

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service  
by John Keble

## SERMON XXII.

June 9, 1850.

ST. JOHN xix. 34, 35.

“One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His Side, and forthwith came thereout Blood and Water: and he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.”

AS the solemn moment of the Baptism itself draws on, the supplications of the Church become more earnest and awful, and we are taught to go back in faith to the times when our Lord and Saviour, newly dead and newly risen, did, in the most distinct and remarkable way, set His seal to that blessed ordinance. The portion of the service which so takes us back is the prayer at consecration of the water, which takes place, as you know, immediately after the four short collects. For as the child about to be baptized had been solemnly offered to God, by prayer, and by the threefold promise and vow made in his name by his sponsors: so it is meet that the water also, which is to be the outward mean and pledge of the child's regeneration, should be in its way solemnly dedicated to God. Not that such form of words is necessary for the Baptism itself, as the form of Consecration in Holy Communion is necessary for that Sacrament. For we know that in private Baptism, the case being urgent, this and all other prayers might be omitted, and only the Form itself of Baptism used, and yet we are not to doubt that the child is lawfully and sufficiently baptized. But in Church, and also in private when there is no such extreme haste, it is meet and right that this solemn prayer should be said, and the very element of water itself blessed, which is to be made the Channel of so great a good. We may consider it as the act of our Great High Priest and Saviour, applying by the Church's prayer to the particular water which is in the Font, the sanctifying virtue which in His own Baptism He had conferred upon all the waters of the earth. By His heavenly touch in the river Jordan under the Ministry of St. John Baptist, He had made *all* water apt for the mystical washing away of sin, and now the meaning of our prayer is, that the same blessing and virtue may not be wanting to this water in particular, nor to the child about to be baptized in it. That is the general meaning of this prayer at Consecration of the water. And now we are to take special notice, what are those mercies of her Lord and Saviour, by which the Church, as her manner is, pleads with His Father and our Father at the commencement of this prayer. They are two: the first is, the issuing of Blood and Water from His Side, as He hung dead upon the Cross; the other is, His commandment to His disciples, a short time before His Ascension, to baptize all men in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity. At present I have only to speak of the first of the two. You heard the particulars in the Catechising, as also some general account of their meaning. What I have now to say on it is this.

First, it is plain that there must be something very deep, deeper than we might have imagined, in this pouring out of the Blood and water from our Lord's Side after His death: seeing that St. John, who was even then waiting by the Cross, is so very earnest in bearing witness about it. “One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His Side, and forthwith

came thereout blood and water; and he that saw it bare record and his record is true.”<sup>1</sup> Why all this care to tell us that he saw it, to affirm the truth of it over and over again, to speak of our faith as especially assured by it? *We* should not beforehand have thought it of such great consequence to our faith. There *must* be something in it, more than we can tell at first sight. And to draw our attention the more to it, the same St. John in his first epistle says, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He that came by water and Blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and Blood; and it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit and the water and the Blood. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.”<sup>2</sup> Put it all together, and it appears plainly, that the faith that overcometh the world, the faith that Jesus is the Son of God, as it receives of course the whole witness of God which He hath testified of His Son, so it cannot be without receiving the point that “Jesus Christ came by water and blood.” There is something in *that*, quite necessary to entire belief in Jesus Christ. What that something is, was emphatically betokened by the Blood and Water which flowed by miracle from our Lord’s Side when He was hanging dead on the Cross, and to which St. John so earnestly draws our attention. In a word, the Blood and Water teaches the doctrine of sacramental grace; and first and especially, the grace of Holy Baptism. Therefore the Church mentions the shedding of that Water and Blood, in the beginning of this Consecration-prayer, and says that it took place for the Forgiveness of our sins: which Forgiveness, as we all know, is first imparted in Holy Baptism: as the article of the Creed teaches: “I acknowledge one Baptism for the Remission of sins.” The Church most unquestionably means us to understand, that the Water and Blood from our Lord’s Side was a token and pledge of the grace of His Life-giving Sacraments. The Holy Spirit by St. John means us to understand the same, when it says, concerning this witness borne by the Spirit, the Water and the Blood, “This is the record (or witness), that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” He does not say, “God will give it unto us,” but “God *hath* given it unto us.” He gave it unto us when He made us members of His Son: and we know when that was. To state the matter a little differently. In order that each one of us, fallen children of Adam, might be saved, it was needful not only that Christ should die for all sinners, but that the merits of His death should be applied to each individual sinner: not only that He should offer Himself a Sacrifice and a sin-offering, but that the blood of that Sacrifice should be sprinkled on each of us, one by one: not only that He should take our nature and suffer in it, but that we should be mysteriously made partakers of Him. John had baptized with water, but Christ should baptize with the Holy Ghost. John came by water only, but Jesus Christ came by Water and Blood. John’s baptism was but a token of the remission of sins to be granted by and by, but Christ’s was the “One Baptism for the Remission of sins,” which therefore could not be without His Blood, for without shedding of blood, the Blood of the appointed Saviour, is no remission.

