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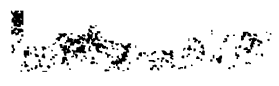
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DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED AT THE

DEDICATION

OF A

NEW HOUSE OF WORSHIP,

ERECTED FOR THE

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY IN MARBLEHEAD,

JANUARY 2d, A. D. 1833.

BY JOHN BARTLETT,

Pastor of said Society.

MARBLEHEAD:

PUBLISHED BY HENRY BLANEY.

1833.

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DISCOURSE.

PSALM LXXXIV—1, 2.

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry aloud for the living God.”

THE occasion, upon which we are assembled, is one of deep interest to religious minds, and particularly so to the christian society, that has erected this spacious and beautiful edifice for the social and public services of religion. We meet here, this day, to dedicate this house to the Most High God; to implore his acceptance of the offering; to supplicate his blessing, and particularly that he would make the heart of every one, who may worship here, a temple for his holy spirit to dwell in.

The emotions, which the occasion naturally excites, are not unaptly expressed in the passage just read. The psalm, from which it is taken, was written, it is supposed, immediately after the completion of the temple at Jerusalem. By whom it was composed it is not certainly known. It is however the devout effusion of a heart, aspiring after the worship of God and eager to enter the sanctuary where it may offer it.

With feelings, I hope not unlike those which animated the author of this psalm, we have entered this

temple ; and as we are about to dedicate it to religious and moral purposes, a brief and simple statement of some of these purposes may not be inappropriate to the present occasion.

1. To the inquiry "what mean ye by this service?" We reply, that our first and great purpose is to dedicate this house to the worship of the only true God ; the self existent, eternal, immutable Jehovah.

That worship is due to him, who made, upholds and governs all things ; the almighty, all wise, infinitely just and good, and upon whom all entirely depend ; that he should be acknowledged and honoured by his intelligent creatures, in their social, as well, as in their individual character, as their creator and preserver, their benefactor and disposer, and that he is entitled to their highest veneration and love ; to their gratitude and praise ; to their trust, submission and obedience, is a sentiment universally congenial to the human heart. Wherever the idea of God is found, there are found also, even among the most ignorant and barbarous people, forms of religious worship ; which, though in many instances, absurd, plainly indicate a natural feeling of obligation to honour him. It surely is a sentiment, according with the nature, which we have received, and corresponding to the character of the divine being and to the relation, which he sustains towards us, that he, who has endowed us with intellectual and moral faculties, by which we are made capable of discerning truth, of enjoying its excellence and beauty, and of applying it to the promotion of our improvement and happiness, should himself be the subject of our highest intellectual

exercises, of our most devout contemplations; that the affections, with which he has clothed us, should go forth supremely to him, who is the chief good and the source of all blessing; that we should venerate his majesty and holiness, his justice and truth; stand in awe of his power, confide in his mercy and love, be grateful for his kindness and condescension, and praise him for all that he is in himself and for all his goodness to his intelligent offspring. To him are we indebted for our very capacity of happiness and for all the provision that is made to fill it. To him we owe all that inspires the heart with hope; that fills it with gladness, that cheers and enlivens present existence and makes an eternal being infinitely desirable.

This house, then, we dedicate first of all to the worship of Him, "*in whom we live and move and have our being.*" Here do we hope frequently to repair, to dilate our minds with devout contemplations of the divine majesty; to expand and enliven our conceptions of his glorious perfections; to bow in humble adoration of *the former of our bodies, the father of our spirits*; the author of all good, and the sovereign disposer of all things. Here may the heart, inspired by these contemplations, with holy love and filial confidence, breathe out its desires; pour forth all its emotions and joyfully consecrate itself to his service and surrender itself to his disposal.

When public or private prosperity fills the soul with joy, here may God be gratefully acknowledged, as the source of it and the tribute of sincere praise be offered to his name.

In seasons of darkness and perplexity, of affliction

and trial, here may his children spread before him their cares and anxieties, their wants and sorrows, and humbly look to him for guidance, support and blessing.

