

1 "The World and Sin"
2 *Faith and Prejudice* sermon 6
3 St. John Henry Newman
4 Second Sunday in Lent, March 19, 1848

5 In the passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, part of which is read as the Gospel for this day,
6 we have a very remarkable contrast, the contrast between this world and the unseen
7 world. It is so distinctly drawn out, and so impressive, that it may be profitable to us, with
8 God's grace, to attempt to enlarge upon it.

9 Our Lord often passed the night in prayer, and, as afterwards in that sad night before
10 His passion He took with Him three apostles to witness His prayer in agony, so at an
11 earlier time, He took the same favoured three with Him to witness His prayer in ecstasy
12 and glory. On the one occasion He fell on His face and prayed more earnestly till He
13 was covered with a sweat of blood which rolled down upon the cold earth. In the other,
14 as He prayed his countenance became bright and glorious, and He was lifted off the
15 earth. So He remained communing with His Father, ministered to by Moses and Elias,
16 till a voice came from the cloud, which said, "This is My beloved {75} Son, hear ye Him."
17 The sight had been so wonderful, so transporting, that St. Peter could not help crying
18 out. He knew not what he said. He did not know how to express his inward feelings, nor
19 did he understand in a moment all the wonders about him. He could but say, "Lord it is
20 good for us to be here." Simple words, but how much they contain in them. It was good,
21 it was the good of man, it was the great good, it was our good. He did not say that the
22 sight was sublime and marvellous. He was not able to reflect upon it and describe it. His
23 reason did not speak, but his affections. He did but say that it was good to be there. And
24 he wished that great good to continue to him ever. He said "Let us build three
25 tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." He wished to remain there
26 for ever, it was so good. He was loath the vision should come to an end. He did not like
27 to descend from the mount, and return to those whom he had left behind.

28 Now let us see what was taking place below, while they were above. When they
29 reached the crowd, they found a dispute going on between the rest of the apostles and
30 the Scribes. The subject of it seems to have been the poor demoniac, who is next
31 spoken of. A father had brought his son to be cured by the apostles. He was a frightful
32 maniac, possessed by the devil. None could hold him. The spirit took away his voice
33 and hearing. He was ordinarily deaf and dumb, but sometimes he dashed himself to the
34 {76} ground, threw himself into the fire or into the water, foamed at the mouth, and then
35 perhaps collapsed. The devil was too much for the apostles. They could not master him,
36 they could not cast him out. They were reduced to a sort of despair, and this was the
37 occasion, as it appears, of their dispute with the Scribes, who might be taunting them
38 with their failure. O the contrast between what St. Peter had come from, and what he
39 had now come to! He had left peace, stillness, contemplation, the vision of heaven, and
40 he had come into pain, grief, confusion, perplexity, disappointment, and debate.

41 Now this contrast, as I have said, between the Mount of Transfiguration and the scene
42 at its foot, fitly represents to us the contrast between the world and the Church, between
43 the things seen and the things unseen.

44 I will not dwell on the mere physical evils of this life, though they are enough to appal
45 us, the miseries of sickness, pain, want, cold, hunger; but let us dwell upon the moral
46 evils which it contains. The poor youth who was brought to Christ to be cured, was
47 possessed by the devil, and alas! is not a great portion, is not the greatest portion of
48 mankind at this day possessed by the devil too? He is called in Scripture "the god of this
49 world," and "the Prince of the powers of this air, the spirit which now worketh in the
50 children of disbelief." In the book of Job we read of his "compassing the earth and
51 walking up and down in it," and St. Peter speaks of {77} our "adversary the devil, as a
52 roaring lion, compassing the earth, seeking whom he may devour." Thus he is found all
53 over the earth, and within the souls of men, not indeed able to do anything which God
54 does not permit, but still, God not interfering, he possesses immense power, and is able
55 to influence millions upon millions to their ruin. And as the poor epileptic in the gospel
56 was under the mastery of the evil spirit, so that his eyes, his ears, his tongue, his limbs
57 were not his own, so does that same miserable spirit possess the souls of sinners,
58 ruling them, impelling them here and there, doing what he will with them, not indeed
59 doing the same with every one, some he moves one way, some in another, but all in
60 some pitiable, horrible, and ungodly way.

61 Wickedness is sometimes called madness in Scripture—so it is. As literal madness is
62 derangement of the reason, so sin is derangement of the heart, of the spirit, of the
63 affection. And as madness was the disorder in which possession by the devil showed
64 itself in Scripture, so this madness of the heart and spirit is the disorder which in all
65 ages the devil produces in the spirit. And as there are different forms of that madness
66 which is derangement of the reason, so there are different forms of that worse madness
67 which is sin. In an asylum there are different forms of the disorder, and so this whole
68 world is one vast madhouse, of which the inmates, though shrewd enough in matters of
69 this world, yet in spiritual matters are in one {78} way or another mad.

