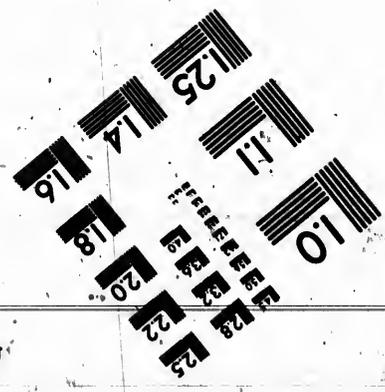


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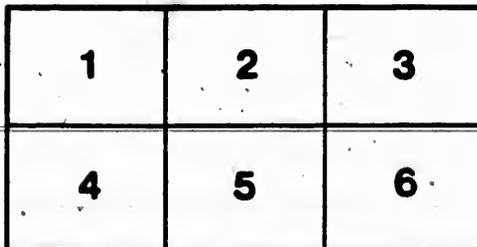
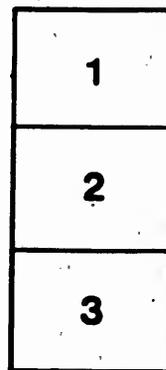
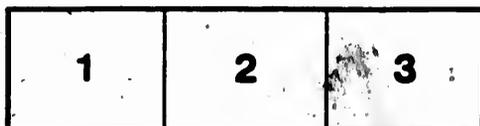
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at the close

of the year

A SERMON.



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A SERMON
ON THE DUTY OF RECEIVING THE
HOLY COMMUNION,

PREACHED AT THE CATHEDRAL, QUEBEC,

December 11th, 1859,

BY THE

REVD. GEO. VERNON HOUSMAN, M.A.,

**Assistant Minister of the Cathedral, and
Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of
Quebec.**

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**PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHURCH  
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JOHN VI., 53,

“ Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.”

THERE were many words spoken by our blessed Lord which were so novel in their character and so deeply spiritual in their meaning, that they were immediately rejected by the majority of those who heard them. The Jews were still living under the rule of the ceremonial law, and saw not how all the observances of the Old Testament dispensation pointed to and had their fulfilment, in the person of Christ. The nail was upon their hearts even as it is now. Not that this adherence to the religion of their forefathers and their consequent rejection of the arguments and entreaties made by Christ was a justification of their conduct. Their want of candour in examining the claims of the Messiah and their continued perversion of all that had been written in the Scriptures, left them without excuse, and they shall stand hereafter in the presence of their Judge, condemned by that very evidence which they once spurned and rejected. “The word which Jesus spoke unto them, the same shall judge them at the last day.” Christ would have gathered them even as a hen doth her chickens under her wings but they would not.

Now, if the Jew will stand hereafter inexcusable, what shall we say of that vast multitude who, living under the greater privileges of the Gospel dispensation, still disregard its claims? We have not, thanks be to God, to deal, at the present day, with many individuals who dare to reject the terms of the Bible, or to deny their obligations to the Great Head of the Church, but we have that which it is as difficult to combat, viz., the indifference and lukewarmness of those who profess and call themselves christians, who readily acknowledge their belief in the principles of christianity, and who show much outward compliance with its forms, and yet manifest no desire to advance beyond that point which the world has, as it were, prescribed and sanctioned, as reasonable and expedient. Human opinion is, alas! the standard to which too many conform their practice, without considering the requirements of God's holy word: and they shelter themselves in a fancied but false security, because so many are found to be satisfied with the same imperfect obedience.

No christian duty is more systematically set at naught by a large portion of professing members of Christ's flock, than that of receiving the Holy Communion, and yet no duty is more positively and strictly enjoined. Let me then my brethren, bring this important subject under your consideration, with the earnest hope, that those of you who have hitherto neglected this sacred ordinance, may be led to consider your obligation to God, and may cheerfully acquiesce in those repeated invitations which bid you commemorate the dying love of your Redeemer.

