

A HOMILY FOR REPAIRING AND KEEPING CLEAN, AND COMELY ADORNING OF CHURCHES

IT is a common custom used of all men, when they intend to have their friends or neighbours to come to their houses to eat or drink with them, or to have any solemn assemblie to treat and talk of any matter, they will have their houses, which they keep in continual reparations, to be clean and fine, lest they should be counted sluttish, or little to regard their friends and neighbours. How much more then ought the house of GOD, which we commonly call the Church, to be sufficiently repaired in all places, and to be honourably adorned and garnished, and to be kept clean and sweet, to the comfort of the people that shall resort thereunto.

It appeareth in the holy Scripture, how GOD'S house, which was called his holy Temple, and was the mother Church of all Jewry, fell sometimes into decay, and was oftentimes profaned and defiled, through the negligence and ungodliness of such as had the charge thereof. But when godly Kings and governours were in place, then commandment was given forthwith, that the Church and Temple of GOD should be repaired, and the devotion of the people to be gathered, for the reparation of the same. We read in the fourth Book of the Kings, how that king Ioas, being a godly Prince, gave commandment to the Priests, to convert certain offerings of the people, towards the reparation and amendment of GOD'S Temple (2 Kings 12.4-5).

Like commandment gave that most godly King Iosias, concerning the reparation and reedification of GODS Temple, which in his time he found in sore decay (2 Kings 22.3-7). It hath pleased Almighty GOD, that these Histories touching the reedifying and repairing of his holy Temple, should be written at large, to the end we should be taught thereby: First, that GOD is well pleased that his people should have a convenient place to resort unto, and to come together, to praise and magnifie GOD'S holy Name. And secondly, he is highly pleased with all those, which diligently and zealously goe about to amend and restore such places as are appointed for the Congregation of GOD'S people to resort unto, and wherein they humbly and jointly render thanks to GOD for his benefits, and with one heart and voice praise his holy Name. Thirdly, GOD was sore displeased with his people, because they builded, decked, and trimmed up their owne houses, and suffered GOD'S house to be in ruine and decay, to lye uncomely and fulsomely. Wherefore GOD was sore grieved with them, and plagued them, as appeareth in the Prophet Aggeus. Thus saith the Lord: Is it time for you to dwell in your sealed houses, and the Lords house not regarded? Ye have sowed much, and gathered in but little, your meat and your clothes have neither filled you, nor made you warme, and he that had his wages, put it in a bottomelesse purse (Haggai 1.4, 6). By these plagues which GOD laid upon his people for neglecting of his Temple, it may evidently appeare & that; GOD will have his Temple, his Church, the place where his Congregation shall resort to magnifie him, well edified, well repaired, and well maintained. Some, neither regarding godliness, nor the place of godly exercise, will say, The Temple in the old Law was commanded to be built and repaired by GOD himselfe, because it had great promises annexed unto it, and because it was a figure, a Sacrament, or a signification of Christ, and also of his Church. To this may be easily answered: First, that our Churches are not destitute of promises, forasmuch as our Saviour Christ saith, Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst among them. A great number therefore coming to Church together in the Name of Christ, have there, that is to say in the Church, their GOD and Saviour Christ Jesus present among the Congregation of his faithfull people, by his grace, by his favour and godly assistance, according to his most assured and comfortable promises. Why then ought not Christian people to build them Temples and Churches, having as great promises of the presence of GOD, as ever had Solomon for the materiall Temple which he did build? As touching the other point, that Solomon's Temple was a figure of Christ: we

