

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR - THE TWELVE

And now the second Pasch of our Lord's Public Life had come. The country from one end to the other was ringing with the sound of His Name. In the crowded cities, in lonely hamlets, in the synagogues, the bazaars, the streets, the Temple itself, Jesus of Nazareth and His marvellous works were the talk of high and low.

Herod Antipas in Galilee, Pontius Pilate in Judea, came to hear of Him, and in their own households He had found adherents. Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, Claudia Procula, the Governor's wife, and many others of rank and influence, either followed Him openly with the crowd or believed in secret. The news of fresh cures sped like wildfire through the land, and kept up an enthusiasm which grew daily. For the miracles of which we are told in the holy Gospels are samples only of the immense numbers wrought. Day after day, in all sorts of places, and at all hours He was amongst the sick and suffering. He "went about doing good," this was the business of His Life.

It was blazed abroad how on one Sabbath He had healed a man whom all Jerusalem knew, the paralytic at the Probatika pond, who for nearly forty years had lain there looking wistfully at the water that would have cured him could he have found a friend to help him into it when it was troubled. Jesus of Nazareth had seen him, and, unasked, had cured him, bidding him take up his bed and go into his house. The people did shout when he swung his bed over his shoulder and walked away. But he had not gone far when some Pharisees came and stopped him, telling him he was breaking the Sabbath by carrying his bed.

On another Sabbath He was teaching in a full synagogue. There was a man before Him whose hand was withered. Everyone was crowding up to the top seats where the Pharisees were and to the raised desk at which Jesus sat. Of course the man would be healed, and of course the Pharisees would be scandalized and shake their heads, and the people wanted to see and enjoy it all.

And so it happened. The Scribes and Pharisees watched Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath. And Jesus looked steadily at them, and there was no fear on His face. Then He looked at the man and said to him:

"Arise, and stand forth in the midst." And rising, he stood forth. Then Jesus said to them:

"I ask you if it be lawful to do good on the Sabbath day?"
But they held their peace. And He said:

"What man among you whose sheep hath fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day will not take hold on it and lift it up? How much better is a man than a sheep. Therefore it is lawful to do a good deed on the Sabbath." And He looked round about on them with anger, and His countenance was terrible to see. And He said to the man:

"Stretch forth thy hand." And he stretched it forth sound and strong like the other. It was always the same thing, said the crowd. If the Pharisees would not believe in Him, they might at least let Him alone. But no, they must follow Him everywhere with their "Why?" and "It is not lawful."

He was walking through the cornfields on another Sabbath, and His disciples who were hungry began to pluck the ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands. At once the Pharisees were down upon them:

"Why do you that?" they said "which is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"
The Pharisees and the priests never joined in the people's shouts of praise. Not they; it would have been beneath them. Instead of being glad when the sick and the demoniacs came from Him cured and happy, they rebuked them sharply and told them it was wrong to

have anything to do with Jesus of Nazareth, because it was only with the help of the prince of devils that He cast out devils and wrought these cures. After this fashion the people talked about Him and about their rulers, whose jealousy and hatred were plain to all.

Our Lord began the second year of His Ministry by an act of the greatest importance, an act which concerns the eternal welfare of every one of us. He founded the Apostolic College, and thus laid the foundation of His Church which was to carry on to the end of time His work for the souls of men.

The world was dark and the way to Heaven difficult to find before He came. How dark it would be again when He was gone! So those thought who loved Him and followed Him. Well might they cry out: "Stay with us, O Lord!" He was everything to them. They had no need to seek for the truth, but only to believe Him and do as He bade them. If their enemies were cunning and strong, He was at hand, always ready to help. If trouble came they could cling to Him, and He would take care of them. But what would become of His followers when He had gone away?

Our Lord, too, asked Himself this question. To understand His own answer to it we must bear in mind His tender love, not for those only who flocked to Him during His Life on earth, but for every soul redeemed with His Precious Blood; that is, for every one of us. However unimportant in the eyes of men, however sinful we may be, we have each of us a place in the Heart of Christ; each one may say with St. Paul: "He loved me and delivered Himself for me." Because He loves us He had to find a way by which the Gospel or good tidings He has brought to the world might reach us, by which we who have never seen His face or heard the sound of His voice may know what we must do to save our souls. Like those who crowded about Him in the villages of Judea and the towns of Galilee, we should want to be taught and comforted, we should have sins to be forgiven. And because we are most of us poor and simple and have to work hard for our daily bread, we should need a plain and simple way to Heaven. We have no time, even were we clever enough, to think out hard questions.