Thus the Blood and Water is the complete token of both parts of the grace of Holy Baptism. The Blood of Christ, to make atonement for sin, and purge the soul of the guilt of it, in the sight of God: and the Spirit of Christ, which is as living water, to apply that Blood to us, to purge our conscience from the stain of sin, to wash the sinful creature, and

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<sup>1</sup> John 19:35

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:9

make him whiter than snow. For that all may go well with the sinner, that he may finally escape everlasting death, he must have both pardon for the past and grace for the future. The Blood from our Lord's Side is the token of that pardon; the water, the token of that grace. Both pardon and grace are by the law of God's kingdom conveyed to us one by one in His blessed Sacraments. First and once for all, in Holy Baptism: that is the water from the Rock following Christ's people through the whole wilderness of this world. Pardon and grace come first in Holy Baptism, and for the time they come completely: they save us, until they are forfeited by sinful relapsing: but as we grow older and temptations come on, new supplies of grace and pardon, new ways of partaking of Christ, the God-Man, are needed: and most especially the Sacrament of Holy Communion: and therefore when we read or hear of the Water and Blood of the Crucifixion, we are to think of Holy Communion as well as of the other Sacrament. We may consider that when St. John saw the wound made in the precious Side of his dearly beloved Lord, and the blood and water gushing out of that wound, it was as if a Voice had come from the Cross, and had told us all, "By this Blood and by this Water, by the merits of Christ crucified and by His Holy Spirit, the fallen children of Adam may be grafted into Him, the disease of sin cured, the image of God restored, and souls and bodies nourished unto eternal life."

Since, moreover, these blessings depended entirely on our Lord's Death, and were the price of His Precious Blood, we are particularly told that He was quite dead, before the soldier pierced His Side, and the Blood and Water came out.

And as He is called the Second Adam, in Whom all should be made alive, even as all died in the first Adam, so there is, in the history of the first Adam, a very remarkable type of the Blood and Water flowing from Christ's Side. The ancient Church always believed, that the Creation of our first mother was a shadow and figure of the building up of the Church: a figure and shadow of the way in which God would by and by form her, who would be the Spouse and Body of Christ; bone of His Bone and flesh of His Flesh. For recollect what the history tells us in Genesis. Adam had the rule over Paradise: he might eat of all the fruits but one, and all creatures were to obey him: yet he was not quite happy, he needed a help meet for him. So our Lord, in His great mercy, accounts Himself incomplete and imperfect without us: He is straitened until our Salvation through Him begins to be accomplished. He sends both for ass and colt, both for Jew and Gentile, saying, the Lord hath need of them. Therefore so far, as I said, He is like Adam needing a help.

