

1 "Invisible Presence of Christ"
2 *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* - sermon 21
3 Saint John Henry Newman
4 November 28, 1841

5 "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo here! or,
6 Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke xvii. 20, 21.

7 [Note] WHAT our Lord announced came to pass. The Kingdom of God came; it filled the
8 world; it took possession of the high places of the earth; but it came without observation.
9 All other kingdoms which have come, have sounded a trumpet before them, and have
10 challenged attention. They have come out with a sword, and with a spear, and with a
11 shield. They have been the ravenous beast from the north; the swift eagle, or the
12 swarming locusts. "A fire devoured before them, and behind them a flame burned. The
13 appearance of them has been as the appearance of horsemen, and as horsemen, so
14 did they run; ... and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many
15 horses running to battle." [Joel. ii. 3, 4. Rev. ix.] Such has been the coming of earthly
16 power; and a Day will be, when that also will have a fulfilment, and find its antitype in
17 the history of heaven; for when our Lord comes again, He too will come with a shout,
18 "with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God." This will be with
19 observation; so will He end, but so did He not begin, His Church upon earth; for it had
20 been foretold, "He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the
21 streets; a bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He
22 send forth judgment unto victory." [Matt. xii. 19, 20.]

23 And that noiseless, unostentatious coming was rendered still more secret, because, in
24 spite of His own assurances, men would not believe that it would be secret. The
25 Pharisees asked for a sign from heaven. They would not believe He could come, unless
26 He came with a show; they looked out for a temporal prince, with a sword of earth; and
27 thus, through the unbelief of men, He was "as a thief in the night," and He was come
28 and in possession before they well understood that He was coming.

29 The kingdom of God," says the Divine Speaker, "cometh not with observation; neither
30 shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for the kingdom of God is within you." He tells us
31 why He was not observed; it was that He came, not as the world cometh, not by an
32 influence from without, but by an inward power; not subduing the outward man through
33 the senses, but touching the secret heart. Kingdoms of this world spread in space and
34 time; they begin from a point, and they travel onwards, and range around. Their course
35 may be traced: first they secure this territory, then they compass that. Of course the
36 Kingdom of Christ also, as being in this world, has an outward shape like this world,
37 though it be not of this world; and, as viewed with the eyes of this world, it has an
38 aspect of growth and development like other kingdoms; but after all this is not the true
39 process of its rise and establishment. It came by an inward and secret presence; by
40 outward instruments, indeed, but with effects far higher than those instruments, and
41 really by God's own agency. He who is Omnipresent and Omniscient, touched many
42 hearts at once in many places; they forthwith, one and all, spoke one language, not

43 learning it one from the other, but taught by Him the Song of the Lamb; or if in one
44 sense by man's teaching too, yet catching and mastering it supernaturally, almost
45 before the words were spoken. Men broke out all at once in His praises, in the east and
46 in the west, in the north and in the south; and the perplexed world searched about in
47 vain whence came that concord of sweet and holy sounds. Upon the first voice of the
48 preacher, upon a hint, upon a mere whisper in the air, a deep response came from
49 many lips, a deep, full, and ready harmony of many voices, one and all proclaiming
50 Christ. For the Spirit of the Lord had descended and filled the earth; and there were
51 thrilling hearts, and tremulous pulses, and eager eyes in every place. It was a time of
52 visitation, when the weak become strong, and the last become first. It was the triumph
53 of faith, which saith not, "Who shall ascend into heaven? or, Who shall descend into the
54 deep? but what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that
55 is, the word of faith which we preach." And thus, as Nineveh and Babylon were
56 surprised of old by the army of the enemy, so was the world then surprised by Him who
57 "rode upon a white horse, and was called Faithful and True;" and as it befell Egypt, that
58 there was not a house where there was not one dead, so now, on this more gracious
59 visitation, there was not a house where there was not one alive. For God had come
60 down among them, and was everywhere; the Lord of Angels was walking the earth; He
61 was diffusing His Presence, and multiplying His Image; and in this sense, as well as that
62 in which He spoke the words, "a man's foes were those of his own household." The
63 despised, the hated influence, insinuated itself every where; the leaven spread, and
64 none could stay it; and in the most unfavourable places, in the family of the haughty
65 senator and fierce soldier, amid the superstitions of idolatry, and the debasement of
66 slavery, the noblest and ablest and the fairest, as well as the brutish and the ignorant,
67 one and all, by a secret charm, became the prey of the Church, and the bondsmen of
68 Christ. And thus a great and wide-spreading kingdom came into existence all at once,
69 like spring after winter, from within.

