

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE GOSPELS

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FOREWORD.

St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy. 3. 14-17) bids him to continue in those things which he has learned and which have been committed to him:---

"Because from thy infancy thou hast known the holy scriptures which can instruct thee to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture, inspired by God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice; that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work."

Now the Bible is the Church's Book; is it not reasonable that we should study it under her guidance?

No one is free to take the civil Laws of any country and say they mean this or that. Private opinion must be confirmed or corrected by reference to authority; to the living voice of a Judge. For the sense of a written document can be misunderstood. Besides prejudice might creep in; one might particularly wish to twist the meaning of a text to suit some private fancy; or worse, to condone a wrong or to support dangerous and revolutionary conduct.

Just as there is a body of Laws in any state and beside it a living authority to interpret and apply its meaning, so in the Church we have both a Book and a Tradition; a sacred text and an authoritative voice; a written Word and the Living Word, Jesus ever present in His Church.

To divorce the two is to make shipwreck of the Faith.

In what follows I have merely tried to shew how luminous is the page of Scripture, how it moulds the judgment of the reader and guides it sweetly and reasonably towards the things of Divine Faith.

The Scriptures are like a lock that many have tried to force; some even to shatter. There is only one key that fits it. Turn the key of the Church in the wards of the lock.

How smoothly it opens!

What treasures it reveals!

C. G. M.

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I. Introduction.

"A City set upon a hill cannot be hid."(1) There is no mistaking the Catholic Church of today. Whether or not men have submitted to its claims they cannot fail to see what and where it is. It is a world-wide Society with a visible Head on earth, namely the Pope. It is a vast organisation of Patriarchates, Archbishops and Bishops: of Vicars Apostolic in mission countries not yet ready for a diocesan Hierarchy; of great Religious Orders: of priests and people, owning a single obedience and confessing a single Creed.

Not only its claims but its doctrines and devotions are distinctive. They form a whole, from which not one tittle can be subtracted. The whole Body reposes upon Authority, an Authority we claim to be divine. Its life also is divine, sustained by the Holy Spirit, nourished with the Sacraments of the Church. It is infallible; its teaching cannot err. It is indefectible: it cannot be destroyed by the enemy from without or scandal from within. It is holy, as witnessed by the Saints it has produced in every age; apostolic, as derived from the original body of Our Lord's Apostles. The Church is one; numerically one; visible and indivisible.

Separate persons or whole nations may have abandoned it at different periods of history; others have been cast out by the Church or condemned finally for their errors. But such action has never jeopardised for one moment the essential Unity of the Body. "The Church needs no man, though all men need the Church."

Now the sole object of this essay is to turn back to the familiar Gospel story and to see if we can trace there anything that truly corresponds to the Catholic Church as we know it today. We shall not of course expect to see it in its fullness, that is, in its matured growth. The Church exists in time and has developed like any other organism. Our Lord Himself taught us this great truth when he spoke of His Kingdom as a grain of mustard seed"(2) Small,

(1) *St. Matt. 5. 14.* (2) *St. Matt. 13. 31-2*

contemptible even it might seem, in its beginnings; poor and unlettered; a refuge of slaves and sinners, craving for a new hope and a new freedom. But the seed would grow; it would become a tree so large that the birds of the air would find shelter in its branches. For this parable was also a prophecy; 300 years after the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord the Christian religion was indeed established throughout the Roman Empire from East to West.

But let us turn back to its very origins: let us take the evidence of its earliest records. Can we assure ourselves that we can find the Catholic Church there, at least in embryo; the true seed with all its potentiality of life; the one Body with its gifts of grace and truth and unity with its Founder?

I would commend this simple study to two classes of readers: first to the Catholic who already knows and believes the main principles, here stated; secondly to those who perhaps have not yet been able to reconcile their conception of the Catholic Church with the first sketch presented in the Gospels; who have not yet found their way from unbelief or from alien communions into the unity of the Fold.

