

"Invisible Presence of Christ"
Sermons on Subjects of the Day sermon 121
St. John Henry Newman
November 28, 1841

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

279 Note

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