That it is a solemn duty for every member of Christ's Church to partake of the Holy Communion no one can reasonably deny. The

command stands forth in prominent terms in the Sacred volume, and if obedience to the divine requirements be a generally acknowledged principle, how can we presume to say that compliance in this particular can be left to the option of man? In the duties which God has enjoined there can be no place for man's opinion. Christianity is not a system founded upon human reasoning, but it embraces principles which have emanated from God alone, and which therefore are stamped with the impress of truth and holiness. Moreover we must acknowledge that every command which has been given, has for its end the benefit of fallen man—so that when we find any duty recommended we must be convinced that it is dictated by a mind, supreme in wisdom, and boundless in love, and that if we would consult our own interest we must comply with it cheerfully and without constraint. Man is a creature formed for the highest enjoyment and the most perfect holiness, and although the image of God was partially obliterated by the fall of our first parents, yet the means for our restoration are ample and clear. There are however, certain conditions upon which we are to receive the benefits of Redemption, and one is obedience to the divine laws. When rules then are laid down in the word of inspiration, men are not at liberty to disregard them, and should any presume to set at naught the counsels of the Most High, such conduct is most reprehensible, and will inevitably bring down the heavy wrath of Him who hath said, "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense saith the Lord." But although man is called upon to yield obedience to all that God has commanded, and the duty of participating in the Holy Communion forms no exception, yet numbers, as I have observed, "separate them-

selves from their brethren who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food," and by this manifest dereliction of duty, do great injury unto God and provoke Him to just displeasure.

Now, if there be this backwardness in approaching God, in this His appointed way, we may reasonably enquire, what excuses are offered, what pleas are brought forward, as at all justifying or palliating such unreasonable conduct. For assuredly each absenter must be actuated by *some* reason, and that too of sufficient weight, to silence the voice of conscience, and to justify the course pursued.

There are, it is true, a vast number of professing christians who ought not in their present state to approach the Lord's table. Of some, the general conduct is so totally at variance with the tenor of God's word, that their presence, would bring upon themselves increased condemnation, and at the same time be highly detrimental to the interests of Christ's Church. The courts of God's house are trodden by men of every variety of character, and sometimes the open and notorious violator of the moral law, will, to quiet his conscience and to maintain his position in society, be a frequent, if not regular, attendant upon the services of the Sanctuary.—In such a case, attendance at the Lord's Table would be a profanation of that sacred rite, and the unhappy individual would bring down upon himself "a curse and not a blessing."

But it is not to notorious offenders against the laws of God and of man, that I wish to address myself. I would rather speak to that class of persons who, if we may judge from external appearances, are surely fitted to partake of the emblems of Christ's body broken and blood shed. Amongst those who apparently come under this

denomination, there may be some who do cherish unholy desires, impure thoughts and uncharitable feelings. To such I would say "wherefore do ye not repent and amend?" There are others however who are deterred by conscientious scruples, and who from a sense of deep humility, think that their absence from the Holy Communion is a light matter compared with the possibility of being unaccepted guests at that sacred feast. And no doubt this is an artifice of Satan by which he too successfully hinders the people of the Lord from participating in an ordinance which is expressly designed for "the strengthening and refreshing of their souls." In this way it is that many languish in their spiritual career and feel oftentimes surprised that there is so little real vitality in their religion, and that they make so little progress towards that state of perfection which all should seek to attain. And can this indeed be a matter of surprise? Surely not. The body, we are aware, needs continual nourishment and support, and how absurd and useless would it be, to look for the development of physical strength and energy where suitable and sufficient food was withheld. And can we wonder that the spiritual facilities should be retarded by the absence of such food as God Himself has provided for our benefit, and which He has commanded us to use for our growth in grace? Moreover, my brethren, can you not see how formal and insincere must be that petition which you daily offer up with your lips, and especially when you assemble within the walls of God's House, "Give us this day our daily bread," if when that bread is provided you refuse to put forth your hand and take it; and how utterly at variance is your conduct with this acknowledgment of your wants! Oh! consider

then what provision God has made for your necessities; and while you feel your need and are so lovingly called and bidden by God Himself to this sacred banquet, refuse not to come thereto.