In the next place, when we read, the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; who does not see that this represents our Holy One sleeping the sleep of death upon the Cross? "Then one of the Soldiers with a spear pierced His Side;" it being so permitted by God's unsearchable Providence, even as God had Himself made an opening in Adam's side and taken out one of his ribs, in order to make of it the first woman. And it is very remarkable what care was taken by God's Providence to make sure of His being dead, before the Fountain of Sacramental grace in His Side was thus opened. The Jews, in that strange state of mind which made them particular about forms and ceremonies, while they had no scruple in committing murder, were anxious to have our Lord and the thieves dead, that they might not hang on the cross, during the day of the Paschal Sabbath: and Pilate accommodating himself to the Jews, ordered the soldiers to see to it: but when they came to Jesus, they found Him dead already, no need to use violence as they had done to the thieves, to bring them to an end: only one of them (as it

would seem, out of a kind of savage wantonness) with a spear pierced His Side, and the Blood and Water flowed out. For as St. Paul argues, when a testament or last will is to do a person any good, you must prove the death of the person making the will: as long as he lives, the will is of no force at all, but only after he is dead. So the Sacraments of the New Covenant had all their virtue from His Death and Passion: and therefore the Wound in His Side, which was the token of His Sacraments, was not opened, until after He was dead; and things were so ordered, as that there might be no mistake about this. Thus much about the sleep of Adam and our Saviour's sleep of death upon the Cross, of which Adam's sleep was a figure.

The next thing we read is, how that the Lord "builded up" the rib which He had taken from Adam's side, into the full form and stature of a woman, whom He afterwards brought to the man, who owned her to be "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." I say the Lord "builded her up" to be a woman; for that is the proper meaning of the word used in this place, as you may see in the margin of some of our English Bibles. Now consider this word "build her up," how exactly it expresses the building up of the Church, out of millions of Christians, one by one, added to it by Holy Baptism. You will thus see, how the Church was really taken out of our Lord's Side, as Eve was taken out of the side of Adam. Eve was "builded up," i. e. formed by degrees, one limb after another, from the rib taken out of Adam's side, as the Church was formed, and is even now formed, by degrees, by the Blood and Water, the Baptismal grace which flowed from our Saviour's Side.

But further; when God brought to the man the woman thus newly created, and Adam said, "this is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,"<sup>3</sup> it was added, "therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh."<sup>4</sup> That is, Holy Matrimony, the nearest union that can be on earth, is a type and shadow of the mystical Union, that is betwixt Christ and His Church. And as a man being joined unto his wife, has leave to quit his father and his mother; the old home passes away, and he has a new home, a new state of things altogether; so it must be with us, when by Holy Baptism we are made members of our Lord's Body. The whole world, and all things in it, must be quite different to us from what they would be if we had never been baptized. As the Heavenly Spouse Himself teaches; "whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross and follow Me."<sup>5</sup> "I have made Myself altogether his: I grudged him no drop of My Blood; it flowed altogether out of My pierced Side; therefore neither must he grudge anything of his to Me: he must make himself altogether Mine."

This is the doctrine of Sacramental Grace, the great doctrine which Holy Church proclaims, in teaching every one of us to say, when we come to Holy Communion, "I acknowledge one Baptism for the Remission of sins." This is the great, the unspeakable mercy which we acknowledge most thankfully to our Heavenly Father, when, just before the Baptism of a child, we put Him in mind that His Most Dearly Beloved Son Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins, did shed out of His most Precious Side both Water, and Blood. And for a continual remembrance of it, you will observe, that in all the pictures of our Crucified and Risen Lord, He has this Wound in His Side, along with the

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:23

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 19:5

<sup>5</sup> Mark 8:34

four wounds in His Hands and Feet. As they are the token of His Perfect Sacrifice, offered once for all on the Cross, so is this the token of His communicating Himself to us one by one in His blessed Sacraments.<sup>a</sup>

a It appears from some short heads written for this Sermon, and preserved with it, that it too was finished orally. The following, which form the concluding heads, were not expanded in writing;

“Thomas could not own Him without the wound in His side, and we always look for it.

“Therefore we must cling to the faith of His Sacraments.

“Fearful view of the sins of Christians.

“Blessed view of their privileges.”