

New Brighton, Sunday 8th October 2023

19th Sunday after Pentecost

“Induat te Dominus novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est, in justitia et sanctitate veritatis.”¹

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“May the Lord clothe you in a new man, who was created according to God, in righteousness and holiness of truth.”

With these few words, the Bishop gives the surplice to the new cleric, for the first time since he received the tonsure. As the young man just received the first consecration of his religious vocation, he also receive a new vestment, the one of divine charity.

The white surplice reminds about the white robe that all baptised Christians received once at their Baptism:

“Receive this white garment, which mayest thou carry without stain before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have life everlasting.”²

Today, for this 19th Sunday after Pentecost, we are proposed the parable of the marriage of the son’s king.

“The king went in to see the guests; and he saw there a man who had not a wedding garment: and he saith to him: Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?”³

St Francis de Sales, in a sermon for the reception of the religious habit of a nun commented, referring to the solemn visit of Queen Esther to her husband King Assuerus, in the Bible:

“But what is this wedding dress? It is the most holy charity, for so the Fathers determined; it is charity, but a charity that is ample, wide and of great scope. The wedding dresses made in the time of our fathers were extremely ample. When it came to bringing the beautiful and chaste Esther into the presence of King Assuerus, she was dressed in the royal style: she was given a dress so heavy that she could hardly wear it, so that she had to lean on the shoulder of a damsel who walked in front of her, and then there was another in charge of carrying the large trailing tail of the dress, which was very wide and all studded with jewels that increased its weight. [...]

¹ *Pontificale Romanum*, De clerico faciendo.

² *Rituale Romanum*, Sacrament of Batism.

³ Mt, XXII, 11-12 .

The dress of the chaste Esther was long and dragging, so that one of her daughters had to wear it after her. [...] Since this dress represents the nuptial dress which we must bring to the banquet and feast of the Cross, our charity must be long and drawn out, persevering to the end of our days. Religious men and women must have this robe very large, which represents good example; and it must not be enough for it to last until the end of their lives, but it must also go further; that the smell of their holiness charge those who come after them, that there be always a good armful of their good examples to be carried, by imitation, by all those who hear of them.

Poor Esther was very heavy, so much so that it was necessary for her to lean on one of her damsels. So it is necessary that the souls who are to be presented to the sovereign King by the attractions and inspirations of heaven should be supported by the hope of sharing in the merits of the Death and Passion of Our Lord; for by relying on their good works they will not know how to walk or to do so alone in order to reach the wedding feast of their dearest Spouse. Now this divine Spouse requires us to know and recognise that whatever we might do or suffer in this mortal life cannot be capable of earning us the eternal delights which he has prepared for those who love him, if these same works or sufferings are not united and conjoined with his own, which alone can sanctify ours and obtain for us the enjoyment of his divine presence, an enjoyment which will make us happy in the glory of blessed eternity.”⁴

St Francis de Sales described in better words I could barely do myself this white garment were given, and that we have to preserve until our last day. Many dangers are around us on this way to eternity: rocks, thorns and hope on the path that could stain or tear off this holy vestment. The Lord gave it to us, but also promised us his Divine Help to protect it:

“If I shall walk in the midst of tribulation, Thou wilt quicken me, O Lord; and Thou wilt stretch forth Thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me.”⁵

Jesus will never fail in His promise to keep us alive with him. Our only task is to faithfully keep the commandments he gave us, and at the moment we will present ourselves to the divine table of communion, the liturgy places upon our lips this prayer, like a loving word of the soul towards his Creator and Redeemer:

“Thou hast commanded Thy commandments to be kept most diligently: O that my ways may be directed to keep Thy justifications.”⁶

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

⁴ St Francis de Sales, Sermon for the vestition on Monday after the 19th Sunday after Pentecost, 15th October 1618.

⁵ Ps. CXXXVII, 7. 19th Sunday after Pentecost, Offertory.

⁶ PS. CXVIII, 4-5.