In the hours of conviction and penitence, when conscience is awakened and the burden and baseness of sin are deeply felt and bewailed, here may the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart be offered up, reconciliation with God earnestly sought and his forgiveness and grace believingly implored.

When the mind, worn down by the secular cares and business, which have harassed it during the six days of the week, eagerly hails the dawn of the Sabbath, that it may then give itself to loftier and holier meditations; or when the heart, tired with beholding the vanities of a world, in which it has found little suited to its desires, but much to disquiet and disgust it; or when, through the withering influence of earthly things, our faith has become weak, and our hopes dim, our religious offerings have grown languid and cold, the soul sick for want of spiritual nourishment, and "*the things that remain in us are ready to die*:"—to this sanctuary may we then come, and in its religious offerings and services feel our minds set free from all low and earthly concerns, enlarged and refreshed with new and glorious views of God and of divine truth. Here may the heart find access to the throne of grace, and in holy and intimate communion with its heavenly father enjoy that peace, which the world never has yielded. Here may there be obtained new, satisfying and influential views of truth and duty. Here may good purposes be awakened and confirmed; love to God, to the Saviour and

mankind be kindled and increased. Here may our hopes be brightened, our zeal and our obedience animated, and here may those pure and inward joys be felt, which are both a foretaste and pledge of heavenly felicity.

When the performance of such religious duties and the enjoyment of such religious privileges and pleasures are associated with the idea of the object for which this house is erected, how readily does the devout heart exclaim, in the language of the text, "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord.*"

2. Another purpose, for which this house is to be dedicated, is the propagation of truth, especially religious and moral truth, and the instruction of those, who may resort here, in every thing relating to their duty, their interest and their happiness. Truth is the proper object of the mind and religious and moral truth is that, which, of all other, most deeply concerns us. The only legitimate sources, from which this truth is derived are the volumes of nature and revelation. These, having the same author, are considered as entitled to the same credit; since it is incontrovertible that the God of truth cannot contradict in one mode of communication to his intelligent creatures what he has made known to them in another. The Saviour himself appeals to the judgment of reason to confirm the truths, which he revealed. To guard however against any misapprehension, as to the latitude, in which the sentiments now expressed is to be taken, it may be well to

remark, that the uncorrupted and unbiassed dictates of reason, it is believed, do always accord with truth in relation to all those things, which are made known to us, or which come within our comprehension. There are however many things above our comprehension, and there are many things, the knowledge of which is important to us, but which reason alone could not have discovered. Of the truth or falsehood, the fitness or unfitness of these things, while they remain unknown or uncomprehended, reason can affirm nothing with certainty. This insufficiency of reason, though it be a good argument for the necessity of revelation, does not derogate in the least from the truth and authority of that unbiassed judgment, which it pronounces with respect to those things, which are fairly presented to our minds and fully understood by us. Reason therefore, in the right use of it, is a true, although it be not a sufficient guide.

Disclaiming, then, all other authority in matters pertaining to religion and morality than the revelation, which God has made and the reason with which he has endowed us; to this house, do we hope to resort, to offer our minds to the light and our hearts to the influence of that truth, which God, from these sources, may graciously shed upon them. Here may the word of God be constantly read, clearly and correctly explained, and affectionately and faithfully enforced. As the bible, in our opinion, contains the only system of religious and moral truth, which has evidence of divine origin, the sanction of divine authority, and the power of making men wise to salvation; may the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ, which it reveals

us, be fully and accurately unfolded; the Saviour, in his sublime and glorious character and offices, be affectionately and earnestly commended to the acceptance, the love and the obedience of all. Here may the truths of his holy and benevolent religion be taught in their purity and simplicity, and urged upon the attention, and scrutiny of every mind. May the doctrines and precepts, the invitations and promises of the Saviour, be made *to drop as the rain, and distil as the dew*. May his offers of salvation, with the conditions accompanying them, be presented and urged with all the force of argument and with all the tenderness of persuasion. From the instructions and rules of the Saviour, and from the beautiful illustration of them in his own perfect example, may all who come hither, learn every part of their duty and understand in what their true perfection and happiness consist; and here may they yield their hearts to the impression of all those motives to a godly, righteous and sober life, which the devout consideration of the divine character and goodness, of the truths of the Gospel and of the character and life, the love and sufferings and death of Jesus Christ cannot fail to suggest.

