

## The Manifestation of Christ in Worship.

*Ps. XXIX. 2.—Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name: worship the Lord in the beauty of Holiness.*

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To worship is a kind of instinct in man. We may say that by the desire to worship intelligently man is distinguished from the rest of the animal creation. "Worship is the spontaneous expression of faith, and without faith worship is impossible." "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone." But his worship springs from faith no less than ours does. He believes in the gods whom he worships, even though they are inadequate objects of his devotion. He is groping after something better. He must be shown something better. His blindness must be cured.

St. Paul's spirit was stirred within him as he walked about Athens to see the sights. He saw that it was full of idols. He recognised that the Athenians were god-fearing, yet superstitious, prepared to be reverent, yet filled with dread. They feared things might happen to them through having overlooked some unknown god. They therefore erected "an altar to the unknown God." This circumstance gave St. Paul his cue and he declared unto them the God whom they worshipped ignorantly. He pointed out to them a worthier object for their worship and devotion. He preached to them Jesus and the Resurrection. Jesus was a Person worthy of their faith. To Jesus they could give the full devotion of their hearts. In Jesus was God manifested to mankind.

It is through Jesus Christ we offer our worship to God  
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the Father, for in Him, through the Incarnation, God and man meet, in Him they are at one.

In worship, then, we make an act of submission to God, we surrender our will to Him. We devote ourselves to His service; that is why our services of prayer and praise and thanksgiving are called our devotions. So in the Prayer of Oblation in the Communion service the priest says on behalf of the worshippers "And here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto Thee." The prayer is virtually the exhortation of St. Paul to the Romans, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, (that is for the glory of God because of the salvation offered in Jesus Christ) by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The purpose of worship is made clear to us by these words. Worship for the time being takes us away from the world and the things of the world. We are reminded that we are spiritual beings and are called upon to live the life of the spirit. "The Spirit," writes the Dean of St. Paul's, "is the higher life of humanity, which keeps alive the results of its experience, its hardly won wisdom, its knowledge of good and evil, its faith, its hope and its love. It holds steadily before it the ideal which the human race was meant to realise, the Kingdom of God which it is meant to set up on earth."

Does not our daily experience bring it home to us how dim our faith may grow, how quickly our hope may die, how easily our love may cool? Did not our Lord anticipate this state of things when He said "Because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold?" And when love waxes cold, faith and hope soon die?

Worship holds up to us the ideal, to enkindle our affections, to inflame our devotion, and to renew our mind, to restore the waste of spiritual force occasioned by conflict with the world. And as Jesus Christ is the ideal held up to us in worship, in our worship He is manifested to us and in us.

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But let me try to impress this truth upon you. In worship we come to give not to receive; though the paradox holds good that the more we give, the more do we receive. How different our worship would be if we remembered that worship is giving. "Give unto the Lord the honour due unto His Name." Then our worship leads us, or should lead us to reflect upon the Name of God, that is on the manifold ways in which God has revealed Himself. And those revelations of Himself are so many expressions of His will. If He has revealed Himself as just and merciful and true and holy, it is because He has willed that His worshippers should be just and merciful and true and holy, for man was made in the image of God and must be a reflection of God.

In Jesus Christ we see the express image of the Divine Person. He is held up to our gaze in worship for our adoration. By contemplation of Him we are renewed in our mind, we are transformed. We can, owing to our limitations, have but a faint apprehension of the glory of Jesus Christ. We behold it obscurely as in a clouded mirror, and faintly we reflect it. But yet there is the promise, if we are true to the guiding of the spirit of Christ, "that with unveiled face, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we shall be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the spirit." But if we desire to reflect the glory of the Lord we must steadfastly [sic] behold the glory of the Lord, and the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God we have in the face of Jesus Christ." But the knowledge is acquired slowly. Progress is a gradual growth. The transforming takes place by degrees from glory to glory. We are to "grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We shall need to exercise great patience, and to submit to discipline. The Christian life is a life lived under discipline. There are definite virtues and graces to be acquired, virtues and graces which we see in their perfection in Jesus Christ. We are but novices in the school of Christ, we can hardly, without presumption, even claim to be disciples, for a disciple is one who has made some progress in the teaching of his master. And most of us are in the lowest class and very near the bottom of it. But personal devotion to our

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Master Christ, should stimulate our desire to please Him. If we once get even a faint idea of how desirable He is we shall be eager to know Him better. We shall recognise that we are called upon to work with Him because He is working in us. Our faith is our response to His call, it is an active desire to work with Him. If we believe in a person it means that we are in sympathy with his aims and are ready to help him to attain them. We are willing to follow his leading. And that will entail upon us self-sacrifice and self-discipline. In that way we do him honour. "Give unto the Lord the honour due unto His Name: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

