

"The World's Benefactors"

Parochial and Plain Sermons vol. II sermon 1

St. John Henry Newman

November 30, 1830

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother." John i. 40.

1 WITH this Festival we begin our year,—thus ushering in, with a few weeks of
2 preparation, the day of Christ's Nativity. St. Andrew, whom we now commemorate, has
3 been placed first of the Apostles, because (as far as Scripture informs us) he was the
4 first among them who found the Messiah, and sought to be His disciple. The
5 circumstances which preceded his call are related in the passage of the Gospel from
6 which the text is taken. We are there informed that it was John the Baptist who pointed
7 out to him his Saviour. It was fitting that the forerunner of Christ should be the
8 instrument of leading to Him the first-fruits of his Apostles.

9 St. Andrew, who was already one of St. John's disciples, was attending on his master
10 with another, when, as it happened, Jesus passed by. The Baptist, who had from the
11 first declared his own subordinate place in the dispensation which was then opening,
12 took this occasion of pointing out to his two disciples Him in whom it centred. He said,
13 "Behold the Lamb of God;" this is He of whom I spake, whom the Father has chosen
14 and sent, the true sacrificial Lamb, by whose sufferings the sins of the world will be
15 expiated. On hearing this, the two disciples (Andrew, I say, being one of them)
16 straightway left John and followed Christ. He turned round and asked them, "What seek
17 ye?" They expressed their desire to be allowed to wait upon His teaching; and He
18 suffered them to accompany Him home, and to pass that day with Him. What He said to
19 them is not told us; but St. Andrew received such confirmation of the truth of the
20 Baptist's words, that in consequence he went after his own brother to tell him what he
21 had found. "He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found
22 the Messiah ... and he brought him to Jesus."

23 St. John the Evangelist, who has been guided to preserve various notices concerning
24 the separate Apostles which are not contained in the first three Gospels, speaks of
25 Andrew in two other places; and introduces him under circumstances which show that,
26 little as is known of this Apostle now, he was, in fact, very high in the favour and
27 confidence of his Lord. In his twelfth chapter he describes Andrew as bringing to Christ
28 certain Greeks who came up to Jerusalem to worship and who were desirous of seeing
29 Him. And, what is remarkable, these strangers had first applied to St. Philip, who,
30 though an Apostle himself, instead of taking upon him to introduce them, had recourse
31 to his fellow-townsmen, St. Andrew, as if, whether from age or intimacy with Christ, a
32 more suitable channel for furthering their petition. "Philip cometh, and telleth Andrew;
33 and again, Andrew and Philip tell Jesus."

34 These two Apostles are also mentioned together in the sixth chapter of the same
35 Gospel, at the consultation which preceded the miracle of the loaves and fishes; and

36 there again Andrew is engaged, as before, in the office of introducing strangers to
37 Christ. "There is a lad here," he says to his Lord, a lad who, perhaps, had not courage
38 to come forward of himself, "which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes."

39 The information afforded by these passages, of St. Andrew's especial acceptableness
40 to Christ among the Apostles, is confirmed by the only place in the other Gospels,
41 beside the catalogue, in which his name occurs. After our Lord had predicted the ruin of
42 the Temple, "Peter, James, John, and *Andrew* asked Him privately, Tell us when shall
43 these things be?" [Mark xiii. 3.] and it was to these four that our Saviour revealed the
44 signs of His coming, and of the end of the world. Here St. Andrew is represented as in
45 the especial confidence of Christ; and associated too with those Apostles whom He is
46 known to have selected from the Twelve, on various occasions, by tokens of His
47 peculiar favour.

48 Little is known of St. Andrew in addition to these inspired notices of him. He is said to
49 have preached the Gospel in Scythia; and he was at length martyred in Achaia. His
50 death was by crucifixion; that kind of cross being used, according to the tradition, which
51 still goes by his name.

52 Yet, little as Scripture tells us concerning him, it affords us enough for a lesson, and that
53 an important one. These are the facts before us. St. Andrew was the first convert
54 among the Apostles; he was especially in our Lord's confidence; thrice is he described
55 as introducing others to Him; lastly, he is little known in history, while the place of dignity
56 and the name of highest renown have been allotted to his brother Simon, whom he was
57 the means of bringing to the knowledge of his Saviour.

58 Our lesson, then, is this; that those men are not necessarily the most useful men in their
59 generation, not the most favoured by God, who make the most noise in the world, and
60 who seem to be principals in the great changes and events recorded in history; on the
61 contrary, that even when we are able to point to a certain number of men as the real
62 instruments of any great blessings vouchsafed to mankind, our relative estimate of
63 them, one with another, is often very erroneous: so that, on the whole, if we would trace
64 truly the hand of God in human affairs, and pursue His bounty as displayed in the world
65 to its original sources, we must unlearn our admiration of the powerful and
66 distinguished, our reliance on the opinion of society, our respect for the decisions of the
67 learned or the multitude, and turn our eyes to private life, watching in all we read or
68 witness for the true signs of God's presence, the graces of personal holiness manifested
69 in His elect; which, weak as they may seem to mankind, are mighty through God, and
70 have an influence upon the course of His Providence, and bring about great events in
71 the world at large, when the wisdom and strength of the natural man are of no avail.