To make mankind wise and good, that they may be capable of everlasting life and happiness, was the great design of the Saviour's mission into the world. All that he taught, and did, and suffered, and is now doing, has this for its object, and this is the great end of God's moral government of the world. This glorious object, will ultimately be accomplished. The time is coming, when "*in the name of Jesus, every*

knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father ; (Philips. 11. 15) when all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God."

To contribute something towards the fulfilment of these glorious predictions, this house is erected, and now to be dedicated to the promotion of true piety and goodness. Here may the darkness, which overshadows the ignorant, be dispelled ; the errors of the perverted corrected, and the unbelieving convinced. Here may the thoughtless and impenitent be awakened, genuine sorrow for sin produced, and multitudes be led seriously to *think of their ways and to turn their feet unto God's testimonies*. When, through the impression made upon the heart by God's word, or providence or spirit, it is led to feel the burden of sin, and to aspire to the character and blessedness of the children of God, here may it believingly and acceptably pour fourth its confessions and prayers, and feel a *good hope through grace*, of the forgiveness and favour of God springing up, and by a faithful use of all the means of religious and moral improvement, which here may be enjoyed, be made to grow in grace and in the knowledge and imitation of Jesus Christ, unto the stature of christian perfection.

3. Another purpose included in the object for which this house is to be dedicated, is the enjoyment and the defence of the rights of conscience and of religious liberty. By the rights of conscience and religious liberty I mean, not only the right to form our own judgment of what is truth ; to interpret the Sacred Scriptures for ourselves, unawed and uncontrolled t

any human authority, but also the liberty of freely expressing our religious opinions, and of acting in conformity to them, without being subjected, on their account, to injurious imputations and unkind treatment, so long as we do not infringe upon the rights of others, and so long as our temper and life are, in the main, irreproachable. This liberty is not only a natural right, but the assertion, and (if possible) the enjoyment of it is a duty, which we owe to God, to his truth and to ourselves.

It is a natural right. Reason, to every person, whom God has endowed with it, is the faculty provided for him by his Creator, by which his mind is to be informed and his conduct regulated. It is the only judge of truth of whose authority he feels the conviction, and the only guide of conduct, in whose directions his mind feels compelled to acquiesce. All that he reads and all that he hears must pass in review before the tribunal of his own mind, before he can rationally assent to or dissent from it.

It is therefore, an unalienable right. We cannot surrender it. As well might a person expect to see with another's eyes, or be conveyed by another's feet, as to have his opinions formed and his faith determined by the decisions of another's reason. And further, the right of private judgment in matters of religion and the liberty of expressing that judgment and of acting agreeably to it, may be shown by arguments drawn from the consideration of the nature of faith. Faith is the principle of all revealed religion. It is by faith that its truths are received, and through faith, are their authority and influence felt. Now

faith, considered as an intellectual act, is the conviction of the mind of the truth of any proposition presented to it, which it clearly understands, produced by evidence, which itself has discerned and carefully weighed. Faith therefore, must, in the nature of things, be our own act. As no one can see or hear for us, so no one can believe for us. Faith too, considered as an act of the mind, is not voluntary. We can no more believe against evidence than we can withhold assent, when sufficient evidence is fully presented and clearly discerned by us. Nothing therefore can be more absurd, than any attempt to compel the mind in matters of faith. It is a vain endeavor to usurp a right, which no person can, if he would, surrender.