70 For example, what is the drunkard but a sort of madman? Who is possessed and ruled
71 by an evil spirit, if not he? He has delivered himself over to the power of Satan, and he
72 is his slave. He cannot do what he would. Through his own fault he cannot do what he
73 would. In that he differs from the real madman, whose fault it is not that he is mad;
74 whereas it is the drunkard's own fault that he is the slave of evil. But so it is, he has put
75 himself under the power of evil, he puts himself away from grace, he cannot make up
76 his mind to will to be otherwise, his will is set on what is evil, and thus he is a mere
77 slave. The relentless spirit of evil carries him off to the haunts of intemperance. He
78 knows that he is ruining himself, soul and body, he knows the misery he brings his
79 family, he knows that he is shortening his life, he curses perhaps his own infatuation
80 while he persists in it. He wishes he had never been born. Perhaps he has a bad illness
81 in consequence, and the medical man who attends him, says to him, that it will to a
82 certainty be his death, if he does not reform. He knows it, yet his sin is too strong for
83 him, and in this despair and agony of mind perhaps he takes up some dreadful belief,

84 most injurious to God's honour and glory, as if he were fated to all this, and could not
85 help it. He says, "Every man is fated to be what he is, it can't be helped, it's not my fault,
86 I never could have been otherwise, it did not depend on me." Miserable and most untrue
87 saying. Is it not the saying of a madman? {79} Is it not the word of one possessed with a
88 devil? Here then is one instance in which the demoniac in the gospel may be taken as a
89 type and emblem of the state of the world.

90 Others are possessed by spirits of a different kind. They are not outrageous, but they
91 are bowed down to the earth, and kept in a close awful captivity. How many, for
92 instance, are there with hard hearts! And what is hardness of heart but a sort of
93 possession by the evil one? The drunkard has often moments of religious feeling, but
94 there are numbers, and they perhaps what the world calls moral, well conditioned men,
95 who seem to have no heart whatever for spiritual subjects. A true Christian cannot hear
96 the name of Christ without emotion, but in this country there are multitudes, poor and
97 rich, who are set upon nothing else whatever but on getting money, and who have no
98 taste whatever for religion. Sometimes, I say, they are poor, and thus they not merely
99 aim to get a livelihood, for this is right, but are engrossed with the thought. Religion
100 seems to them, not a real thing, but a name, and to concern them no more than what is
101 going on in China or Patagonia. It seems beside the mark, and they merely wonder and
102 stare at those who introduce it. The rich again are engrossed with the wish to make their
103 wealth greater, and the pursuit of wealth blocks up the avenues to their hearts, and they
104 have neither time, nor thought, nor love {80} for the great things which concern their
105 peace. What is all this but another possession of the devil, though very different from
106 the former? It is like moping melancholy. The demoniac in the gospel, not only cried out
107 and tore himself, but at other times he became dry or shrivelled, which seems to mean
108 a sort of collapse. What is this love of the world, which we see whether in rich or poor,
109 but a sort of shrivelling up or collapse of the soul? What then is so like a possession of
110 Satan? And can any state be more fearful than that of an immortal being, who is to live
111 for ever, attempting to live on mortal food, and having no relish for that immortal food,
112 which alone is its true nourishment? 'What is to be your food, my Brethren, when you
113 get into the next world? Will this mortal food on which you feed now, be present to you
114 then? What are your souls then to feed on? What is to employ them? Nay, what is to
115 possess them? If a soul goes on contentedly, now the slave of the evil one, if he lets the
116 evil one take up a lodgement in his breast, how is he to dislodge him ever? Will not that
117 evil spirit necessarily and inevitably carry down that soul at once to hell, when death
118 comes?

119 I might go on upon this subject at great length, were it necessary. Accustom yourself to
120 the idea, my Brethren, and a terrible idea it is, that the state of sin is a demoniacal
121 possession. Consider how such a possession of the body is spoken of in Scripture.
122 Consider how the devil tormented the poor suffering body which he was allowed to {81}
123 get hold of. Then consider, what we may so often see now, what a fearful affliction
124 madness is. Then, when you have considered these two things, and got a clear hold of
125 the idea, think that sin is just such a possession of the heart and spirit. It is not that the
126 body is afflicted, as in the case of a demoniac. It is not that the reason is afflicted, as in
127 the case of a madman. But it is that the spirit, the heart, the affections, the conscience,

128 the will, are in the power of an evil spirit, who sways them about at his pleasure. How
129 awful is this!