Our dear Lord knew all about us, and this is what He did. From among those who believed in Him and listened with docility to His teaching, He chose twelve whom He called Apostles, or messengers "sent," because they were commissioned by Him to carry on His work among men and teach what they had themselves been taught. These Twelve He kept constantly with Him. He instructed them very carefully in all they would have to know. He answered their difficulties. He told them secrets not made known to the crowd. What He taught to others in parables He explained to them apart.

Our Blessed Lord made a very solemn preparation for this choice of His Apostles. The evening before, says St. Luke, "He went out into a mountain to pray, and He passed the whole night in the prayer of God," not because He needed prayer, but for our example, who need it very much when we have any important work to do or decision to take. "And when day was come He called unto Him His disciples, whom He would Himself. And He made that twelve should be with Him that He might send them to preach." He gave them His own power to heal the sick, to cast out devils, to raise the dead, to forgive sins. When He was leaving the earth He bade them go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He promised to send down upon them His Holy Spirit, who should abide with them for ever and lead them into all truth, and to be with them Himself even to the end of the world.

Because they were to teach His truth, and with His authority, men were to listen to them as to Him.

"He that heareth you heareth Me," He said, "and he that despiseth you despiseth Me." By "you" our Lord must have meant, not the Apostles only but their successors. For these twelve men were to die, but their work was not to stop with their death. They were to pass it on to their successors, and with these as with the first Twelve Christ promised to remain

till the end of time.

Those who heard the Apostles and believed what they taught were to form a society or Church whose members would be, some in Heaven, some in Purgatory and some on earth. Those who have reached Heaven are the Church Triumphant, those in Purgatory are the Church Suffering, those on earth are the Church Militant or Fighting. The Church Militant consists of two classes, the teachers and the taught. For Christ did not say to all His followers but only to the Twelve and their successors:

"He that heareth you heareth Me." The Apostles, then, and their successors, the Bishops, are the Church Teaching, the laity are the Church Taught.

The first Christians knew their place as learners. They did not argue with the Apostles, or pick and choose among the doctrines taught them. So earnestly did their teachers impress upon them the necessity of holding fast what they had been taught, that St. Paul said to his converts: "If an angel from Heaven preach a gospel to you besides that we have preached let him be anathema;" that is, accursed. Why such tremendous words? Because St. Paul knew that what he and his fellow-Apostles taught was not their own doctrine, but the teaching of their Divine Master, which was to be passed on unchanged till He should come again.

Our Lord prayed that His followers might be one, all believing the same truths, all uniting in the same worship, all using the same means of salvation which He had provided for them, all obeying the ruler He had set over them. To keep them one, He put them all into Peter's charge, as we shall see later, and by His prayer for Peter and promises to Peter He secured him and his successors against the possibility of leading the Church astray.

We must learn something about these Twelve whom Christ our Lord chose out of all men to carry on His work, to preach the Gospel and to plant the Church.

Peter. In the four lists drawn up by the Evangelists, St. Peter is always named the first. St. Matthew says: "The names of the twelve Apostles are these the first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the publican; James, the son of Alpheus and Thaddeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him."

"The first Simon." Our Lord had made him first, and they all acknowledged him as such. When a question was asked they let Peter answer for them. They noticed that their Master taught from Peter's boat, that He treated him differently from the rest, expected more of him, reproved and warned him specially, promised him favours that were for himself alone, and gave him charge of the rest. Peter's was an ardent, impetuous nature. His heart was full of deep, devoted love of his Master. But he trusted too much in himself. In the hour of trial his courage failed him, and he thrice denied Him for whom he had left all things and thought he was ready to lay down his life. But if he fell grievously he rose quickly and grandly. His was the kind of repentance our Lord loves. He wept bitterly, and all his life, his cheeks were furrowed with his tears. But there was no gloom, no mistrust, no damping of the courage which had made him do and dare great things. Peter's faith in our Lord's Divinity made him shudder with horror when he heard of the mocking and the scourging and the spitting that were to come. "Far be it from Thee, O Lord," he cried, "this shall not be to Thee." And at the Last Supper he would not suffer our Lord to wash his feet: "Thou shalt never wash my feet," he said. But when Jesus threatened to have nothing more to do with him, he went to the other extreme and offered his hands and his head. When the hour came for Peter to lay down his life for Christ in the persecution of Nero, he showed his humility by begging to be crucified with his head downwards, deeming himself unworthy to suffer in the same posture as his Lord.