2. What are the Gospels?

The four Gospels of the Church were written at different dates during the last 50 or 60 years of the first century A.D. Two of the Evangelists were Apostles of Our Lord; St. Matthew, the tax-gatherer, a social outcast in the eyes of the Jews since he represented the hated Roman power; St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved; who leaned upon His Breast at the Last Supper, who stood with the Blessed Virgin beneath the Cross, and to whose care Our Lord confided His Mother.

St. Mark was the disciple and interpreter of St. Peter and wrote his Gospel at Rome. St. Luke was a physician and, as some say, also a painter; he was converted by St. Paul and travelled and laboured with him in the ministry of the Word.

These four Gospels were written in Greek though there was probably an earlier version of St. Matthew in Aramaic, the Jewish tongue. The Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark were published first; then after some years the Gospel of St. Luke and finally almost at the close of the first century A.D. came the Gospel of St. John.

Now the first three Evangelists have been called the Synoptists: what does this word imply?

You may have noticed perhaps on a holiday how you have found some lovely view and wished to photograph it. Not content with a single photograph you have approached it from a second and even a third angle and going home you have developed and prized your photographs as each and all reminders of one central object.

In such a way the three earlier Gospels complement each other in the faithful picture they give us of Our Saviour, while yet presenting some distinctive features. The special object of St. Matthew was to shew his own countrymen how Jesus of Nazereth was indeed the true Messiah. St. Mark shews Christ to be the Son of God; and was not that the very confession made by St. Peter to Our Lord's question:

"Whom say ye that I am?" (3)

St. Luke gives us many details about Our Lady and certain parables that do not appear elsewhere.

But with St. John we seem to reach a more intimate knowledge, of yet profounder significance, concerning his Friend and Master. Consider for instance the opening words of St. John read as the Last Gospel after nearly every Mass in the Catholic Church:—

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God..... The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

St. John adds, and there is a ring of pathos in the words as the Evangelist thinks of the infidelity of so many of his own countrymen:—

"He came unto his own and his own received him not."

Now it must not be supposed that the four Gospels of the Church were the only records made of Our Lord's life. On the contrary we know from the opening words of St. Luke's Gospel that "many others had taken in hand to set forth a narration" of these same events. But the Church eventually set her seal upon the four accounts we find in our Bibles as being the authentic records; inspired by the Holy Ghost and free from error. I am not attempting here to set forth detailed proof of their authenticity. They were assailed by the most adverse criticism in the 19th century; their, (3) *See St. Matt: 16, 16. St. Mark : 8, 29. St. Luke: 9, 20.*

authorship was disputed or denied; their text submitted to the minutest scrutiny; a vast apparatus of historical and scientific research brought to bear on their contents. But the Gospels emerged triumphantly. He would indeed be a rash man today who disputed what Catholics have always maintained, that the Gospels are what they claim to be—genuine documents and faithful records.

With these few words of introduction, let us now pass on to consider if we can see for ourselves the true lineaments of the Catholic Church already mirrored in these pages; the Divinity of Our Lord attested; the forming of a sacred College round His Person; the entrusting to it of the doctrines and sacraments of the Church; and the appointment of a visible head on earth in the person of St. Peter.

3. The Gospel Evidence: The Founding of the Church.

If we lay the four Gospels side by side, we see at once that the record falls into different parts. Part I. is the events connected with the Birth and Childhood of Our Lord. Here we are dependent on the testimony of St. Matthew and St. Luke; St. Mark and St. John are silent. In Part II. we find the Announcement and the Introduction of Our Lord's public Ministry; there is the threefold record of the Synoptists, St. John supplying further details as for instance the account of the first miracle at Cana in Galilee. Part III. gives us the public Ministry of three years, where the account is generally twofold or threefold up to the last Passover Week where the records are at their fullest, especially of the Passion with its four separate narratives. Part IV. deals with Our Lord's Resurrection, His appearances to His disciples and His Ascension, where the record lies fairly evenly between the four Evangelists.

What are some of the first thoughts that strike us as we review the sacred story? First, that from a life-time of 33 years, Our Lord devoted 30 to what might seem to us obscurity; and 3 only to His public Ministry. Yet by the age of thirty some of the great heroes of this world had accomplished their life work; Alexander, for instance, who had conquered the world of his day by that age and died not long after. But Our Lord did not emerge from his retirement till He was 30.