But some may still say, I acknowledge the truth and reasonableness of all that is advanced, and yet the sense of unworthiness which has hitherto restrained me in approaching God in this sacred ordinance, is not diminished, and my apprehensions still compel me to absent myself.

Admitting that this is a valid plea, may not the same argument be brought forward as warranting the withholding of *all* communion with God? Who, I would ask, is *worthy* to approach God in prayer? Who is *worthy* to invoke the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and to look for His continual presence? Who is *worthy* to tread the courts of the Lord's House? Surely the most sincere believer is ever ready to acknowledge his unworthiness, and yet he engages with faith in all the means of grace, with the humble yet well grounded hope that God for Christ's sake will give more than either he desires or deserves. Humility then—yea a sense of the most utter unworthiness—is needed from all those who approach the Lord's Table. The whole service is expressive of the self abasement of those who come to communicate*—And any feeling short

* The following quotations from the Common Service sufficiently prove this:—

"Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men: we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed by thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings: the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable."

"We do not presume to come to this thy Table O Merciful

of this would evidently be unbecoming in those who come as suppliants and without any desert or merit, to seek the highest blessings which God can bestow upon his creatures.

Surely then there must be something more than a sense of unworthiness which operates in hindering many sincere Christians from obeying their Lord's dying command. My brethren, the error lies, I believe in confounding the terms *unworthy receivers* and *receiving unworthily*. As I have observed, all acceptable communicants are unworthy receivers, they cannot be otherwise,—the Word of God represents no man as *worthy* of divine blessings, and no man entertaining a due sense of his spiritual condition, would presume to represent individual worthiness, as constituting a claim upon God's goodness: So that those who are waiting until they shall become worthy, are indeed looking for that peculiar spiritual condition, which must in reality ever be beyond their reach in this world; and if they should, indeed, at any time, consider themselves to have attained unto this elevated position, this supposition would lead them into that condemnation which they were so anxious to avoid—"Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Rather than discourage a feeling of unworthiness in your approach to the Table of the Lord, I would bid you cherish it as one most commendable in the sight of God, and being destitute of which, you will certainly shut your-

Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table."

"Although we be unworthy through our manifold sins to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service: not weighing our merits but pardoning our offences through Jesus Christ our Lord."

selves out from heavenly blessings in this world, and become in consequence unfit to partake of those joys which are reserved hereafter for the faithful: for thus saith the Lord "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word."

But there is a manifest and important difference between this unworthiness on the part of every acceptable communicant, and the receiving of the Lord's Supper unworthily. The 29th Article expressly touches upon this point.—"The wicked," it says "and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth (as St. Augustin saith) the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a think."

Here you will readily perceive that unworthily receiving the Holy Communion, is an evil expressly stated as appertaining to "*the wicked*" and those who are "*void of a lively faith.*" Those then who acknowledge that these terms express their real condition, would indeed be *unworthily* receiving "the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ." Therefore I would say, in the language of the exhortation, "If any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of His Word, an adulterer or live in malice or envy, or in any other crime, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that holy Table, lest, after the taking of that holy Sacrament, the devil enter into you, as he entered into Judas, and fill you full of all iniquities and bring you to destruction both of body and soul."

So that while on the one hand our Church teaches that those who "truly repent of their

sins and are in love and charity with their neighbours and intend to lead a new life," are fitted to receive the Holy Communion with benefit to their souls: she on the other hand expressly warns "the wicked" and those who are destitute of "a lively faith," not to come to that sacred feast; for should they persist in doing so they would be unworthily partaking of the emblems of Christ's death, and would thereby inevitably bring down upon themselves the heavy condemnation of the Almighty.