In worship we have to take account of two things, first, the external accessories of worship; and secondly, the inner disposition of the heart. Of the two things the second is the

more important, but the first is by no means a matter of indifference. It is sometimes argued that we are spiritual beings and that therefore worship should be spiritual, and consequently that there is no need for the external accessories of worship. Under present conditions we are not spirit only but body and spirit, and the spirit is as much influenced by the body as the body is by the spirit. The body is not to be under-rated as it is the medium through which the spirit acts, and even when the spirit shall have been freed from the body by death, it still will need a medium through which to act. "It will be clothed upon," as St. Paul teaches, "with the body which God is preparing for it." But as things are, in Robert Browning's words, "All good things are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul."

Externals are necessary in worship for the sake of reverence and dignity, nor is worship any less spiritual for their presence. Indeed it might be made very unspiritual by their absence. The spirit is influenced through the eye and ear, e.g., worship would be poor without the aid of music, "the most spiritual of all the arts ... the very voice of God." And objects presented to the eye are symbols of spiritual things. Our Lord Himself by instituting sacraments has consecrated Bread and Wine and Water as outward signs of, and means of conveying, inward and spiritual grace. "Worship the Lord in the beauty of

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holiness" is rather the attributed meaning than the actual translation of the original text. The real translation is "worship the Lord in holy array," and allusion is made to the rich garments worn by the priests in the service of the sanctuary. They were clothed in "holy garments for glory and for beauty." They were but types of the heavenly priesthood, and their garments symbols of the heavenly graces with which the heavenly priest is invested. The metaphor of clothing is one of the commonest we can find in the Bible, both in the Old and in the New Testament. "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness." "I will clothe her priests with salvation." We have the more terrible use of the metaphor in the 109th Psalm. "He clad himself with cursing as with his robe and it came into his inward parts like water, and like oil into his bones." Cursing became the second nature of the wicked man. His evil habits clung to him as a part of his very self. But, it may be equally true of the Christian graces becoming part of a man's true self. "Put on as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering." "Put on Christ." The outward demeanour is the expression of the spirit within. "Manners are not idle but the fruit of loyal nature and of noble mind." The attitude of our body in the House of God is the index to the attitude of our mind towards God. Reverence and humility are essential to true worship of God. In prayer, as we are humbling ourselves, or should be, in the presence of God our proper attitude should be "meekly kneeling upon our knees." We should stand to praise and sit to hear. We ought not to behave in the House of God as if it were a condescension on our part to be there. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His Name: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." And it should be remembered that holiness is the object of all Christian living. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Is not the promise given to us "Now are we the children of God and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is?" We see what we have the capacity for seeing. Someone remarked to the

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artist, Turner, "I do not see in nature the colours which I see in your pictures." And the artist replied "But don't you wish you could?" Likeness is both the condition and consequence of vision. By sympathy with the object of sight we gain greater power of vision. And this will apply to worship. By striving to become holy as the Object of our worship is holy, that Object will be revealed to us more and more: and with fuller knowledge thus gained of Him Whom we worship we shall become more and more holy. As He is manifested more clearly to us He will be manifested more fully in us.

Then is it not a matter of the highest importance that we should be careful not only in our acts of worship but in our preparation for worship? In worship we expect to meet God, to see Him and speak with Him and tell Him all that is in our heart. Should we not then take pains to prepare our heart, to avoid all those distracting thoughts which divert our attention from God? Experience tells us what and how many they are. Our worship loses half its effect for want of due preparation. It would gain immeasurably in power if we spent the few minutes before service in trying to secure that state of recollectedness which will enable us to fix our thoughts on God. It would increase our spiritual power, also, if after service, instead of rushing back to the things of the world, one stayed to reflect on some truth of God, some revelation of Himself, which He has been pleased to make in our worship. Our service should be the best of which we are capable. We do but insult God by offering Him "that which is broken or maimed." Our offering must be without blemish. The careless guest who came without the wedding garment was cast into the outer darkness. He had been guilty of slighting his host. "For the want of this self-preparation we are excluded from the higher life of the Kingdom of God." In the light of God's realised Presence, the soul sees light. The soul is darkened by the loss of God's Presence. Our aim in worship is the glory of God not our own edification. That will follow as a matter of course. With increasing knowledge of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, will come advancement in holiness.