

Bishop Wilson's Form of Receiving Penitents

by J.H. Newman

The Church's censures are a means of awakening members to their sin and encouraging them to repent and reform, with the goal of bringing them back to God.

Scripture: Luke 15:4, Luke 15:11, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Galatians 5:19, Hebrews 10:31, James 4:7, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Repentance", "Forgiveness"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of confession, repentance, and true reformation in the Church, emphasizing the consequences of living a wicked life and the need to turn to God for forgiveness and mercy. He highlights the encouragement and compassion God offers to those who sincerely repent, using parables to illustrate the joy in heaven when a sinner returns to God. Newman urges the congregation to acknowledge their own sins, seek forgiveness, and lead a new life in obedience to Jesus Christ, reminding them of the constant presence of temptation and the importance of self-reflection and humility.

Transcript

After Morning Prayers, the person who is censured to penance standing in the accustomed place and habit, the Minister shall exhort him as follows:

BROTHER,

The Church being a society of persons professing to live in the fear of God, and expecting the judgements of God to fall upon them, if His laws are broken without calling the offenders to account; it is reasonable that every member of this society, who has been guilty of any scandalous offence, should either openly confess his sins, and promise reformation for the time to come; or else should be cut off from the body of CHRIST, which is the Church.

Now, to awaken you to a true sense of your condition, I will set before you the Word of GOD; that you may certainly know what will be the end of a wicked life; and that knowing the terror of the LORD, you may speedily turn unto Him and make your peace.

Hear then what the Apostle St. Paul saith of great offenders:

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of GOD.

Hear also what the same Apostle saith:

Now the works of the flesh are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living GOD, who can destroy both body and soul in hell; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

These being the very words of GOD, you will do well to consider into what condition you have brought yourself; and indeed, the only comfort you have is this, that you are yet alive, and that the day of grace and repentance is yet afforded you. Which that you make use of, I must also let you know, what GOD has declared concerning such as repent and turn unto GOD, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

To the LORD our GOD belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

And our blessed SAVIOUR, to show us what great compassion GOD has for him that has gone astray, and returns to his duty; He represents Him as a man, who having found his lost sheep, takes it upon his shoulders, rejoicing.

And in another parable, to make us understand the love of GOD for penitent sinners, he shows us how we may hope to be received, even as a compassionate father received his prodigal son, whenever he became humble and sensible of his faults; he embraced him, he clothed him, he rejoiced with his whole family. And such joy there is amongst the angels of GOD, when a sinner repenteth.

Such great encouragement you have to return to GOD. But then, you must do it sincerely; you must not only appear outwardly a penitent, but with a true penitent heart come before GOD and His Church. Which if you do, you will not look upon this as a punishment inflicted upon you by the Church, but as a wholesome medicine administered for the good of your precious soul. Without which, you might have gone on, adding sin to sin, until there had been no more space for repentance.

You will suffer yourself to be admonished; acknowledge your offence; and give glory to GOD, in owning His power to punish you in the next life, though you should escape in this.

You will testify to others that it is, indeed, an evil thing and bitter to forsake the LORD. And owning this so publicly, you will be ashamed to return to the sins you have repented of.

Then we shall pray to GOD that He would, for CHRIST's sake, accept of your repentance; that He would enable you to live for the time to come in obedience to the laws of JESUS CHRIST, that your souls may be saved at the day of judgement.

These are the wholesome ends the Church proposes in her censures; following herein the Apostle's directions, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, that they may recover themselves out of the snares of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Therefore, dear brother, consider that you are in the presence of GOD-the searcher of hearts. You may indeed, deceive this congregation with a feigned repentance, but you cannot deceive Him that made you; who, if you dissemble in this matter, will shut you out of heaven, though you continue a visible member of His Church here.

But that we may take all due caution, I must in the name of the congregation, ask you these questions:

Are you from your heart sorry for the sin you have committed?- Answer. I am.

Will you be more careful for the time to come; and by GOD's help, avoid all temptations to it?--

Answer. I will.

Will you constantly pray to GOD to assist you to do so?- Answer. I will.

Do you desire the forgiveness of all good Christians, whom you may have offended?-Answer. I do.

And do you desire that others, seeing your admonition of such as, after a Christian manner, shall advise you, if they shall see you forget yourself and the promises you have now made?- Answer. I will.

Then shall the Minister say,

May the gracious GOD give you repentance to life eternal; receive you into his favour; continue you a true member of the Church of CHRIST; and bring you unto his everlasting kingdom, through the same JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

After which he shall speak to the congregation as follows:

Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this person is moved by the good SPIRIT of GOD to confess his sins, and to be afflicted for then; let us, that we may mourn with him as becomes good Christians, consider that we are all subjects to sin, and to death eternal;

That there is nothing so vile and wicked which we should not run into, did not the grace of GOD prevent us;

That, therefore, we have nothing to value ourselves for above others, but what the good SPIRIT of GOD has given us.

Let him, then, as the Apostle advises, that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

Let us remember the words of CHRIST, Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh continually about, seeking whom he may devour.

Let us learn never to be ashamed to acknowledge our sins to remembrance, and judge ourselves, though we are not censured by the Church. Let us confess our sins unto GOD, who is most willing to pardon us, if we turn unto Him with all our hearts, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life. Which GOD grant we may all do, for JESUS CHRIST's sake. Amen.

Then shall be said distinctly the fifty-first Psalm, together with the Prayers appointed in the Communion service for Ash-Wednesday.

OXFORD,

The Feast of St. James.

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