Besides, the right of private judgment, and of the religious freedom inseparably connected with it, is not only distinctly affirmed in the Sacred Scriptures, but, the exercise of it, is there particularly enjoined. It is the belief of christians of all denominations, that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, contained in the Books commonly called the Old and New Testament are the word of God. And it is the great principle of protestant christians, that this word is the only divine rule of faith and practice, and is, of itself, sufficient to make all, who truly receive it, wise unto salvation. This word contains a message from God, directed to every person that receives it. And every such person is required, by him who delivered this message, to search it for himself; and he is encouraged so to do by promises of all needed assistance to enable him to understand it, to perceive its truth and excellence,

to feel its power and to partake of the blessings which it promises. "*Search the Scriptures, said the Saviour, for these are they which testify of me. Why even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right? If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself. Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. I speak unto wise men, judge ye what I say.*" Such being the language of Scripture in reference to this subject, according perfectly, with the best suggestions of our own minds, we feel that it is not only a natural right, but an imperative duty, to claim for ourselves, and to allow to others, the right of private judgment in all matters of religion and morality, and the liberty to express our religious sentiments, and to act in conformity to them, without being subjected on their account to any molestation, so long as our conduct is in the main upright and we do not infringe upon the rights of others.

In this house, which, this day, we dedicate, may this religious liberty ever be asserted, faithfully defended and fully enjoyed. May no creed of human authority here ever be imposed. May the conscience here never be ensnared by subscription to articles of human fabrication. But may the simple declaration

of faith, that *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*, of belief in the divine origin and authority of the Sacred Scriptures, accompanied with an avowal of a sincere desire to study, to understand, and to obey them, confirmed by an upright life and conversation,—procure for every one, that seeks it, free admission to all our religious privileges and to our christian fellowship.

If, in the exercise of this liberty, any one should misinterpret the word of God, and imbibe erroneous religious sentiments; for these errors, he is accountable, to God only. He alone can judge how far errors of opinion are chargeable to negligence or an evil heart, or how far they are attributable to infirmity or to the unavoidable circumstances of one's condition.

We insist thus strenuously on the rights of conscience, not merely, because we believe that they are rights which ought not and indeed cannot be alienated, but because we are fully persuaded that the full enjoyment of them will be greatly advantageous to the cause of religious truth. The knowledge of this truth is, of all other, most important to us. It should therefore be sought with the greatest diligence. In the pursuit of it, the mind should be unembarrassed and unawed, and be indulged in the most free and fearless inquiry.

Lastly. Another purpose, to which this house is dedicated, is the promotion of love and good will, of peace and happiness among men, through the influence of the religious instructions, which may be dispensed, of the religious services, which may be per-

formed, and of the christian example, which, we hope, will be exhibited here.

The natural relation, which subsists among us all, as men, sprung from the same father, connected by one common nature, and by fellowship in the same common infirmities, necessities and wants, binds us to mutual love and kind offices, and to live in peace with each other. This is the law, which our nature and our condition imposes upon us. It has been justly observed, that "In the more circumscribed relations of life, the remembrance of kindred, or brotherhood, of a common parent, and of a common family, tends, as it ought to do, to heighten the feelings of love and sympathy, and to soften the harsher passions which occasional disagreements might excite. Why should not a remembrance of the same kind, have the same effect with respect to the great brotherhood of mankind?"

We are connected, however, by still closer bonds, as believers in the same religion, by the acknowledgment of the same Lord, as participators in the same blessed hopes; and if christians indeed, we are children of God and joint heirs with Christ to the same glorious inheritance. The God whom we worship is love. He sent his Son into the world upon a mission of love. The blessings, which were proclaimed at his birth were peace on earth and good will to men. The spirit that breathes throughout the religion he established is a spirit of peace and love. His whole life was one continued exemplification of this spirit, and of all the virtues that are allied to it. Nothing did he inculcate more earnestly and more frequently

among his disciples, than mutual love and kindness, a meek and forgiving disposition, and he has affirmed it to be the distinctive badge of his true disciples, that they love one another.

Were the whole christian world but animated with the spirit of the religion they profess, and conformed to the precepts and to the example of the master, whom they own; fancy could not picture a lovelier image of a happy society than they would present. Why should this picture exist only in the imagination? May it not be a reality, and such a reality too, as our heavenly father would have us to enjoy? Indeed are not earnest efforts to attain such a condition, frequently and earnestly enjoined by the Saviour, as a duty incumbent upon all who bear his name? Surely there must be something wrong in christians, if such be not their condition now. Either their knowledge of their religion and their faith in it must be very imperfect, or their feeling of the obligation of its precepts must be extremely languid and ineffectual.