Next, if we examine the three years of His Ministry, we see that some part of that too was of a private nature. True that He went about doing good; that He was followed by immense crowds; that He preached from the hill-tops, taught openly in the Synagogue and that the fame of His words and miracles spread throughout the land. Yet these activities were constantly interrupted by other motives; by an escape from the crowds, by long prayer at night among the mountains, and by His life among a chosen few. So it was with His teaching: much was given in the form of parables and moral instruction for the multitude; but His secrets were confided to a chosen band. His innermost circle received a more intimate revelation of His Person. Again while He ordained 70 of His disciples for an immediate mission, the Twelve, His own Apostles, were still kept at His side.

Even in this body of twelve there were subdivisions: three men especially were favoured in that small company and chosen out to be the sole witnesses for instance, of His Transfiguration. Lastly of these three one only was named as the Rock on which Christ would build His Church; Kephas or St. Peter.

We see then that the superficial view of Christ, as held by the world at large, is true but not the whole truth. He was more than an Example for all men to follow; more than a Prophet with a new message. We refuse to place Him merely side by side with Buddha or Mahomet or Confucius as one among the other great seers of human history. We say that both His Person and His claims belong to a different category; and that all this is evident from a study of the Gospels.

It has actually been stated at times that Our Lord was careless of His general teaching; that He made no provision for its immediate recording as it fell from His lips; that it was left to His friends long after to recall as best they could the substance of His wondrous conversation. But this, as we hope to shew, is to mistake the major purpose of His labours for use to overlook the training of the Twelve, the true repository of the Mysteries that He revealed; commissioned by Himself when all at last was ready, to preach the Gospel in His Name to all the world.

Why did Our Lord deliberately turn aside from the crowds and labour earnestly and lovingly with the Few? Even these few at first mistook Him at times; proved slow and obstinate scholars; one at last betrayed Him to His enemies; St. Peter denied Him on the Eve of His Crucifixion; during His Agony in the Garden, they had slept; later they all forsook Him and fled.

What supreme plan or principle was being worked out in these events, in this purposeful occupation of Our Lord,

this testing and training of the Few?

He was fashioning a Body, a Church.

He was selecting and combining such elements as He needed; such material as His age and His own race provided for a permanent work that would not pass away when His own Life on earth had come to its close.

If this is the true reading of the Gospel story, if this is the secret that explains the conduct of Christ, the language He used, the way in which He apportioned His time, then we see that it was of paramount importance that the Twelve, the Few, should be so fashioned and instructed that all posterity might benefit. Only so could the Gospel be founded in human hearts; only so could its truth be secured and its ministry perpetuated; only so could the confession of St. Peter avail for all the world to the end of time.

And what is the nature of this Body—the Mystical Body that Our Lord created? "I am the Vine," He said, "ye are the branches."⁽⁴⁾

The union of these first disciples and their Master was not only a tender love, a profound sympathy or initiation into a higher teaching. It was something more vital than all that; more close, more practical, and more enduring. It was a supernatural bond; the Life of Christ, Himself God, communicated to men; the indwelling of the Divine Spirit so that St. Paul could exclaim after his conversion to the Faith:

"Henceforth not I, but Christ that liveth in me!"

Such was the chosen Body; it was to live with the Life of Christ. Such too was to be the condition of membership in that Body for each of us to the end of time. Not merely an imitation of His conduct but a vital re-birth; no longer a living by our strength, even at its highest and best, but a supreme dependence upon another source of strength, new in kind; supernatural in its potency. Such and such only is the appointed Way for the individual Christian.

But how could these things be?

4. The Gospel Evidence; the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

How indeed?

This was the very question that perplexed Nicodemus. He had come to Jesus by night for fear of the Jews; he had his own reputation to consider as a leading Pharisee, a ruler of his people, a teacher of the Law. He dare not yet commit himself too clearly to the claims and teaching of Christ. "Rabbi", he begins, and it is a courteous and conciliatory opening, "we know that Thou art a teacher come from God for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, unless God be with him."

