, and appointed me as a Successor to Thy Apostles. O may I ever act agreeably to this character. May I never profane a character so holy and so divine, lest God should pour down His vengeance upon my ungrateful heart. Pardon me whereinsoever I have been wanting in the several duties of my calling; and give me grace to be more careful for the time to come. Amen.

How am I bound to adore Thy goodness, my great Master! Thou hast set me in office amongst the chief of Thy servants; but I will, for Thy sake, make myself the servant of the meanest of Thy servants. By me Thou communicatest Thy grace in the Sacrament; by me Thou teachest Thy people the truth; by my hands Thou adoptest them Thy children in baptism, feedest them with Thy body, comfortest them in affliction, arimest them against the fear of death, and fittest them for a blessed eternity. Grant that I may truly weigh the sanctity of my calling, and faithfully discharge it; and that others may weigh it, and bless Thee for so great a blessing. I am appointed to sanctify others. O grant that I may first sanctify myself; that I may separate myself from this world, its profits, pleasures, honours, and all its idols. Amen. Let my zeal, O my Lord and Master, be answerable to that account which I must one day give. Let me not see Thy laws broken, hear Thy name blasphemed, Thy word set at nought, Thine ordinances despised, with patience. And oh, may I never, by any neglect or sinful silence of mine, contribute to these crimes; but employ my authority to suppress them. Let me remember what was once said by Christ himself to a Christian bishop: "Because thou art lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my moth." Inspire my heart with such holy resolution and courage, that I may not fear any man when Thy honour and my duty call me; that no worldly considerations may hinder me, when my office obliges me to stand in the gap. Amen. Give me such holy dispositions of soul, whenever I approach Thine altar, as may in some measure be proportionable to the holiness of the work I am about, of presenting the prayers of the faithful, of offering a spiritual sacrifice to God, in order to convey the body and blood of Jesus Christ, true bread of life, to all His

members. Give me, when I commemorate the same sacrifice that Jesus Christ once offered, give me the same intentions that he had, to satisfy the justice of God, to acknowledge His mercies, and to pay all that debt which a creature owes to his Creator. None can do this effectually but Jesus Christ: Him, therefore we present to God, in this Holy Sacrament. O Thou, who has made me a servant in Thy house, give me such dispositions as that I may never dishonour Thy service. Amen.

I am a sinner, and yet I am appointed to offer up prayers for others. It is to the great God to whom I offer these prayers. To me the Church, the spouse of Christ, intrusts her desires, her interest, her necessities, and her thanks. What a trust is this! O may I never betray it! may I never obstruct Thy mercies to Thy Church by a formal service. Let me ever speak to God, and from God with attention, with love, with respect, with fear, with purity of heart, and with unpolluted lips. Amen. The office of a shepherd of souls is full of difficulty. Consider what toil Jesus Christ underwent, what reproaches, what contempt, and what despatch!-- and from those persons to whom He preached the most concerning truths; and, last of all, laying down His life for His sheep. I am astonished, and greatly ashamed, when I consider how very far I come short of this pattern, how poor my pains have been, how little of my time, my care, my thoughts, have been spent in this service. O Chief Shepherd, and Bishop of souls, communicate to me, the meanest of thy herdsmen, such a degree of concern as may thoroughly qualify me for this great work; pardon my past negligence, and lay not to my charge the evils which may have happened thereby. Amen. Consider the patience of your great Master, with what compassion He treated sinners; transcribe His example; and if any of your flock are perverse, froward, obstinate, bear with them, condescend to their weakness, and strive to reduce them even against their wills. But has this been my way? Very far from it. I have been impatient when any of my flock have not been bettered by my care and pains. And this, not from a true zeal for the glory of God, and the good of souls, but too often, alas! from a principle of self-love; angry, because I have been so conceited as to think that my labours should not be in vain. And yet how often has God spoken to me myself, and I regarded it not? How long was his grace ineffectual even with myself. O Jesu, impart to me a portion of that Spirit of meekness which prevailed with Thee to preach to a people who regarded Thee not, who despised, who crucified Thee. Then why should I, who am a sinner, complain of my unsuccessful labours? Forgive, gracious God, the faults I have committed in this great work of the ministry; and let no unworthiness in me hinder thy blessings from descending upon the souls committed to my care. Amen.

Reflect seriously what a dreadful account you have to give, if you say, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;" or if you give the children's bread to dogs, that is admit to the Lord's Table those that are unworthy of such a favour. This would be to lay men asleep in their sin. Lord, preserve Thy servant from this sin. Amen. I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have don. O Lord, that I could say this to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made me Overseer. That I could say, Be ye devout, as ye see me devout; do ye forgive one another, as ye see me ready to forgive; despise the world, &c. as ye see me do it. Let me seriously consider, that I am not only answerable for my own personal offences; I sin every time I cause others to sin by my example. What reparation can be made, what answer can be given, when Christ requires our flock at our hand? Lord, suffer me not to follow my own will; reform me, that I may reform others; give me light to discover, and grace to amend, where I have done amiss. Amen. Let your conversation be such as becomes, not only the gospel, but ministers of the gospel, to whom all that is curious, useless, light, and vain, is forbidden; all scurrilous language, idle stories, &c.

Endeavour to leave some impression of piety upon the minds of those with whom you converse. Jesus Christ did so always. Make no distinction betwixt the rich and the poor, as to converse with one, and not

with the other. Lord, grant that Thy example may ever be before me; and my conversation holy, useful, and edifying. Amen.

As to the disposal of the Church's revenues, the suggestions of avarice, of vanity, of pleasure, and of the world, ought not to govern me. I am only a steward, not a proprietor, and should be as criminal as those laymen that invade them, if I convert them to lay and secular uses; which side of sacrilege, very probably, took its rise from other observing the Church's revenues put to secular uses. Grant, O my Lord, who hast given me much more of this world's goods than Thou tookest Thyself, grant that I may apply the goods of the Church to Thy glory, and to the support of Thy poor members; and pardon all my vain expenses. Amen.

Source:

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