The kingdom of heaven, to which the hope of the christian is directed, is a kingdom of love. There all are of one heart and soul. Love in its purest and blissful exercises constitute the happiness of that kingdom. Is this the ultimate object of our most ardent aspirations? Why then may we not enjoy some foretaste of this happiness on earth? It is here that our preparation for it must be made, our title to it secured. This preparation consists in acquiring the disposition and a resemblance to the character of the inhabitants of heaven.

To the cultivation then of this heavenly disposition and character in ourselves and to the promotion of it in others, we would dedicate this house. May a pure and fervent love to mankind breathe in all the religious instructions and services that may be administered here. May every rebuke of wickedness, every reproof of thoughtlessness and vanity, every warning and alarm that may be sounded in the ears of the worldly and sensual, the irreligious and impenitent, appear evidently to proceed from a benevolent fidelity to the souls of men. In meekness of wisdom and with the gentleness of Christ, may the ignorant and erring, and those who oppose themselves, be instructed, convinced and subdued. Here may the weak be affectionately encouraged; the contrite and humble, the afflicted and desponding, comforted and revived; and the feet of every one, led "in the way of peace."

In the same spirit of love, may all, who shall come here to worship; attend to the instructions, and unite in the services of the sanctuary. When entering this house of the Lord, may all unkind and unfriendly feelings, all wrath and bitterness, with all malice, be banished from their bosoms. And while their minds are intent upon the instructions, or absorbed in the devout contemplation of the character and the example of Jesus Christ, may their hearts feel kindling within them the same pure and benevolent spirit, which animated him; and, constrained by the love of Christ, may they go forth into the world glowing with a benevolent zeal for the promotion of the virtue, the peace and happiness of the whole human family.

Here too, may all of every name, who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, who own him, as their Lord, and bow to the authority of his word, find free and cordial admission to our fellowship in all our religious duties, privileges and enjoyments. Let no peculiarities in the religious opinions or religious observances of other christians, exclude them from our communion, when they shall desire it; nor operate, as a hindrance to our candour and kindness towards them. We should remember, that all sincere christians have enlisted under the same banner, acknowledge the same captain of their salvation, and although some of them may adopt a different dress; prefer to shield themselves with some peculiarities in their armor, and prescribe to themselves some different services; yet they are all fellow soldiers in the army of Christ; all are engaged in the same spiritual warfare; contending against the same enemies; striving for the same victory, and hoping for the same recompense. Let them then be regarded by us, "*not as strangers and foreigners, but as fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.*" (Eph. ii. 19.)

These, my friends, we believe to be the great principles and this the true spirit of our holy religion. Acting upon these principles, and animated by this spirit, we may hope to contribute something, indeed we shall contribute much to the promotion of the virtue, the peace and the happiness of mankind. We shall be among those divinely honoured and happy instruments, by whom God will fulfil that glorious prediction, "*the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he shall dwell with them and they shall be*

his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God." (Rev. xxi.) "*The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain. The earth shall be full of the knowledge of God.* (Isaiah xi. 6. 8.) "*And all flesh shall see his salvation.* (Luke iii. 6.) For "*if we love one another God dwelleth in us, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.*" (John iv. 12.)

I have now stated some of the purposes, to the forwarding of which, we would dedicate this house, viz : the worship of the only true God, the instruction and improvement of mankind in piety and virtue ; the enjoyment and defence of religious liberty and the promotion of love, peace and happiness among men. These, we believe, to be among the most noble and benevolent purposes, which we can propose to ourselves. Let them then be the purposes of our hearts. Let each of us, my brethren, let every one cooperate in their promotion, else that blissful vision of human felicity, which antient seers, under the strong impulse of inspiration, have so glowingly described, will be to us but a vision, a vision yet for many days.