But Our Lord replies:

"Amen, amen I say unto thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God."

Twice more at verse 4 and verse 9 (St. John. ch 3) Nicodemus' interposes his difficulties. How can a man be born when he is old? What is such a re-birth as this? How can it be?

Our Lord replies by first stating His authority to teach as the Son of God; and next unfolds the nature of the Sacrament of Baptism, the essential preliminary for entering the Kingdom. It is a re-birth of water and the Spirit. And Jesus adds:

"Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?"

Further Our Lord speaks sternly of obstinate unbelief in His teaching. (v. 18. foll.)

In due course Nicodemus made his submission to the Divine Teacher; later in the Gospel he defended Our Lord before the Pharisees (St. John 7. 50) and was present at His Burial. (St.. John. 10. 39.)

Now there are many today precisely in the condition of Nicodemus when he first came to Jesus; attracted but not yet convinced; unwilling to admit the larger claim; puzzled by the supernatural; prejudiced by their former training. This condition of mind and heart is challenged straightway by the Church. The Church states its terms of membership and explains its authority. These are unalterable, nor are they unreasonable for those who studied the Scriptures:

"Art thou a teacher in Israel and knowest not these things?"

On the other hand all who have received the Sacrament of Baptism validly are members of Christ; they have admitted His claim. If later in life they fall away, they have none the less received for ever the character of Christian
(4) *St. John 15. 5.*

Baptism. This sacrament is not an initiation into any local or particular body of Christians but membership in the Church, in the One Body of Christ.

If we turn on to the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel, we shall see that another crisis has been reached in the reception of Our Lord's teaching. Our Lord claims to be the Bread of Life.

"The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying: How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Our Lord replies again with the same solemn formula:—

"Amen, amen I say unto you: except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." (St. John: 6. 48-54 and foll.)

This profound subject has, we know, been a matter of sharp division and controversy throughout the ages among those who have dissented from the Church's teaching and definitions. The same question is asked: How can these things be? What did Our Lord mean? Are these words to be taken literally or as a figure of speech—a commemorative meal with a spiritual "eating" by faith only; or a sacramental partaking in the Body and Blood of Jesus, truly present?

Which is it?

It is strange how the Reformers of the 16th century while they abandoned Tradition and thought to secure themselves on the literal words of the Bible only, were at this point false to their own principles. For they held that these plain words "I am the Bread of Life" and later in the record, the words of Institution,"(5) "This is My Body" could not after all bear a natural and literal sense. They were exceptions; for how could these things be? It was too much for belief.

The argument was advanced with just this degree of plausibility; is it not a fact, they asked, that Our Lord DID use figurative language in certain passages in Scripture where for instance He claimed to be the Vine or the Door of the Sheepfold? Here, they said, are obvious metaphors: the "Bread of Life" is a metaphor too.

Now how do we know, how can we be sure, that the language of this passage in St. John 6. is NOT figurative? By this: that if we pursue the course of events throughout the entire chapter, we shall see Our Lord's meaning most plainly. He knew that His words were causing a severance among His followers:

"After this many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." (v. 67.)

Now at such a crisis is it likely that Our Lord would have permitted a merely verbal misunderstanding to part Him from His previous friends? Would He not have explained Himself further? Would He not have removed forever such a scruple in very justice to the men who felt now compelled to abandon Him?

But what in fact, does He do? He explains away nothing; He does not water down His teaching to suit their taste or prejudice. On the contrary He asseverates the central doctrine again in yet clearer terms:

"Except you eat the flesh you have no life in you."

There can be no possible ground for misunderstanding here. At last He turns to the Twelve: they too are free to go if they wish.

"Will you also go away?" (v. 68).

And Simon Peter answers:

"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

5. The Gospel Evidence: The Primacy of St. Peter.

We have seen from the Scriptures that Jesus advanced an unique claim; that He was God and the Son of God. He came into this world to found a Church; to incorporate His disciples into His own Mystical Body. To the Church He entrusted the truths of His revelation and certain essential rites, as for instance the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

Now what was to be the organisation of the Church? Had it a visible Head on earth? Was its constitution to be monarchic or democratic? How should its doctrine be kept uncorrupt?