130 When then St. Peter, St. James, and St. John came down from the Mount, and saw the
131 miserable youth tormented by an evil spirit, they saw in that youth a figure and emblem
132 of that world of sinners, to whom in due time they were to be sent to preach. But this is
133 not all. They found their brethren disputing with the Scribes, or at least the Scribes
134 questioning with them. Here is another circumstance in which the scene which they saw
135 resembled the world. The world is full of wrangling and debate, and not unreasonably,
136 because when the heart is wrong, the reason goes wrong too, and when men corrupt
137 themselves and lead bad lives, then they do not see the truth, but have to hunt about
138 after it, and this creates a great confusion. For instance, suppose a sudden darkness
139 were to fall upon the streets of a crowded city in day time, you may fancy without my
140 telling you what a noise and clamour there would be, foot passengers, carriages, carts,
141 horses all being mixed together. Such is {82} the state of the world. The evil spirit, which
142 worketh in the children of disbelief, the god of this world, as St. Paul says, has blinded
143 the eyes of them that believe not, and hence they are obliged to wrangle and debate, for
144 they have lost their way; and they fall out with each other and one says this and one
145 says that, because they do not see. When men do not see, they begin to *reason*. When
146 men do not see, they begin to talk loud. When men do not see, they begin to quarrel.
147 Look around, my Brethren, is it not so? Have not you theories innumerable, arguments
148 interminable offered to you, on all sides? One man says truth is here, another there.
149 Alas, alas, how many religions are there in this great yet unhappy country! Here you
150 have the Scribes wrangling with each other. There is no end of religions—there are new
151 ones continually. Now if one is true, the other is false; if the new is true, the old are
152 false, if the old are true, the new are false. All cannot be true. Can even a dozen be
153 true, or six, or two? Can more than *one* be true? And which is that one? Thank God, we,
154 my Brethren, know which that one is—that is the true religion which has been from the
155 beginning and has been always the same. But on all sides there are wranglings and
156 doubtings and disputings, uncertainty and change.

157 Now I will mention one other respect in which the scene before the three Apostles when
158 they came down from the mount resembled the world, and that is a still {83} more
159 miserable one. You will observe that their brethren could not cast the evil spirit out. So it
160 is now. There is an immense weight of evil in the world. We Catholics, and especially
161 we Catholic priests, have it in charge to resist, to overcome the evil; but we cannot do
162 what we would, we cannot overcome the giant, we cannot bind the strong man. We do a
163 part of the work, not all. It is a battle which goes on between good and evil, and though
164 by God's grace we do something, we cannot do more. There is confusion of nations and
165 perplexity. It is God's will that so it should be, to show His power. He alone can heal the
166 soul, He alone can expel the devil. And therefore we must wait for a great deal, till He
167 comes down, till He comes down from His seat on high, His seat in glory, to aid us and
168 deliver us.

169 In that day we shall enter, if we be worthy, the fulness of that glory, of which the three
170 Apostles had the foretaste in the moment of Transfiguration. All is darkness here, all is

171 bright in heaven. All is disorder here, all is order there. All is noise here, and there there
172 is stillness, or if sounds are heard, they are the sweet sounds of the eternal harps on
173 which the praises of God are sung. Here we are in a state of uncertainty: we do not
174 know what is to happen. The Church suffers; her goodly portion, and her choice
175 inheritance suffer; the vineyard is laid waste; there is persecution and war; and Satan
176 rages and afflicts when he cannot destroy. But all this will be {84} set right in the world
177 to come, and if St. Peter could say at the Transfiguration "It is good to be here," much
178 more shall we have cause to say so when we see the face of God. For then we shall be
179 like our Lord Himself, we shall have glorified bodies, as He had then, and has now. We
180 shall have put off flesh and blood, and receive our bodies at the last day, the same
181 indeed, but incorruptible, spiritual bodies, which will be able to see and enjoy the
182 presence of God in a way which was beyond the three Apostles in the days of their
183 mortality. Then the envious malignant spirit will be cast out, and we shall have nothing
184 to fear, nothing to be perplexed at, for the Lord God shall lighten us, and encompass us,
185 and we shall be in perfect security and peace. Then we shall look back upon this world,
186 and the trials, and temptations which are past, and what thankfulness, what joy will not
187 rise within us—and we shall look forward; and this one thought will be upon us that this
188 blessedness is to last for ever. Our security has no limit. It is not that we shall be
189 promised a hundred years of peace, or a thousand, but for ever and ever shall we be as
190 we are, for our happiness and our peace will be founded in the infinite blessedness and
191 peace of God, and as He is eternal and happy, so shall we be.

192 May this be the future portion of you all, my Brethren, and in order to that future bliss
193 may the present blessing of God, the Father, etc.