

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

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

21.—THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS CATHOLIC OR UNIVERSAL.

This characteristic means that the Church still preserving her internal unity of faith and her external unity of government, is intended to be the one Church of Christ throughout the whole world. The prophets foretold the one Kingdom of Christ to which all nations would repair: The stone cut out of the mountain without hands will become a great mountain and fill the whole earth; Christ will be the Light of the Gentiles even to the ends of the earth and to peoples from afar; He will be given for a Witness to the people, for a Leader and a Master to the Gentiles; His everlasting name will belong not to the children of Israel only, but to those of the stranger also; the whole earth will be His footstool, and every nation of it will bring forth children to Him; He will send His disciples to the Gentiles, into the sea, into Africa and Lydia, into Italy and Greece, to the islands afar off; and all these will unite to offer one Sacrifice, a Clean Oblation, everywhere, from the rising to the setting sun, to the Lord of Hosts, Whose name is great among the Gentiles.

And when Christ had come and would forecast His own Kingdom, He spoke the parable of the mustard seed, small indeed, but the spreading branches of whose tree would give lodgment to the birds of the air. He spoke also the parable of the marriage feast, in which the servants of the master are sent into the highways to bring in guests who would fill his house. He spoke the parable of the Good Shepherd, Whose flock are all the people no matter where these may be found. For them He will not build several sheepfolds to suit their foolish fancy, one in Prussia, one in Scandinavia, and one in England. No, one great Catholic or Universal sheepfold He will build for all, and "there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

He keeps His promise and founds a Catholic or Universal Church: He sends His Apostles into all nations, and commands them to preach His one Gospel to every creature; they must be witnesses for Him, not in Jerusalem and the adjoining territories only, but "even unto the uttermost parts of the earth." He is no national King having His vision bounded by this or that territory; He is the Eternal King of Ages, Who would gather all His children to His bosom, because no matter what their nationality may be, He wishes them all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. "He was the true light that enlighteneth every man coming into this world." His Church therefore, His Kingdom of Truth, must be for every man, it must cover time and space, must be for all ages and nations, must be not national but Catholic. The Apostles understood this, and to justify their work even in the infancy of the Church, St. Paul wrote: "their sound hath gone forth into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the whole world."

The Fathers of the early Church also understood that Christ had set up an universal Church. The name "Catholic Church" with

its strict technical meaning, was of common usage among them in the beginning of the fourth century, and became in their hands a powerful weapon against heresy and schism. St. Pacianus, the eloquent Bishop of Barcelona (360-390), insisted against the Novatians that "Catholic" was the proper surname of Christians, a name that would distinguish them from those who would arrogantly retain the title "Christian" while they were engaged in breaking up the Christian unity: "Christian is my name, but Catholic my surname. . . And people when named Catholic are separated by this appellation from the heretical name."

"The Church is one," writes St. Augustine, "and our ancestors call it Catholic, to show that it is spread throughout the nations. It is the Body of Christ, and those who are not members of it cannot share in the salvation merited by the Head. . . I am retained in the Church by the very name of Catholic; for it was not without reason that she alone, amid so many heresies, obtained that name." By that same name he confounded the Donatists, and it was his arguments against the Donatists that led the illustrious Cardinal Newman into the Church. The Donatists in the fourth century, did not deny any point of Catholic teaching in its Theology concerning Christ, but they were endeavoring to propagate a faulty system of Church discipline and organisation, which they had set up in their little corner of Africa. St. Optatus refuted them, about the year 370, and St. Augustine, about the year 400. They both insisted upon the note of Catholicity, and pointed out that both the Old and the New Testament represented the Church as spread over all the earth. St. Augustine strongly insisted upon the common use of the name Catholic:

"Although there be many heresies . . . yet there is but one Church. This is the Catholic Church. . . We must hold fast to the Christian religion and the Communion of that Church which both is, and is called Catholic. Heretics and schismatics, whether they like it or no, are obliged when speaking with strangers to call her the Catholic Church. For, unless they call her by the name by which she is known all over the globe, they are not understood. . . Do you imagine that the African Church is the Catholic Church . . . that the Church has perished everywhere outside Donatus and Africa? . . . Therefore the universal Church securely judges that they cannot be good who separate themselves from the universal Church in any part of the world."

It was this last sentence, beginning with the four Latin words "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*" that first startled Cardinal Newman, showing him beyond a doubt that the Anglican Church occupied the same position of sad isolation in his day that the Donatist Church did in its:

"For a mere sentence the words of St. Augustine struck me with a power which I

never had felt from any words before. By those great words the theory of the *via media* was absolutely pulverised. . . I became excited at the view thus opened upon me. . . I had seen the shadow of a hand upon the wall. It was clear that I had a great deal to learn on the question of the Churches, and that, perhaps, some new light was coming upon me."

That the new light came and did its divine work we may learn from this beautiful passage from his sermon on Christ upon the Waters:

"There is one, and only one religion such; it is known everywhere; every poor boy in the street knows the name of it; there never was a time, since it first was, that its name was not known, and known to the multitude. It is called Catholicism, a world-wide name and incommunicable; attached to us from the first; accorded to us by our enemies; in vain attempted, never stolen from us by our rivals."

This other passage, from "Discourses to Mixed Congregations," is worthy of his master St. Augustine:

"How different are all religions that ever were from the lofty and unchangeable Catholic Church! They depend on time and place for their existence; they live in periods or regions. They are children of the soil, indigenous plants, which readily flourish under a certain temperature, in a certain aspect, in moist or in dry, and die if they are transplanted. Their habitat is one article of their scientific description. Thus the Greek schism, Nestorianism, the heresy of Calvin, and Methodism, each has its geographical limit. Protestantism has gained nothing in Europe since its first outbreak." Of the Catholic Church, he says: "She is the same as she was three centuries ago, ere the present religions of the country existed; you know her to be the same; it is the charge brought against her that she does not change; time and place affect her not, because she has her source where there is neither time nor place, because she comes from the throne of the illimitable God."

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