70 Now if you ask me how this was done, or in what way the grace of Almighty God dealt
71 with the spirits He had created, the answer is ready: Man is not sufficient for his own
72 happiness; he is not happy except the Presence of God be with him. When he was
73 created, God breathed into him that supernatural life of the Spirit which is his true
74 happiness: and when he fell, he lost the divine gift, and with it his happiness also. Ever
75 since he has been unhappy; ever since he has a void within him which needs filling, and
76 he knows not how to fill it. He scarcely realizes his own need: only his actions show that
77 he feels it, for he is ever restless when he is not dull and insensible, seeking in one
78 thing or another that blessing which he has lost. Multitudes, indeed, there are, whose
79 minds have never been opened; and multitudes who stupify and deaden their minds, till
80 they lose their natural hunger and thirst: but, whether aware of their need or not,
81 whether made restless by it or not, still all men have it, and the Gospel supplies it; and
82 then, even if they did not recognize their want by nature, they at length learn it by its
83 supply. This, then, is the secret of the triumph of Christ's Kingdom. Soldiers of this world
84 receive their bounty-money on enlisting. They take it, and become the servants of an
85 earthly prince: shall not they, much more, be faithful, yea, unto the death, who have
86 received the earnest of the true riches, who have been fed with the hidden manna, who
87 have "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," and "the

88 graciousness of the Lord," and "the peace which passeth all understanding"? It is the
89 Presence of Christ which makes us members of Christ: "neither shall they say, Lo here!
90 and Lo there! for the kingdom of God is within us." Others marvel; others try to analyze
91 what it is which does the work; they imagine all manner of human causes, because they
92 cannot see, and do not feel, and will not believe the inward influence; and they impute
93 to some caprice or waywardness of mind, or to the force of novelty, or to some
94 mysterious insidious persuasives, or to some concealed enemy, or to some dark and
95 subtle plotting, and they view with alarm, and they fain would baffle, what is really the
96 keen, vivid, constraining glance of Christ's countenance. "The Lord turned and looked
97 upon Peter;" and "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the
98 west, so also is the Presence of the Son of man." It is come, it is gone, it has done its
99 work, its abiding work, before men see it.

100 And what took place in the first years of His Kingdom, when it was brought into being,
101 holds good, in its measure, of all times of the Church; whether before the Law, or under
102 the Law, or in this late and dark age, when Christians have divided into parties, and fight
103 against each other. For on Jacob, as he slept, the Presence of God descended, and
104 when he woke, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not;" and he
105 added, as having his mind opened to new thoughts by the manifestation, "If God will be
106 with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, ... then shall the Lord be my God." [Gen.
107 xxviii. 15-21.] And Moses also asked for this great gift, and obtained it. He said, "See,
108 Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people, and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou
109 wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found
110 grace in My sight ... And He said, My Presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee
111 rest. And he said unto Him, If Thy Presence go not with me, carry us not up hence ...
112 And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also which thou hast spoken, for thou
113 hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name." [Exod. xxxiii. 12-17.] And in like
114 manner the Prophet tells us, with reference to all the people, "In all their affliction He
115 was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He
116 redeemed them, and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." [Isa. lviii. 9.]