know that now in the time of the cleare light of Christ Jesus the Son of GOD, all shadowes, figures, and significations are utterly gone, all vaine and unprofitable ceremonies, both Jewish and Heathenish, fully abolished. And therefore our Churches are not set up for figures, and significations of Messias and Christ to come, but for other godly and necessary purposes, that is to say, That like as every man hath his owne house to abide in, to refresh himselfe in, to rest in, with such like commodities: So Almighty GOD will have his house and place whither the whole Parish and Congregation shall resort, which is called the Church and Temple of GOD, for that the Church, which is the company of GOD'S people, doth there assemble and come together to serve him. Not meaning hereby, that the Lord whom the heaven of heavens is not able to holde or comprise, doth dwell in the Church of lime and stone, made with man's hands, as wholly and only contained there within, and nowhere else, for so he never dwelt in Solomon's Temple. Moreover, the Church or Temple is counted and called holy, yet not of itselfe, but because GOD'S people resorting thereunto, are holy, and exercise themselves in holy and heavenly things. And to the intent ye may understand further, why Churches were built among Christian people, this was the greatest consideration: that GOD might have his place, and that GOD might have his time, duly to be honoured and served of the whole multitude in the parish. First there to heare and learne the blessed word and will of the everlasting GOD. Secondly, that there the blessed Sacraments, which our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus hath ordained and appointed, should be duly, reverently, and decently ministered. Thirdly, that there the whole multitude of GOD'S people in the Parish, should with one voice and heart call upon the Name of GOD, magnifie and praise the Name of GOD, render earnest and heartie thanks to our heavenly Father for his heape of benefits daily and plentifully poured upon us, not forgetting to bestow our almes upon GOD'S poore, to the intent GOD may blesse us the more richly. Thus ye may well perceive and understand wherefore Churches were built and set up amongst Christian people, and dedicated & appointed to these godly uses, and wholly exempted from all filthy, profane, & worldly uses. Wherefore all they that have little mind or devotion to repaire and build GOD'S Temple, are to be counted people of much ungodliness, spurning against good order in Christ's Church, despising the true honour of GOD, with evil example offending and hindering their neighbours otherwise well and godly disposed. The world thinketh it but a trifle to see their Church in ruine and decay. But who so doth not lay to their helping handes, they sinne against GOD & his holy congregation. For if it had not been sin to neglect & slightly regard the reedifying and building up againe of his Temple, GOD would not have been so much grieved, and so soone have plagued his people, because they builded and decked their owne houses so gorgeously, and despised the house of GOD their Lord. It is sinne and shame to see so many Churches, so ruinous, and so fouly decayed, almost in every corner. If a man's private house wherein he dwelleth, be decayed, he will never cease till it be restored up againe. Yea, if his barne where he keepth his corne be out of reparations, what diligence useth he to make it in perfect state againe? If his stable for his horse, yea, the stie for his swine, be not able to hold out water and wind, how carefull is he to doe cost thereon? And shall we be so mindfull of our common base houses, deputed to so vile employment, & be forgetfull toward that house of GOD, wherein be intreated the words of our eternal salvation, wherein be ministered the Sacraments and mysteries of our redemption? The fountaine of our regeneration is there presented unto us, the partaking of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, is there offered unto us: And shall we not esteeme the place where so heavenly things are handled? Wherefore if ye have any reverence to the service of GOD, if ye have any common honesty, if ye have any conscience in keeping of necessary and godly ordinances, keep your Churches in good repaire, whereby ye shall not onely please GOD, and deserve his manifold blessings, but also deserve the good report of all godly people.

The second point, which appertaineth to the maintenance of GOD'S house, is, to have it well adorned, & comely, and clean kept. Which things may be the more easily reformed, when the Church is well repaired. For like as men are well refreshed and comforted, when they finde their

houses having all things in good order, and all corners clean and sweet: so when GOD'S house the Church is well adorned, with places convenient to sit in, with the Pulpit for the preacher, with the Lord's table, for the ministration of his holy supper, with the Font to Christen in, and also is kept clean, comely, and sweetly, the people are more desirous, and the more comforted to resort thither, and to tarry there the whole time appointed them. With what earnestness, with what vehement zeale did our Saviour Christ drive the buyers & sellers out of the temple of GOD, and hurled downe the tables of the changers of money, and the seates of the Dove-sellers, & could not abide any man to carry a vessell through the Temple (Matthew 21.12)? He told them that they had made his Father's house a den of thieves, partly through their superstition, hypocrisie, false worship, false doctrine, and insatiable covetousness, and partly through contempt, abusing that place with walking and talking, with worldly matters without all feare of God, and due reverence to that place. What dens of thieves the Churches of England have been made by the blasphemous buying & selling the most precious body and blood of Christ in the Masse, as the world was made to believe, at diriges, at monthes minds, at trentals, in abbeys & chantries, beside other horrible abuses (GOD'S holy name be blessed for ever) which we now see & understand. All these abominations, they that supply the roome of Christ, have cleansed and purged the Churches of England of, taking away all such fulsomness and filthiness, as through blinde devotion and ignorance hath crept into the Church these many hundred yeeres. Wherefore, O ye good Christian people, ye dearly beloved in Christ Jesu, ye that glory not in worldly and vaine religion, in phantasticall adorning and decking, but rejoyce in heart to see the glory of GOD truly set forth, and the Churches restored to their ancient and godly use, render your hearty thankes to the goodness of Almighty GOD, who hath in our dayes stirred up the hearts, not only of his godly Preachers and Ministers, but also of his faithfull and most Christian magistrates and governours, to bring such godly things to passe.

And forasmuch as your Churches are scoured and swept from the sinfull and superstitious filthiness wherewith they were defiled and disfigured: Do ye your partes, good people, to keep your Churches comely and clean, suffer them not to be defiled with raine and weather, with dung of doves, and owles, stares, and choughs, and other filthiness, as it is foule and lamentable to behold in many places of this country. It is the house of prayer, not the house of talking, of walking, of brawling, of minstrelsie, of hawkes, of dogs. Provoke not the displeasure and plagues of GOD, for despising & abusing his holy house, as the wicked Jewes did. But have GOD in your heart, be obedient to his blessed will, bind your selves every man and woman, to your power, toward the reparations and clean keeping of the Church, to the intent that ye may be partakers of GOD'S manifold blessings, and that ye may be the better encouraged to resort to your parish Church, there to learne your duty towards GOD and your neighbour, there to be present and partakers of Christ's holy Sacraments, there to render thankes to your heavenly Father for the manifold benefits which he daily poureth upon you, there to pray together, and to call upon GOD'S holy Name, which be blessed, world without end. *Amen.*

Notes:

1. This is the third Homily from the Second Book of Homilies, of which the contents are listed in Art. XXXV of the XXXIX Articles of Religion (1562).
2. Spelling and punctuation partly modernised by William Arthurs 2003.