Our Lord made a definite choice and provision in all these matters. The answer lies in studying what is recorded in the Gospels concerning St. Peter.

No one can deny, even after the cursory reading of the Evangelists, that Peter plays a prominent part in the story. (5) *St. Matt. 26. 26.*

He is the leader and spokesman of the Apostolic band. He is courageous and self-confident:

"Though all men are offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." (St. Matt. 26. 33.)

When Jesus is apprehended, he flourishes his sword. (St. John. 18. 10).

He is present at the Transfiguration: at the raising of the daughter of Jairus (St. Luke. 8. 21.)

But his lapses are recorded in the Scripture as well as his high intentions. He deprecates Christ's suffering and receives a stern reply: "Get thee behind me, Satan." (St. Matt. 16. 22.)

He denies His Master three times during the night before the Crucifixion.

But there are at least three passages in the Gospels where he is chosen out for special titles and prerogatives. Our Lord conferred upon him a certain office; certain gifts and graces which should pertain not only to the first Peter but to all his successors in the Holy See.

What is the Scriptural evidence for this?

I. St. Matt. 16. 13-20.

In this passage after Peter has confessed the Godhead of Christ, he receives a new name. He shall be called no longer Simon but the Rock. (Petrus, Kephaz). Upon this Rock Our Lord says he will build His Church. St. Peter united to Christ is the Rock that gives stability to all that is founded upon it. (See also St. Matt. 7. 24.) Over against this Kingdom is set the kingdom of Satan, the Gates of Hell; Our Lord promises that they shall never prevail against His Church.

Next St. Peter receives the Keys of the Kingdom. What he binds on earth shall be bound in Heaven; what he looses, shall be loosed.

II. St. Luke, 22. 31 foll.

Follow carefully the literal translation of these words:

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have YOU (Plural: that is, all the Apostles) that he may sift YOU as wheat. But I have prayed for THEE (Singular: Peter alone) that THY faith fail not; and when THOU art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

The promise is given to St. Peter as distinct from the other Apostles or members of the Church. His faith shall not fail; that is, he shall teach without error. He shall confirm his brethren in the faith.

III. St. John. 21. 15

"Feed my sheep feed my sheep.... feed my lambs."

These words too are addressed to Peter alone after his threefold profession of love for His Master.

Thus the Apostle to whom spiritual supremacy had been already promised receives his commission; he is chief Pastor over the entire flock of Christ.

Let us sum up what we have learnt from these passages: St. Peter is the Rock; he is given the Keys of the Church or Kingdom: he is given the prerogative of teaching without error and confirming his brethren; and he is chief Pastor.

But are we justified in saying that what is conferred on St. Peter will pass to all his successors in the same office, to all future Popes? How do we know that Our Lord's words implied as much as that? For this reason: that Peter is represented as the opponent of Satan. Now it would be absurd to imagine that the attacks of Satan would be confined merely to the lifetime of the first Pope. The war between the Church and the powers of Darkness will be continued to the end of time. Therefore in every age there is an equal need for the Rock to stand; for the Teacher to define the Faith and confirm his brethren; for the Ruler and Pastor to control and feed his flock. Therefore all that is promised here is common to Peter and his successors.

What is the nature of his supremacy and infallibility?

We speak of the Papal Monarchy; we see the Pope enthroned in St. Peter's; maintaining his court in the Vatican; occupying today a small Papal State where he is independent of other earthly jurisdiction. His Kingdom is in this world and he is justified in wearing the insignia of his office; but his kingdom is not OF this world. It is a spiritual Kingdom. All that the Pope has of splendour or earthly circumstance, he bears in the name of His Master who is Prophet, Priest and King. For that reason the Pope wears a triple crown. He is the Vicar of Christ on earth.

He is the sole fount of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. All Bishops are guides of the Church, not merely assistants of the Pope; they are shepherds of their respective flocks. Yet, one and all they are subject to the Pope, owe him obedience

and receive from him their jurisdiction.

