

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

(By the RIGHT REVEREND MONSIGNOR POWER, V.F., for the N.Z. Tablet.)

20.—CHRIST'S CHURCH IS HOLY.

Holiness is a property of the Church of Jesus Christ. The vision of her vouchsafed to the prophets, arrayed her in the sparkling robes of grace, and portrayed her as God's love, God's dove, God's beautiful one, His peerless queen, dowered with the Father's glory, encircled with million angel forms of light, all her walls are precious stones, and her towers built up with jewels. And when prophecies were fulfilled and Christ had come to call her into actual being, He "loved the Church and gave Himself up for her sake, that He might sanctify her, purifying her in the bath of water by means of the word, and that He might present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." It was thus the Beloved Disciple saw her arrayed in the vision of Patmos: "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." Christ's death was efficacious for His Church, and conscious of this, she herself sings in gratitude to Him: "Holiness becometh Thy House, O Lord, unto length of days."

The Church is holy, in her Founder, the God of all holiness; she is holy, because she is the temple of the Holy Spirit; she is holy, in the end she pursues—the salvation of men; she is holy, in the means she makes use of—pure doctrine and the Sacraments; she is holy, in her children, "the living stones" that lead her ramparts above the starry sky, in her children, who "are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that (they) may declare His virtues, Who hath called (them) out of darkness into His marvellous light."

The Church has had a holy Founder because she has come from the Heart of Christ pierced on the Cross, and was washed in the blood and water that poured therefrom. There was poured into her at Pentecost the Holy Spirit, to be ever abiding; to keep her from error since He is the Spirit of Truth, and to keep her holy since He is the Spirit of Sanctity. Only God could establish a holy Church, since He alone can say: "Be ye holy as I, the Lord your God, am holy." Only He Who had poured the Spirit of Truth and Sanctity into the Church's leaders, could command them to sanctify His people in truth. The All-Holy God is the Founder of His Church, she is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and in so far she is holy.

She is holy, in the end for which she was established, that is, to sanctify and save human souls. This is to imitate Our Lord Jesus Christ: to be a light to those seated in darkness, a strength to the weak, a comfort and an assurance to the wavering. To raise up man from the dark valleys of pagan ignorance and from the mire of pagan sin, to teach him that he is more than reptile, and make him an adopted son of God, and

lead him at length to his eternal heritage, this is the end for which the Church was founded, and no end could be holier.

She is holy, in the means she makes use of to carry out this end. As a man's belief has a powerful effect on his conduct and as Christ wishes His people to live by faith, the Church must expound the teachings of the faith in carrying out her end. The truth sanctifies, and she is the divinely-appointed guardian and authoritative expounder of the truth to a darkened world. The schools of philosophy had removed the idea of the true God and with it the notion of good and evil, it gave men false ideas of human personality and no idea of the soul's immortality; the beliefs of paganism found expression in the worship of many false gods, in polygamy, in the ruin of the family, and in widespread moral corruption; the happiness of man had departed, and there was left to him no hope of happiness hereafter. The greatest of the pagan poets considered man the most wretched of all the mortals that walked or crept upon the earth. This intellectual darkness and moral corruption Truth, in the person of Christ, confronted in the judgment-hall of Pilate, and now confronts it through the Church. Truth therefore is a holy weapon, and the Church is holy because she uses it. The treasure-house of truth must be holy.

She has other holy means in the Sacraments with which she was dowered by her Founder. Through Baptism her children receive the first communication of the divine life and are made to participate in the fruits of the Incarnation; in Confirmation her growing youths and maidens are strengthened against the wiles and wickedness of the world, that now begins to attract their attention and tempt their allegiance; through the Holy Eucharist they have Christ, the Fount of light and grace, abiding in them, and they are made to abide in Him; in Penance the wounds of their souls are healed by restoring grace; in Matrimony the fount of the race is consecrated and sanctified; in Holy Orders specially chosen men are set apart and lifted up to offer supreme worship to the Eternal Father, and to devote themselves to the sanctification of the people. But priest and people come to die in God's good time. Then Holy Church comes to their dying bed and ministers unto them; she purifies with another Sacrament the senses of their poor body, and brings the sweet mercy of the Redeemer upon the departing soul; and when this has departed, she has her Holy Sacrifice of the Mass to bring it seasons of refreshment, light, and peace, and waft it at last to the feet of its Lord. Poets have marvelled at this perfect round of grace, and have seen in it a remedy for man's every spiritual need and a wise provision for every stage of human life. We see in it a compelling proof of the Church's holiness. She is holy therefore in the means she uses in carrying out her end.

Finally, she is holy in her children who are her fruits of holiness. In every generation she will be able to point with pride to her jewels, to her children who are eminent for holiness, who are unspotted by the world and sparkling with virtues. There will be amongst her sons heroic martyrs for Jesus and valiant and intrepid confessors of the faith. There will be monks and hermits to despise the false pleasures of the world and with them even pleasures that are lawful, and there will be bands of virgins following the Lamb, and bearing with joy the white lily of purity that flourishes in her genial soil and is made fragrant with the dews of her grace. There will be defenders of the marriage bond and upholders of the sanctity of marriage who will brave the threats and tyranny of wicked governments and kings. Voluntary poverty will be taken as a bride by hundreds of her Assis in every generation, and obedience will be cheerfully vowed to His representative who was Himself obedient unto death. She will convert to sanctity the corrupt Roman world, and lead semi-civilised peoples to grace, and will bring a new life and a new civilisation into every nation. The pagan of the first century will admire the holiness of even her rank and file, and nineteen centuries later a chairman of a Divorce Commission in London will comment on the purity of Catholic marriages, and an English Cardinal will state in well-weighed words that she alone can make the young heart chaste, and this because she alone can give to children Jesus as their Food and Mary as their Nursing-Mother.

Let none object that there are sinners in the Church! The Church has two sides, she is human as well as divine, and while humanity lasts there will be sin. She is the Mother of all God's children, bad as well as good, and all will remain side by side until the time for sifting comes. The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a field in which the good man of the house sowed good seed but found cockle amongst the wheat, and like a net that is cast into the sea and draws out good fish and bad. The Church will continue to cast the net and strew the seed and draw in a mixed return, but not all the worthless crop and draught will continue so. Many will be charmed by her holiness and brought to grace by her ministrations; then will be fulfilled what the Royal Psalmist foresaw, the outcast will be lifted from the dunghill and she will become their joyful Mother.

The real man is the one who finds excuse for others but never excuses himself.—Beecher.

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