Shall then the ardent hope which the church of God, for so many centuries, has cherished be still deferred ? Shall she yet longer in the anguish of her disappointment, be made to utter the plaintive cry "*Lord, how long ?*" The reply, my brethren, is left with ourselves. God is ever ready to bless his rational creatures, to conduct them to their proper perfection and happiness. The means of this happi-

ness he has put into our hands, and he has promised to bless the faithful use of them.

The subject, my brethren, which has been offered to your attention, opens a wide field for observation; a field which we should willingly still farther survey, were not our minds led back to reflections more immediately connected with the occasion.

To the religious society, here assembled, to dedicate the house, which they have erected, the occasion is one of particular interest. You return this day, my friends, to the spot consecrated by the prayers and religious services, of your fathers. You return to your home. On this occasion, the heart gives itself up to the emotions of gratitude and joy. Your labours are finished, the temple is completed, and the soul is ready to pour forth the prayer: "*Arise now, O Lord, into thy rest, thou and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests be clothed with righteousness, and let thy saints shout for joy.*" (Ps. cxii. 8, 9.)

It would be a restraint upon the heart, which it could not easily endure, and an injustice, to which it would never consent, were we to refrain from acknowledging the many causes, which, as a religious society, we have for gratitude and joy. The liberal assistance, which we have received from the generous contributions of our friends in the vicinity, and to which we are so greatly indebted for the neat and commodious house provided for us; the excellence of the materials, which compose it; the beauty and faithfulness of the workmanship; the exemplary uprightness, with which his engagements were fulfilled, to whom the whole undertaking was entrusted; the

harmony that has prevailed among all, who have been employed here, their preservation from any serious accident; and the general satisfaction with which their work, when completed, has been reviewed;— these, are not the least, of the many causes of our joy and gratitude on this occasion. May they be an earnest of still richer blessings from the fountain of all good; and engage our hearts, to greater zeal and fidelity in his service.

It may have been expected, on this occasion, that there would be presented a brief history of this religious society. On the completion of the first century after its formation, this was done.* The events and circumstances, which have happened to it since that time, are too recent and familiar, to require narration.

It may also have been expected, as pertinent to the occasion, that there would be given a statement of our views of the principale doctrines of christianity. This also has already been done and published,† and so recently, that a repetition of it at this time, it is believed, would neither be useful nor interesting. Suffice it to say, that our views of the doctrines of christianity, are, in our own opinion, the nearest approach to the original purity and simplicity of the Gospel, which has been made. As such, therefore, they are dear to us; dear as are our hopes, as is our being. We do not however presume that no errors cleave to us, or that we have discovered all the truth. Such arrogance is in direct opposition to the humble and truth loving spirit of the religion we

* April 26, 1816.

† December, 1830.

believe. But we can sincerely affirm, our desire and readiness to renounce error, as soon as it is detected ; to embrace truth, as soon, as it is discovered by us, and, in the mean time, diligently and faithfully to use all the means of doing both. More than this cannot reasonably be demanded of us ; and more than this we do not ask from others. If all christians, were to act from these principles, how rapid would be the progress of truth ! how soon would all come "*to the unity of the faith and to the knowledge of the Son of God.*"

In conclusion :—

Both the occasion, and the season, call upon our souls and all within us to bless that God, who has preserved us to this time ; who has ever made us the objects of his paternal care and goodness, and brought us to a new division of time, and to new blessings and to new opportunities of serving and enjoying him. The remembrance of the past, and the sense of the greatness of present blessings, may well fill our souls with gratitude and joy. To him, then, let them be lifted up in thankful adoration and fervent prayer. To his service let the life, the faculties, the health, and the blessings which he has so kindly continued, be henceforth devoted.

While with filial piety and reverence we now dedicate this material edifice, which his goodness has provided for us, to the outward services of his religion, may we at the same time consecrate to him our hearts. In each of them may he ever find a fit temple for his spirit to dwell in. Here may he ever be enthroned. Here may we ever feel the holy, the

refreshing, the quickening influences of his presence, of his word and of his spirit ; then shall we present to him the sacrifices of a humble and contrite heart ; the offerings of pure and fervent love, of filial submission and trust ; and of a most sincere, universal and faithful obedience. Thus shall we become fitted for "*that building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" AMEN.



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