

The People's Interest in Their Minister's Commission

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the divine commission given to pastors to bind and loose, to teach and guide, and to administer sacraments, and how this commission is passed down through the laying on of hands.

Scripture: Matthew 16:19, Matthew 28:20, John 3:5, John 6:53, 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 Corinthians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 2:2

Topics: "Apostolic Authority", "Sacramental Ministry"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the commission and authority given by Jesus to St. Peter and the apostles, empowering them as chief shepherds of the Church to teach and guide the people in matters of faith and salvation. This commission includes the responsibility of ministering the Word of God and administering the sacraments, particularly Baptism and the Eucharist, which are essential for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Newman emphasizes the importance of the apostolic succession and the divine commission passed down through bishops, ensuring the faithful exercise of ministry and the presence of Christ in the Church's sacramental actions.

Transcript

And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt. xvi. 19.)

In these words our blessed Lord delivers to St. Peter the same commission, as we find Him, in chapter xviii. of the same Gospel, giving to the rest of the apostles; the commission, power, and authority of chief shepherds, or pastors to the Church;-the commission to be the keepers and guardians of the revealed word of God, and to have authority to teach the people out of it, and what they must do to be saved, what course of faith and duty will admit them to heaven, through the sacrifice of Christ; and what will exclude them from all claim to the salvation which He has purchased for man. It is to this part of the commission that St. Paul alludes when he says, "As we have been allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, so we speak not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts" (1 Thess. ii. 4.); and again he says, "we are ambassadors for CHRIST, as though GOD did beseech you by us." (2 Cor. v. 20.)

But something beyond the ministration of the Word, is committed to the care of the pastors, when our LORD speaks of "the keys of heaven," viz. the ministration of the sacraments. The sacrament of Baptism,

by which souls are admitted into covenant with God, and without which none can enter into the kingdom of heaven (John iii. 5.); the sacrament of the Body and Blood of CHRIST, by which the souls of the faithful are strengthened for their LORD'S service, and brought into union with Him (1 Cor. x. 16.), and without which they are, ordinarily speaking, cut off from union with Him, from communion with the faithful, and cast out of the Kingdom of Heaven. For it is expressly said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." (John vi. 53.) St. Paul also tells us, that the ministration of these sacraments is entrusted to the pastors of the Church by this commission, when he says, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of CHRIST, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. iv. 1.)

This commission, which you find in chapter xvi. given to St. Peter, and in chapter xviii. given to all the Apostles,-which is made mention of in St. Luke's Gospel, where our SAVIOUR says to them, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me" (Luke xxii. 29.), and again in St. John's, where CHRIST says, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John xx. 21);-this commission, I say, was left by the apostles to their successors, viz. those apostles or bishops whom they appointed to be their helpers in governing the churches during their life-time, and to occupy their place when dead. And it has been handed down, by the laying on of hands, from bishops to bishops, and will so continue to the end of time, according to that promise, whereby our LORD engaged to continue with them always in the exercise of it, when He said to the apostles, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) By virtue of this commission, each bishop stands in the place of an apostle of the Church; and discharges the important trust reposed in him, either in his own person, or by the clergy whom he ordains and gifts with a share of his authority.

Herein is the difference between the ministry of such persons as have received this commission from the bishop, and of those who have not received it;-that to the former, CHRIST has promised that his presence shall remain, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world:" and that when they minister the Word and Sacraments (which are the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven), what they do upon earth, in His name, according to His will, shall be ratified and made good in heaven. "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." But to those who have not received the commission, our LORD has given no such promise. A person not commissioned from the bishop, may use the words of Baptism, and sprinkle or bathe with the water, on earth, but there is no promise from Christ, that such a man shall admit souls to the Kingdom of Heaven. A person not commissioned may break bread, and pour out wine, and pretend to give the LORD'S Supper, but it can afford no comfort to any who receive it at his hands, because there is no warrant from CHRIST to lead communicants to suppose that while he does so here on earth, they will be partakers in the SAVIOUR'S heavenly Body and Blood. And as for the person himself, who takes upon himself without warrant to minister in holy things, he is all the while treading in the footsteps of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whose awful punishment you read of in the book of Numbers. (Compare Number xvi. with Jude 11.)

It is of the utmost importance that you should know and understand that it is by virtue of this commission, that we Clergymen lay claim to your attention, when we minister the Word and Sacraments. It is not because we have received an expensive education; it is not because we move in the station of what is called gentlemen; it is not because we have hitherto been encouraged by the State; it is not because we, most of us, have enough of this world's goods, both to supply our own wants, and to impart to the necessities of others; it is not for these things that we dare to speak to you in the name of GOD. Time was when the clergy had them not; the time may come again when they shall not have them. Men may rudely

and unjustly taken away these things; may make us as poor as the poorest; may destroy what is called our station in society; may make us appear in the eyes of men a humbled and degraded class, as they did the Apostles; may "cast out our name as evil for the SON of MAN'S sake," as they did theirs. This cannot alter our position in spiritual things, nor the relation which we bear to GOD and CHRIST, and to your souls. Men cannot take away what CHRIST has given us,-I mean the Divine commission; they cannot set aside the trust which He has placed in our hands,-I mean "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. v. 18.), nor make void the promise He has made, that in the faithful exercise of this ministry, He is "with us always, even to the end of the world."

Remember, then, that whether your pastors be rich or poor, honoured or despised by the world, it is only the having received this COMMISSION that makes us "bold in our GOD to speak unto you the Gospel of GOD" (1 Thess. ii. 2.); and it is only this that can give you any security that the ministrations of the Word and Sacraments shall be effectual to the saving of your souls. Learn, then, to cherish and value the blessing which GOD has vouchsafed to you, in having given you pastors who have received this commission. The Dissenting teachers have it not. They lay no claim to regular succession from the Apostles; and though the Roman Catholic clergy have indeed been ordained by the hands of Bishops, they are mere intruders in this country, have no right to come here, and besides, have so corrupted the truth of GOD'S word, that they are not to be listened to for a moment.

OXFORD,

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