When then I would urge you, my brethren, to consider the imperative command of the Saviour bidding you to communicate, I would charitably hope, as I have already intimated, that you are *not* such open and systematic violaters of God's laws, as would certainly justify your absence, but that you are endeavouring (God being your helper) to live such a life, as shall make you accepted at the last great day of account. If this surmise be correct, then, I would ask, are you not separating from your brethren who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food on insufficient grounds? And do you not see that the unworthiness which you have hitherto offered as a plea, is not in reality a reasonable or valid excuse? And consider further that God has provided this Sacrament to be "not only a badge or token of christian profession but rather a certain sure witness and effectual sign of grace and God's good will towards us, by the which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him."

If then God has Himself appointed an ordinance by which we are to secure the blessings of Redemption, surely you must be depriving yourselves of those gracious benefits if you disobey His

command, and you are assuredly not living in accordance with the terms of that Gospel which you profess to delight in, and which God in His mercy has so fully revealed to us, for therein it is declared "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

There is yet another argument which is brought forward by many sincere christians in extenuation, if not in justification, of their neglect of that sacred ordinance; it is this,—they affirm that after the reception of the Holy Communion they may possibly fall into the sins which hitherto have so easily beset them, and that to avoid this contingency they will wait to a more "convenient season." To suppose that any man can be placed beyond the reach of temptation, or attain a position from which he can never decline, is to look for more than the Scriptures warrant us in expecting. All that we can do is diligently to apply ourselves to the use of those safeguards which are within our reach, and it is only when we thus act that we can hope to escape from the assaults of him, who, with inveterate malice is ever ready to effect the ruin of our souls. He then who comes in faith to the Holy Communion, is taking to himself the whole armour of God and in that spiritual strength which he thereby acquires, he will go forth into the world, and be able to combat successfully with the great enemies of his salvation. To act otherwise is to give Satan the advantage, and many have no doubt deplored with heartfelt sorrow their shortcomings and misdoings, who might have received that strength they needed, by a regular and devout attendance at the Lord's Table.

One word let me say to those who declare that with the pressure of worldly business, they can-

not conscientiously and consistently participate in so solemn and sacred a rite.

If this be the case you are evidently putting worldly claims before the claims of God—you are substituting the riches of earth, for the riches of Heaven, and has not our blessed Lord, with solemn earnestness, asked the important question, "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Such excuses, be it remembered, are not so easily accepted and allowed before God, and those who make them will hereafter be counted unworthy of the Heavenly feast, when the Saints in glory shall sit down to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Urging then, as I would do upon you all, the necessity of complying with the Saviour's dying command "Do this in remembrance of me," let me briefly, in conclusion, remind you of the frame of mind in which you should approach the Lord's Table.

If we regard this Service as commemorative of what our Saviour effected for us by His death upon the cross, surely we should be filled with heartfelt gratitude for such amazing mercies. And if we thus "remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour, thus dying for us," are we not irresistibly reminded of our naturally lost condition on account of sin? In our approach, therefore, to the Lord's Table, we must confess our sins unto God, and being bowed down with a sense of unworthiness, and at the same time manifesting the most sincere repentance we shall cry out in heartfelt sincerity "God be merciful to me a sinner." But while this abject feeling leads us as humble suppliants to the throne of grace, we must also have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ. "By

the merits and death of Jesus Christ, and through faith in His blood," we humbly yet believingly look for "remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His passion." Nor are the blessings we receive merely for the present. The strength which we thus acquire,—the vigour which is thus imparted to us, will enable us to persevere in the good and the right way: so that having obtained forgiveness for the past and grace for the future, we shall be able, like the Ethiopian Eunuch to "go on our way rejoicing."

May this subject, my brethren, so engage your serious consideration, that you may be led to join from time to time in this divine ordinance, and escape the condemnation which is embodied in those solemn words of our text "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."

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