In what sense is St Peter infallible?

We do not mean that the Pope is either free from sin (impeccable) or that he cannot err as a private theologian; we DO mean that when he speaks as the Pastor of all Christians (ex cathedra) in view of his apostolic authority and through the divine assistance promised to Blessed Peter, what he defines concerning faith and morals, is infallible (free from error.)

The provision of the Papacy and all that it entails is a logical necessity if what Christ gave us was an ultimate Revelation of the Truth of God. Granted that the contemporaries of Christ had indeed a clear and perfect knowledge of His teaching. How shall it be perpetuated? By writing? But the written word can be misunderstood and interpreted in different senses. By tradition? But tradition might become corrupted.

Only if the Church possesses some infallible organ of speech, can the truth of the Gospel never be lost and the faith be preserved inviolate.

If Our Lord lived and worked and died for all future generations, then He MUST have provided a lasting constitution for His Church and a voice to speak infallibly; a hand to guide; a head to control. Otherwise His Mission would have failed and His Gospel disappeared. Is that for one instant thinkable?

Can we conceive that God Almighty would have once poured forth the very best that His divine Love and Wisdom had to offer and then allowed it to be wasted in the sands of human speculation and historical enquiry? He that gave ensured His Gift: and His Gift is the Church ruled by Peter.

6. Two Pictures:

(a) The boat on the lake

(b) Tongues of fire

(a) The boat on the lake

The lake of Galilee, called also the Sea of Tiberias, lies towards the North of Palestine, embosomed in the hills. In the time of Christ it was a busy centre for it was crossed by one of the great trade routes from the East to the ports on the Mediterranean coast. It was surrounded by small but populous towns. Here too in these difficult waters many a fisherman plied his trade, among them Simon Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John.

The little fishing craft of Peter was no stranger to the Divine Master for He used it frequently during His mission round the shores of the lake. At times He preached from it to the crowds that lined the beach; once He slept in it, worn out with His toils, at the very moment that a great storm arose. Once He approached the vessel, walking on the waters. It was like a second home to him.

Twice in the Gospel record we are told of a miraculous draught of fishes that occurred when Jesus told the fishermen where to cast their nets. In the first story (St. Luke: 5, 1-10) after preaching from Simon's boat He orders him to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a draught. Simon is not hopeful as to the results:

"Master, we have toiled all night and taken nothing," but he obeys at once the Divine instruction; the nets are spread on all sides and suddenly "they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes and their nets broke." Beckoning to their partners in the other ship, they filled both the vessels so that they were almost sinking. However, they brought their ships safely to shore and were greeted by the words of Jesus to Simon:

"Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

The second story is recorded in the last chapter of St. John's Gospel (Ch. 21.)

It is now after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Our Lord; He has appeared already to His Mother, to St. Peter, and to many others. This chapter records a further manifestation of Jesus to His friends. Once more Simon Peter is engaged in fishing with his partners, James and John and two others of the disciples. "And that night they caught nothing" (v. 3.) In the light of morning Jesus appears on the shores (yet the disciples knew not that it was Jesus) and directs them thus:

"Cast the net on the right side of the ship: and you shall find."

Once more the nets are suddenly filled: in a moment Peter realises the truth and plunges into the waves to reach the

side of Jesus. The catch is brought safely to the shore: Peter himself goes up and draws the net to land, full of great fishes which are numbered: one hundred and fifty-three.

This scene is followed by a meal which Jesus shares; after that the charge is given to Peter which has been already discussed: "Feed my sheep."

Now what are we to learn from these vivid stories? Are they anything more than picturesque coincidences? Or does each detail, each variation of the narrative convey some profound teaching and stand as a living symbol of spiritual reality?

The boat of Peter: the abode of Christ: the companions in the other boat: the nets that broke in the first story; the nets unbroken in the second, brought safely to the shore with the specified number of great fishes found therein: the presence of Jesus in the boat in the first account and at the later miracle not in the boat but on the shore: the command to be fishers of men.