72 Now, first, observe the operation of this law of God's government, in respect to the
73 introduction of those temporal blessings which are of the first importance in securing our
74 well-being and comfort in the present life. For example, who was the first cultivator of
75 corn? Who first tamed and domesticated the animals whose strength we use, and
76 whom we make our food? Or who first discovered the medicinal herbs which, from the

earliest times, have been our resource against disease? If it was mortal man, who thus looked through the vegetable and animal worlds, and discriminated between the useful and the worthless, his name is unknown to the millions whom he has benefited. It is notorious, that those who first suggest the most happy inventions, and open a way to the secret stores of nature,—those who weary themselves in the search after Truth, who strike out momentous principles of action, who painfully force upon their contemporaries the adoption of beneficial measures, or, again, who are the original cause of the chief events in national history, are commonly supplanted, as regards celebrity and reward, by inferior men. Their works are not called after them; nor the arts and systems which they have given the world. Their schools are usurped by strangers; and their maxims of wisdom circulate among the children of their people, forming, perhaps, a nation's character, but not embalming in their own immortality the names of their original authors.

Such is the history of the social and political world; and the rule discernible in it is still more clearly established in the world of morals and religion. Who taught the Doctors and Saints of the Church, who, in their day, or in after times, have been the most illustrious expounders of the precepts of right and wrong, and, by word and deed, are the guides of our conduct? Did Almighty Wisdom speak to them through the operation of their own minds, or rather, did it not subject them to instructors unknown to fame, wiser perhaps even than themselves? Andrew followed John the Baptist, while Simon remained at his nets. Andrew first recognised the Messiah among the inhabitants of despised Nazareth; and he brought his brother to Him. Yet to Andrew Christ spake no word of commendation which has been allowed to continue on record; whereas to Simon, even on his first coming, He gave the honourable name by which he is now designated, and afterwards put him forward as the typical foundation of His Church. Nothing indeed can hence be inferred, one way or the other, concerning the relative excellence of the two brothers; so far only appears, that, in the providential course of events, the one was the secret beginner, and the other the public instrument, of a great divine work. St. Paul, again, was honoured with the distinction of a miraculous conversion, and was called to be the chief agent of the propagation of the Gospel among the heathen; yet to Ananias, an otherwise unknown saint, dwelling at Damascus, was committed the high office of conveying the gifts of pardon and the Holy Ghost to the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Providence thus acts daily. The early life of all men is private; it is as children, generally, that their characters are formed to good or evil; and those who form them to good, their truest and chief benefactors, are unknown to the world. It has been remarked, that some of the most eminent Christians have been blessed with religious mothers, and have in after life referred their own graces to the instrumentality of their teaching. Augustine has preserved to the Church the history of his mother Monica; but in the case of others, even the name is denied to us of our great benefactress, whosoever she was, and sometimes, doubtless, the circumstance of her service altogether.

When we look at the history of inspiration, the same rule still holds. Consider the Old Testament, which "makes us wise unto salvation." How great a part of it is written by

120 authors unknown! The book of Judges, the second of Samuel, the books of Kings,
121 Chronicles, Esther, and Job, and great part of the book of Psalms. The last instance is
122 the most remarkable of these. "Profitable" beyond words as is the instruction conveyed
123 to us in every word of Scripture, yet the Psalms have been the most directly and visibly
124 useful part of the whole volume, having been the prayer-book of the Church ever since
125 they were written; and have done more (as far as we dare judge) to prepare souls for
126 heaven, than any of the inspired books, except the Gospels. Yet the authors of a large
127 portion of them are altogether unknown. And so with the Liturgies which have been the
128 possession of the Christian Church from the beginning; who were those matured and
129 exalted Saints who left them to us? Nay, in the whole system of our worship, who are
130 the authors of each decorous provision and each edifying custom? who found out the
131 musical tunes, in which our praises are offered up to God, and in which resides so
132 wondrous a persuasion "to worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our
133 Maker?" Who were those religious men, our spiritual fathers in the "Catholic faith," who
134 raised of old time the excellent fabrics all over the country, in which we worship, though
135 with less of grateful reverence for their memory than we might piously express? Of
136 these greatest men in every age, there is "no memorial;" they "are perished as though
137 they had never been, and become as though they had never been born."

