

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service
by John Keble

SERMON XXVI.

July 14, 1850.

PROV. xviii. 10.

“The Name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.”

THERE are two Names which come into the actual administration of the Sacrament of Baptism, the Name of God, and the name of the child: and the wonder and the mystery is, that these two names are in a manner made one. The child is so united to God Almighty, that from thenceforth the Name of God is in a manner the child's name. But as to the child's own name, that which is commonly called his Christian name, we said something of it in our last Catechising. Now let us go on to the other, the most Holy Name, that Name which by an ordinance for ever is annexed to the Sacrament of Baptism, so that without it there can be no Baptism: the Name of the most Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For such is the foundation law of the kingdom of Heaven, enacted by the Great King at the moment when He was just about to take to Him His great power and reign. He met His Disciples by special appointment in Galilee, on the same mountain probably, where He had spoken in the hearing of the same Apostles His eight Beatitudes and the rest of His Divine Sermon; which mountain may in some respects appear to hold the same kind of place among Christians, as the mountain of Sinai among God's ancient people. Consider Him with His Apostles, on the mountain in Galilee, and mark what His words are. It is the King meeting His chosen officers and giving them their instructions for nearly the last time, as to how they should order the Kingdom in His absence. And this is the Proclamation He makes: “all power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth: go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” These are the words or Form of Baptism, settled once for all by Him Who baptises all. For however many and various are the persons baptized, and the circumstances under which they are baptized, the real Baptizer is always one: as the Forerunner said, “This is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost:” and the words used by the priest are always the same, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

On this Sacred and mysterious Name I have first of all to observe, that here is the most express acknowledgement of the Faith of the Holy Trinity, ordained by our Lord Himself at the very entrance into His Kingdom. No one can be a disciple of His, i. e. no one can be a Christian, without this solemn acknowledgement: that the God to whom He belongs is both One and Three: One, for it says, “I baptize thee in the *Name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; not, “in the Names,” but “In the *Name*”: there seem to be three Names, but in reality it is One Name: because the three Persons severally named are One God; and this God, our God, for ever and ever. He is Three also; therefore the Three Personal Names are added, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The Father, the One Fountain of all good, from Whom in eternal unspeakable ways the other two Divine Persons have their Being: The Son or Word of God begotten from

everlasting of the Father: The Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father, and sent out by the Son; or, as we acknowledge in our Communion Service, "Proceeding from the Father and the Son." In the One Divine Name of these Three Persons our Lord hath commanded us one and all to be baptized. He will have us love, trust and serve them all alike, they being so inseparable, that whatever obedience love and honour is paid to One is paid to all: although with respect to that One of them Who vouchsafed to be made Man for us, we must have special feelings turned towards Him as He is Man, doing and suffering so much for us, feelings which we cannot have as concerning those, Who never were Incarnate. However, it is quite plain, that our Lord has here put the Faith and Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost at the very door of His House and Kingdom, so that no one can enter in, without taking that Name and that Faith upon him.

Now by this we may understand, secondly, that our Lord expects each one of us to keep up and practise the same faith continually: even as the priest enquired of us when we were brought to the Font, "Wilt thou be baptized in this Faith?" and we answered by our godfathers and godmothers, "That is my desire."

We desired to be baptized into the faith of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and He graciously granted our desire: you see then how we are bound, in all duty and thankfulness to go on living in that faith. What is "living *in the faith* of such and such a doctrine?" It is, turning our minds to it, recollecting it continually, making very much of it in our thoughts and in all our behaviour. You would not say a man lived in the faith of Christ, if he never thought of Christ, never made any difference in his doings for Christ's sake, and in order to please Him. So neither ought you to consider yourself as living in the faith of the Holy Trinity, unless you very often think of the Trinity, and lift up your heart in prayer and praise, in love and worship, to the Divine Three in One. Are you accustomed so to do, my brethren? Do you carefully use the opportunities which the Church, in her wisdom and charity, gives you of acknowledging the "Holy Blessed and Glorious Trinity, Three Persons and One God:" giving glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost? You know how often she invites you to do so, at the end of every Psalm and Canticle. Do you always endeavour to answer her invitation with all reverence and earnestness of heart? There is fear of our not doing so; and if we do not, it cannot but prove a serious harm to us, for the very reason that the opportunity occurs so often. In truth, if you have not hitherto taken *special* care on this point, there must have been more or less inattention and irreverence, though you were far perhaps from meaning it: and it may have been silently hurting others as well as yourself. Let me beseech you then, brethren, henceforth always to pay special regard to the Most Holy Trinity, the Three Persons in One God, making some act of reverence, if not in body, yet at least in mind, as often as you read, hear or speak of them. Those Divine Three are ever present in all their love, wisdom and power. Whenever and however they are mentioned; the mention of them is their own providential way of putting you in mind of their Presence. Can you do less than notice and acknowledge it?

Certainly you cannot do less, if you at all believe what I am next going to point out to you, as the undoubted teaching of Holy Scripture concerning our portion in that Holy Name: viz., that we are baptized not only *in*, but *into* it. We have the Name of the Most High God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so put upon us, as that we shall be rightly called by it; it becomes in a manner *our name*. We are called by the Divine Name, as being made partakers of the Divine Nature. So St. Peter tells us; referring particularly to

the regenerating grace of the Holy Ghost, making us members of Christ, Who is God, in the moment of our Baptism. But let us consider how the three Sacred Names, the Names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are each severally *our* Names—how we are in a manner called by each of them.

