

Trinity VI (19-07-09)

“baptised into his death” (Epistle)

I am giving you parts of a sermon by Dr. Pusey, preached during services held in the first week of the church which he had built (with his own money) to serve the needs of a poor part of Leeds.

“To the Death of the Son of God in our nature, all true Christians look as the source of life and salvation. He died that we might live. He died, “the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” This is one of the plainest truths of our religion, one of the first elements of the Christian faith. But plain and elementary as this truth is, no Christian ever lived who has fathomed its depth, or fully comprehended its meaning. Those indeed who know the least, know much; for much in truth it is to know that He died for us. And yet those, who know the most, know but little. It is a great and unfathomable mystery, and the more we contemplate it, standing as it were on the brink of the deep, the more we are lost, as we gaze down into the abysses of His love. For the measure of the Cross is the infinite love of God. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”

Some people drew the conclusion that therefore they could live as they liked. “Such is the perversion which S. Paul had to meet. And now observe how he meets it, and sets it aside. He does not take the ground that a right faith must be productive of good works; that if persons believe in Christ, it is a necessary and legitimate consequence that they should obey Him. Neither does he urge the motives of gratitude, as he does in another place, as that the love of Christ will constrain us to live no longer to ourselves or to sin, but to Him Who loved us and died for us.”

“He takes even higher ground than this, from which He comes down upon the objector with a still more overwhelming and crushing answer. Motives, however high and influential, might fail. They seem to leave it to men's choice whether they will be actuated by them or not. The force of reason, however powerful and unanswerable its arguments, may often be unfelt, or evaded. For who, if he will, may not do violence to the dictates of his reason? But what can be said when a certain course of action is involved in the very form and nature of the Christian's standing? and when the very supposition on which the objector builds, destroys the foundation of his own inference; when the very grace which he believes himself to possess, destroys the sin which he fancies it leaves him at liberty to commit. How can one dead perform the functions of life? This would not be a mere inconsistency, or a mere failure in the motives which ought to influence a rational being; but it would be an absolute contradiction, a positive and actual contradiction, a saying and unsaying of the same thing, at the same time.

Now observe, this is the ground taken by the Apostle. He does not speak of sin in Christians, as a mere inconsistency, or as a dishonouring of our profession; but he says boldly at once, It cannot be. Christians, and continue in sin! Impossible! You have forgotten your own standing; you have forgotten that you are dead to it. You are grafted into Christ, and into Him not as He was in mortal flesh, but now as He is a quickening Spirit; not before He died, but after He had died and risen. To commit sin wilfully or allowedly is in fact to deny this, to deny your union with Him; and this is not inconsistent Christianity, but it is the renouncement of Christianity itself.”

“See how the Apostle here speaks of Christian Baptism: not as a mere outward form, a mere sign or pledge of blessings already received or to be yet received, but as a real ingrafting into Christ Who has died and risen again. It is the taking in of one person into another, and constituting them one. And He into Whom the baptized is received, has already passed into a state of death, through it, and out of it. And so then by virtue of real vital union with our Lord every one baptized has in Him died and is risen. The Body is as the Head. The virtue of the acts which were done by and in the Head extend to the members also.”

“There follows our part, not which we can do of ourselves, but which nevertheless we may do and must do by the aid of God's Spirit. And this is, to keep our old nature in a state of death; nay, we may not shrink from this full truth in a state of crucifixion. Strength is given us to do this, and we are responsible for doing it.”