138 Now I know that reflections of this kind are apt to sadden and vex us; and such of us
139 particularly as are gifted with ardent and enthusiastic minds, with a generous love of
140 what is great and good, and a noble hatred of injustice. These men find it difficult to
141 reconcile themselves to the notion that the triumph of the Truth, in all its forms, is
142 postponed to the next world. They would fain anticipate the coming of the righteous
143 Judge: nay, perhaps they are somewhat too favourably disposed towards the present
144 world, to acquiesce without resistance in a doctrine which testifies to the corruption of its
145 decisions, and the worthlessness of its honours. But that it is a truth, has already been
146 showed almost as matter of fact, putting the evidence of Scripture out of consideration;
147 and if it be such, it is our wisdom, as it will become our privilege, to accustom our minds
148 to it, and to receive it, not in word merely, but in seriousness.

149 Why indeed should we shrink from this gracious law of God's present providence in our
150 own case, or in the case of those we love, when our subjection to it does but associate
151 us with the best and noblest of our race, and with beings of nature and condition
152 superior to our own? Andrew is scarcely known except by name; while Peter has ever
153 held the place of honour all over the Church; yet Andrew brought Peter to Christ. And
154 are not the blessed Angels unknown to the world? and is not God Himself, the Author of
155 all good, hid from mankind at large, partially manifested and poorly glorified, in a few
156 scattered servants here and there? and His Spirit, do we know whence It cometh, and
157 whither It goeth? and though He has taught men whatever there has been of wisdom
158 among them from the beginning, yet when He came on earth in visible form, even then
159 it was said of Him, "The world knew Him not." His marvellous providence works beneath
160 a veil, which speaks but an untrue language; and to see Him who is the Truth and the
161 Life, we must stoop underneath it, and so in our turn hide ourselves from the world.
162 They who present themselves at kings' courts, pass on to the inner chambers, where
163 the gaze of the rude multitude cannot pierce; and we, if we would see the King of kings

164 in His glory, must be content to disappear from the things that are seen. Hid are the
165 saints of God; if they are known to men, it is accidentally, in their temporal offices, as
166 holding some high earthly station, or effecting some mere civil work, not as saints. St.
167 Peter has a place in history, far more as a chief instrument of a strange revolution in
168 human affairs, than in his true character, as a self-denying follower of his Lord, to whom
169 truths were revealed which flesh and blood could not discern.

170 How poor spirited are we, and what dishonour we put upon the capabilities and the true
171 excellence of our nature, when we subject it to the judgment and disposal of all its baser
172 specimens, to the rude and ignorant praise, and poor recompensing of carnal and
173 transgressing man! How shall the flesh be at all a judge of the spirit? or the sinner of
174 God's elect? Are we to look downwards, not upwards? Shall we basely acknowledge
175 the right of the Many, who tread the broad way, to be the judges of holiness, which
176 comes from God, and appeals to Him? And does not the eye of faith discern witnesses
177 of our conduct, ever present, and far worthier of our respect, than even a world of the
178 ungodly? Is man the noblest being in the creation? Surely we, as well as our Divine
179 Lord, are "seen of Angels;" nay, and ministered unto by them, much as they excel us in
180 strength! St. Paul plainly tells us, that it is God's purpose that "His manifold wisdom
181 should be known to the heavenly principalities and powers, through the Church." [Eph.
182 iii. 10.] When we are made Christians, we are baptized "into that within the veil," we are
183 brought near to an innumerable company of Angels; and, resembling them in their
184 hidden condition, share their sympathy and their services. Therefore, the same Apostle
185 exhorts Timothy to persevere in obedience, not only by the thought of God, but by that
186 of the Angels; and surely we ought to cultivate the habitual feeling, that they see us in
187 our most private deeds, and most carefully guarded solitudes.

188 It is more than enough for a sinful mortal to be made a fellow-worker and fellow-
189 worshipper with the Blessed Spirits, and the servant and the son of God Most High.
190 Rather let us try to realize our privilege, and withal humble ourselves at our want of
191 faith. We are the elect of God, and have entrance "through the gates into the" heavenly
192 "City," while we "do His commandments," [Rev. xxii. 14.] following Christ as Andrew did,
193 when pointed out to us by His preachers and ministers. To those who thus "follow on to
194 know" Him, He manifests Himself, while He is hid from the world. They are near Him, as
195 His confidential servants, and are the real agents in the various providences which
196 occur in the history of nations, though overlooked by their annalists and sages. They
197 bring before Him the temporal wants of men, witnessing His marvellous doings with the
198 barley loaves and fishes; they, too, lead strangers before Him for His favourable notice,
199 and for His teaching. And, when He brings trouble and distress upon a sinful people,
200 they have truest knowledge of His will, and can best interpret His works; for they had
201 lived in contemplation and prayer, and while others praise the goodly stones and
202 buildings of the external Temple, have heard from Him in secret how the end shall be.
203 Thus they live; and when they die, the world knows nothing of its loss, and soon lets slip
204 what it might have retained of their history; but the Church of Christ does what she can,
205 gathering together their relics, and honouring their name, even when their works cannot
206 be found. But those works have followed them; and, at the appearing of their Lord in

207 judgment, will be at length displayed before all the world, and for His merits eternally
208 rewarded in His heavenly kingdom.

The Feast of St. Andrew the Apostle