First, we are called from God the Father, of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Being admitted into His family, we are called from Him, as being called His children: for all children have their being and their name from their Father, In Baptism we are regularly adopted to be His children, and His Name is thenceforth called upon us: and the angels looking upon us, think of Him, and of the love which He hath towards us: just as we, meeting with any child whom a great rich person had adopted, should naturally think of that person, and of the love which he had shewn to that child. Can we then help saying to ourselves, “He is our Father; where is His honour? I am His child, His adopted child: how can I ever reverence and love Him enough?” Such as these ought to be our thoughts of God the Father, seeing we are called by His Name.

And then as to the Second Person, God the Son, we are baptized into His Name, as you all know without my telling you, in that we are by that Holy Sacrament made members of Him, Bone of His Bone, and Flesh of His Flesh, and as truly united to Him, as a wife is joined to her husband in the holy and mysterious ordinance of matrimony. And therefore, as the wife from thenceforth takes the husband’s name, giving up her own; so the baptized person is thenceforth called a Christian after the Name of Jesus Christ: and of his own earthly names and connexions he ought to think little in comparison, as they are indeed nothing to compare with the honour and blessing of becoming a member of Christ. Has it been so with us, brethren? is it so even now? We know that we are members of Christ; those who know least of their Catechism can hardly be ignorant of *that*: how often in the day are we used to remember it? When we are tempted to sinful or doubtful liberties, either in thought, in word, or in deed, do we regularly check ourselves with remembering, “Nay these members of mine, this heart, this tongue, these hands, this whole body and soul, are the heart, tongue, and hands, the body and soul of Christ Jesus: shall I take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot? Shall I tell lies with the tongue of Christ, steal with the hand of Christ? God forbid.” And on the other hand do we encourage ourselves in every good word and work with the sure and certain hope, “It is not I, but the grace of Christ which is in me? I may hope for a blessing, since it is not I, poor frail unworthy being, but Christ that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works.” Do we say to ourselves, “Come let us be up and doing: let no good opportunity pass away; we have our Lord’s eyes to see with, our Lord’s hand to work with, the tongue of Christ to utter our words, the mind of Christ to order our thoughts: we are inexcusable if we bear no good fruit: whoever else may be slothful, we may not.” If we are really members of Christ, this is how we ought to quicken ourselves, and not let our time and all our blessed opportunities pass away as in an idle dream. And this, because we are baptized unto God the Son, into the Name of Christ.

But, thirdly, we are also baptized into the Name of the Holy Ghost. We are the children of the Father, being members of the Son: and how are we members of the Son? by the work of the Holy Ghost. Therefore we are called regenerate, sanctified, spiritual persons; i. e. the Name of the Holy Spirit is put upon us, no less than the Name of the Father and of the Son. That blessed Comforter, uniting us to Christ, has also united us to Himself and to the Father. It is a three-fold Cord: who may break it? Who shall separate

us from the love of the Holy blessed and glorious Trinity? from the God who made us His own, before we could think or know anything?

Here then is the saying of Solomon wonderfully accomplished, “The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”¹ We are here in an evil and trying world, encompassed with many and great dangers. Storms are in the air, they may come down upon us any moment: whither shall we fly for shelter? To our earthly homes and friends? Alas, they are under the same sky as ourselves, they are subject to the same tempests: they, no less than we, may this very hour be swept away suddenly and without warning. Shall we set to work and build ourselves up a shelter, a tower, as some did of old time, whose top might reach unto heaven, a great Babylon of our own contrivance, in which we may have our own way undisturbed? We know beforehand it will be all in vain: the experience of near 6000 years has told us, and the most simple among us knows it as well and as certainly as he knows his own existence, that all such devices are in vain. And so, when we have looked far and wide, when we have thought and dreamed all things over, we shall find but this one refuge, this one hope and shelter; the Lord God Almighty, Who hath taken us to Himself, putting His own Name upon us in our Baptism. To Him let us hasten, as children run to their parents. Why should we seek any other refuge? His own saving Almighty Name, the Name of the most Holy Trinity, is ours, if we will use it, for a sure defence, and strong weapon against all that our enemies can do to hurt us. To flee away to any other, neglecting this, is in reality setting up the Evil One against God: it is the sin of witchcraft, so called in the Scriptures: it is trusting in names and divinations and charms: but may our trust always be in that worthy Name whereby we are called, in the Name of the most Holy Trinity, which we carry about with us ever since our Baptism! Whatever else we use, and thankfully use, to help and comfort us for awhile on the way, let us never trust in anything but in this One Holy Name, this glorious and fearful Name, the Lord our God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Into this Tower we will run, and there by His mercy we shall be safe: only let us remember to what manner of persons this is promised. The righteous runneth into this strong hold and is safe, i. e. they who by sincere obedience or true repentance have kept or recovered that righteousness of Christ which He bestowed on them in their Baptism. But if you turn back to your own wickedness, to the evil works which were your own by nature, the holy Name which should have been your Salvation will turn in the end to your more dismal ruin. Preserve us, O Lord, from that worst of sin and misery.

¹ Proverbs 18:10