117 Much more is this personal gift fulfilled in these latter days, which are days of the
118 Gospel, though they be degenerate days. What is described in the text had been
119 foretold in the Prophets. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new
120 covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the
121 covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring
122 them out of the land of Egypt; ... but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the
123 house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put My law in their inward parts,
124 and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they
125 shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know
126 the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them,
127 saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." And
128 again, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy
129 children." And the Apostles, after the fulfilment of the promise, in like manner, "Ye have
130 an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things;" "He that believeth on the Son of
131 God hath the witness in himself." And again, "The Spirit Itself beareth witness with our

132 spirit, that we are the children of God." [Jer. xxxi. 31-34. Isa. liv. 13. 1 John ii. 20; v. 10.
133 Rom. viii. 16.]

134 I said just now, that there are multitudes who neither feel their need, nor believe in the
135 supply; they have never thought upon religious subjects, or they have stupified their
136 conscience by sensuality or by covetousness. And I also said, that those whose minds
137 have been roused and opened, perceive their need, or at least feel it, though
138 unconsciously, and if it be not supplied, become restless in consequence. And now I
139 add, and a solemn thought it is, that numbers among ourselves, though we profess the
140 Gospel, are in that restless state, ever seeking, never finding! Look around you, my
141 brethren, on every side: what, on the whole, is the religion of England? it is
142 restlessness. Look round, I say, and answer, why it is that there is so much change, so
143 much strife, so many parties and sects, so many creeds? because men are unsatisfied
144 and restless; and why restless, with every one his psalm, his doctrine, his tongue, his
145 revelation, his interpretation? they are restless because they have not found. Alas! so it
146 is, in this country called Christian, vast numbers have gained little from religion, beyond
147 a thirst after what they have not, a thirst for their true peace, and the fever and
148 restlessness of thirst. It has not yet brought them into the Presence of Christ, in which
149 "is fulness of joy" and "pleasure for evermore." Had they been fed with the bread of life,
150 and tasted of the honeycomb, their eyes, like Jonathan's, had been enlightened, to
151 acknowledge the Saviour of men; but having no such real apprehension of things
152 unseen, they have still to seek, and are at the mercy of every rumour from without,
153 which purports to bring tidings of Him, and of the place of His abode. "By night on my
154 bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him, but I found Him not. I will rise
155 now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom
156 my soul loveth; I sought Him, but I found Him not." "I sought Him, but I could not find
157 Him; I called Him, but He gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city
158 found me; they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil
159 from me." [Cant. iii. 1, 2; v. 6, 7.] Mary wept because they had taken away her Lord, and
160 she knew not where they had laid Him. She was in trouble because she sought Him, yet
161 in vain. Poor wanderers, helpless and ill-fated generation, who understand that Christ is
162 on earth, yet do but seek Him in the desert or in the secret chambers,—Lo here! and Lo
163 there! O sad and pitiable spectacle, when the people of Christ wander on the hills as
164 "sheep which have no shepherd;" and instead of seeking Him in His ancient haunts and
165 His appointed home, busy themselves in human schemes, follow strange guides, are
166 taken captive by new opinions, become the sport of chance, or of the humour of the
167 hour, or the victims of self-will, are full of anxiety, and perplexity, and jealousy, and
168 alarm, "tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of
169 men, and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive;"—and all because they
170 do not seek the "one body" and the "one Spirit," and the "one hope of their calling," the
171 "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," and find rest for their
172 souls! O how different from that Apostolic state, when "all that believed were together
173 and had all things common; and ... continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and
174 breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of
175 heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people"! and whence was this
176 outward order, which we have lost? it was because of that inward Gift, which, being

177 One, made them all one, according to our Saviour's prayer, "The glory which Thou
178 gavest Me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are One; I in them
179 and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." [Eph. iv. 5, 6. Acts ii. 44-47.
180 John xvii. 22, 23.]