Andrew, his brother, the "Bringer to Christ," has the glory of being the first called of the Apostles, and of having brought Peter to Jesus. He seems to have been the oldest of the Twelve, and when we hear of him he is generally presenting some one to our Lord.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee and Salome, were called by our Lord "Boanerges," or the "Sons of Thunder." They had much to learn before they became like their Master, meek and humble of heart. All who would not welcome Him they would have liked to see destroyed by fire from Heaven. And they were ambitious, too, asking to sit on His right hand and on His left in the Kingdom they thought He was going to set up on earth. Think of rough, ignorant fishermen applying for the chief places at Court, to be royal ministers in the new Kingdom! Yet with all their faults, their love for their Master was deep and generous, and they were His special favorites. He took them, with Peter, to places where the other Apostles were not admitted. They were at the Transfiguration, at the Agony in the Garden, and at the raising to life of Jairus' little daughter. And He gave them something better than the first places they wanted. James was the first among the Apostles to give his life for his Master, and John was first in his Master's love, and suffered for Him more than martyrdom at the foot of the Cross. He was the youngest of the Apostles, and calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," because of the special affection our Lord showed him.

Thomas was a practical man. He had no idea of a service of Christ that costs nothing. It was all very well to go out preaching and to return to their Master saying joyfully they had been working miracles and casting out devils in His Name; but if they were really His followers they must be ready to follow Him always and everywhere, not only when the multitude cried out in admiration, "We never saw the like," but when the Samaritans refused Him a passage through their country and when the rulers persecuted Him. And so when the other Apostles tried to dissuade their Master from going into Judea where danger threatened, Thomas said boldly: "Let us also go that we may die with Him." His courage, like Peter's, failed him at the last, but his idea of what our Lord had a right to expect of His disciples never changed. It accounts in part for his obstinate refusal to believe in the Resurrection. All the others, Peter included, told him they had seen their risen Lord. He would not believe. He knew better. What! that Christ should raise Himself to life when He had been dead three days, and come back to them with the old love when they had all failed Him in His hour of need—it was impossible. Our Lord had to show Himself to Thomas before he would believe that His rising again and coming to comfort His poor, weak disciples was not too good to be true.

Matthew. After his call to the Apostleship we hear no more of Matthew in the Gospels. He wrote the first and longest of the Gospels, in which his chief object is to show how our Lord fulfilled all that was foretold of Him by the Prophets, and that He is therefore the long promised Messiah and Son of God.

Philip, Bartholomew, Simon and Jude. Of the friends Philip and Bartholomew, or Nathaniel, we have seen something. Of Simon, the Canaanite, and Jude we know little beyond their names. Jude wrote an Epistle in which he earnestly exhorts the first faithful to stand fast in the faith first delivered to the Saints and taught by the Apostles.

James, the son of Alphaeus, called "the Less," to distinguish him from St. James the Great, the son of Zebedee, was brother to St. Jude and cousin of our Blessed Lord. We hear little of him in the Gospels. He was the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and for his holiness was revered even by the Jews.

Judas Iscariot comes last in all the lists. Some of the Evangelists add to his name "who also betrayed Him," terrible words that pass down for the detestation of all ages the crime of the miserable disciple who thus repaid the love and preference of His Master. Out of all men our Lord had chosen Judas to be one of His best loved and trusted companions. He had a most real and tender love for him. He chose him because He loved him. He gave him special graces, and with the rest the gift of preaching, of healing the sick, of casting out devils. He gave him warning after warning. But all in vain. A fault which he might easily have conquered in the beginning grew and grew till he became its slave. He did not ask the

help he needed, and when strong temptation came he fell never to rise again.

This was the little company gathered round our Blessed Lord poor, uneducated men, more used to employing their hands than their minds, looking like the rest of the nation for a golden age of temporal prosperity, for the people of God to come with the Messiah. They lived with their Divine Master as His intimate friends. They took their simple meals with Him, they prayed and slept at His side. After Mary and Joseph none knew Him like the Twelve. Because they were to help Him in the great work of saving souls which brought Him down from Heaven, and because He saw beneath their rough exterior grand qualities to be developed, He loved them dearly and trained them carefully and patiently. In character they were very different, but in their love of Him, and in the readiness with which they left all they had for His sake, they were alike. When they were chosen by Him they were dull and ignorant, unable, to take in the sublime thoughts of their Divine Teacher. But little by little His instructions, His example, His gentle influence began to tell, and when the Holy Ghost came down upon them at Pentecost they were fit for the great work that lay before them—to preach the Gospel and to plant the Church.