Such are the salient features of a picture whose colours cannot fade, whose significance cannot pass. For indeed the two pictures melt finally into one, though each is distinct; together they shew us the dispensation of God, its methods and its end.

The boat is the Church; and the boat is Peter's. True, there is another vessel; the two ships may stand for the two-fold mission of the Church to Jew and Gentile alike. But it is into the ship of Peter that Our Lord ascends; such is the "mystery of Unity" that His act conveys to us. All others engaged in this same fishing obey the word of Peter; work for him and under him; share in his blessing and in the rich abundance of all he wins.

The nets break and are NOT YET carried to the shore because with the good EVIL MEN TOO enter into the Church and by schism rend the Apostolic net. But not FINALLY: in the latter picture after Our Lord's Resurrection when He stands now upon the shores of Eternity, the net cast only on the RIGHT SIDE of the vessel is landed without the loss of a single fish; for these are the elect. And they are numbered.

Now all through history since that first commission to St. Peter, his boat has been plying over the stormy waters of this world to "catch" men; not to destroy them but to bring them alive to the eternal shore. We must not be scandalised by the presence of good and bad within the one net; by schism and heresy: by opposition, obstruction, danger or that dead weight of indifference that makes the task of Peter seem so heavy and heart-breaking at times; or by all that seems now to rob him of his results. Truly the nets broke when in the 15th century the great Oriental branch of the Church refused any longer to be subservient to Peter. The nets broke when in the 16th century the so-called Reformers withdrew whole peoples (but never the faithful Irish), from the allegiance they had owned; from the faith they had loved for ages past. The nets are equally broken whenever men in their pride and folly leave the one communion of Our Lord to set up what they consider a purer and truer model of the Church of Jesus.

All these have abandoned Peter and must take the consequence. Truly the nets may break: but the boat does not sink; the work of the Fishermen proceeds. He launches out again for new draughts of fishes, explores more distant waters, or recovers his losses from the very hand of his foe.

The one boat; the one unceasing work: the one divine commission; all these are in the Hands of God whom men may resist but whose Plan they can never overturn.

And what of the shore where the Risen Jesus stands and that final saving and numbering of the fishes in the unbroken net? Is not that a true symbol of the Final Judgment, the final severance of good from evil; the apportioning of reward or penalty?

What other boat than Peter's fulfils literally and entirely each detail of the inspired narrative? What other ship puts forth into the deep throughout the ages with undeviating course and undiminished labour? It seems a frail and humble vessel; not equipped with lavish comfort or expensive tackle; exposed to the most treacherous assaults of wind and wave; and at times Jesus Himself seems to be sleeping, to be unconscious of the extremity of the Church's hazard. But no: in His own time He awakes and "there is a great calm;" the clouds are gone and the billows subside. Persecution and danger must be borne: they are the very marks of the long voyaging of St. Peter. But at last Our Lord brings him to the haven where he would be.

For the boat on the lake is the Church of Christ.

(b) Tongues of fire

For our last picture we must turn beyond the Gospel record and take one glance at the Acts of the Apostles, the narrative of St. Luke that follows.

Few things are more impressive than the moment before action. Think of a great ship ready to be launched; of vast machinery awaiting the touch of the engineer; of an army entrenched by night for battle on the morrow. Such a scene was enacted on the day of Pentecost. (See Acts ch. 2.) The faithful band is gathered together in a single place; some humble tenement in Jerusalem. They represent the harvest of Our Lord's long labour. They are a little company gathered in secret and unknown entirely to the world. The fierce excitement that had surrounded the capture and crucifixion of Jesus, had died away. The great Roman Empire swung on its appointed course.

As the Apostles waited there, something happened; a sign was given; and the whole course of human history was changed forever. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind coming; and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire; and it sat upon every one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Ghost. . . ."

A moment before they had been like an empty chalice, shaped and cleansed for some high purpose; a moment later they are filled with the wine of the Spirit; with life and energy and power to BE and MOVE and ACT.

Our Lord had fulfilled His promise.

God had returned to give Life to the Body.

It was the birthday of the Catholic Church.