181 How great a blessing is it, my brethren, at all times, but especially in an age like this,
182 that the tokens of Christ are not only without us, but more properly within us! I say in this
183 age especially, because it is an age in which the outward signs of Christ's Presence
184 have well nigh deserted us. Christ, in mercy to all who seek Him, has been accustomed
185 in all ages, in anticipation of His true inward witness, to hold forth certain plain and
186 general tokens of His Presence, to show the world where He is to be found. These are
187 for beginners; or for those who are not yet beginners, that they *may* begin, and may
188 thus be led on by such experience of His grace, to discern those holier and better notes
189 of which He speaks in the text. Since then, in this our age, He has in judgment obscured
190 the visible and public notes of His Kingdom among us, what a mercy is it to us that He
191 has not deprived us of such as are personal and private! Alas! how few even of serious
192 men could remain peaceful and steadfast, or be secure about themselves, that they
193 would not run any whither, if they judged merely by what is seen! "We see not our
194 tokens; there is not one prophet more; no, not one is there among us that
195 understandeth any more." "Thou makest us to be rebuked of our neighbours, to be
196 laughed to scorn and had in derision of them that are round about us; Thou makest us
197 to be a by-word among the heathen, and that the people shake their heads at us. My
198 confusion is daily before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me; for the voice
199 of the slanderer and blasphemer, for the enemy and avenger." [Ps. lxxiv. 10; xlv. 14-
200 17.] Who among us does not at this day participate in this ancient trial? for who would
201 account that to be the Church of God in which we are, if he went merely by sight? who
202 has not cause to appeal, and who may not appeal, and who will not find an answer
203 when he appeals, to the notes of that Kingdom, which abides, as it came, "without
204 observation," and which proclaims not "Lo here! or Lo there!" because it is a Kingdom of
205 God which is "within us"? Yes, I say; who among us may not, if he will, lead such a life
206 as to have these secret and truer tokens to rest his faith on, so as to be sure, and
207 certain, and convinced, that the Church which baptized us has still the Presence of
208 Christ, and therefore is within the bounds of His Kingdom, and is the gate to His eternal
209 favour?

210 When, then, we are overwhelmed, as we well may be, at the confusion of all things
211 around us, as Psalmists and Prophets have been before us, let us turn to the thought of
212 that gift which Psalmists and Prophets had not as we may have, and which is personal
213 and incommunicable and unspeakable, but known to religious men. What are signs and
214 tokens of any kind whatever, but the way *to* Christ? what need of *them* should it so be,
215 through His mercy, that we have found Him? Who asks his way when he has got to his
216 destination? why seek the shadow, if we already have the substance? why seek Him
217 elsewhere, if we have reason to trust we have found Him here? why turn from Him, if we
218 are already in His Presence? If so be we have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," what
219 need we more? When the women met Christ after His resurrection, "they came and held
220 Him by the feet and worshipped Him." Magdalen would have done the like, but He

221 forbade it. The two disciples, when "He made as though He would have gone farther,"
222 "constrained Him." When Jacob wrestled with the Angel, he would not refrain even at
223 His word, but said, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." "I held Him, and would
224 not let Him go," says the Bride, "until I had brought Him into my mother's house, and
225 into the chamber of her that conceived me." What want we *more* than His Presence?
226 Andrew "findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto Him, We have *found* the
227 Messiah." What can we need beyond finding Him? Can we gain more than Him any
228 where? shall we be thankful, shall we be dutiful, shall we be believing, if we leave Him?
229 The holy women would not let Him go; can we be certain, if we once loose our hold of
230 Him, that we shall ever regain it? shall we not rather, in that case, be of the number of
231 those, who, though they saw His mighty works, came to Him, and "besought Him that
232 He would depart out of their coasts"?

233 But you will, perhaps, ask, "Is there no chance of Christ ever leaving a home where
234 once He was? and if His Presence leaves it, must not we leave it also?" Yes, verily; did
235 He leave His home, we must follow Him; who doubts it? But let me ask, Does He
236 commonly leave without tokens that He is leaving? and if we have tokens that He is still
237 with us, we have sufficient tokens that He has not yet left us. Doubtless there was a
238 time when even from Jerusalem, the Holy City, it was a duty to depart; but our Lord
239 gave a sign when it was to be. "When ye shall see the abomination of desolation stand
240 in the Holy Place, then let them which be in Judæa flee unto the mountains;" and when
241 the time came, other signs were added. The Lord had come upon the Jewish people
242 with miracles; and with miracles He left them. He foretold and brought to pass "fearful
243 sights, and great signs from heaven." Strange portents happened in the fated city, and
244 the voice of Angels was heard in the Temple, saying one to another, thereby to guide
245 God's people, "Let us depart hence." Such, too, was the command when the people
246 came out of Egypt: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. The Lord
247 shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

248 Let, then, the disorder in religious matters which now prevails among us, only lead each
249 of us to ask himself this plain question, whether he may not have more tokens, real and
250 intimate, that Christ is with himself and his brethren in our ordinances, than he has
251 evidence in the present absence or mutilation of the truth, whatever it is, that Christ is
252 not with him. Christ may be at a distance from others, yet may be with him. The word
253 runs, "According to thy faith, be it done unto thee." If, then, "there is any consolation in
254 Christ, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies;" if you have gained any
255 good thing, not merely in, but through your Church; if you have come to Service, and
256 been favoured with the peace or the illumination you needed; or if you can recollect
257 times when you visited holy places, and certainly gained there a manifestation such as
258 the world could not give; or if sermons have come to you with power, and have been
259 blessed to your spiritual good; or if your soul has been, as it were, transfigured within
260 you, when you came to the Most Holy Sacrament; or if Lent and Passiontide brought to
261 you what you had not before; or if at Ordinations you have been partakers of an
262 indescribable influence, and almost savour of grace, though you realized it not at the
263 time; or if strange providences, and almost supernatural coincidences have hung about
264 the Church's Ordinances; if mercies or judgments have descended through them upon

265 yourselves, or upon those about you; or if you have experience of death-beds, and
266 know how full of hope the children of our Church can die;—O! pause ere you doubt that
267 we have a Divine Presence among us still, and have not to seek it. Let us enjoy what
268 we still have, though the world deride us;—though our brethren tell us that in their and
269 our Sacraments we have not what we think we have; though they tell us it is all a
270 dream, and rudely bid us seek elsewhere: no, they do not need to seek who have
271 already found; we need other arguments before we seek what, through God's mercy,
272 we hope to enjoy where we are. "The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground; yea, I have a
273 goodly heritage;" why should not we enjoy the hidden Kingdom of Christ, though others
274 may not have faith to see it? And we will cling to the Church in which we are, not for its
275 own sake, but because we humbly trust that Christ is in it; and while He is in it, we will
276 abide in it. He shall leave before we do. He shall lead, and we will but follow; we will not
277 go before Him; we will not turn away from Him, we will ever turn towards Him. We will
278 but ask ourselves this single question, "/s He here?" for "with Him is the well of life," and
279 justifying grace, and Divine favour. "Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed
280 for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. Rejoice in the Lord
281 alway; and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men; the Lord is
282 at hand. Be careful for nothing: but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with
283 thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which
284 passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus."

285 Note

286 The four following Sermons, on the safety of continuance in our communion, are not
287 addressed, 1, either to those who happily are without doubts on the subject, 2, or to
288 those who have no right to be in doubt about it. Doubts are often the punishment of
289 existing neglect of duty. Persons who make no efforts after strictness of life, who do not
290 live by rule, who do not attempt to know themselves, to correct their faults, to keep out
291 of temptation, to resist evil, and to deny their wills, must not be surprised if they are
292 unsettled and restless, and have no encouragement to seek an intellectual remedy for
293 difficulties which may be assigned to grave moral deficiencies. That there are such
294 persons, the author makes no question at all; at the same time, he is bound to add that
295 he is not alluding to any with whom he is personally acquainted, though of most of these
296 more of course might fairly be required than they have hitherto effected. On the other
297 hand, where persons are in no perplexity on the subject, the discussion contained in
298 these Sermons may be, for that very reason, simply of a disturbing character, and
299 should be read with the caution exercised in opening the work of a Christian Apologist,
300 who is obliged to state painful objections, or to make extreme admissions in the process
301 of refuting his opponents.

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