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THE BOOKS OF HOMILIES: Book 2—III. For repairing and keeping clean the Church

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For the Easter season, I am reading the Books of Homilies, using John Griffiths' 1859 edition (https://prydain.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/the_two_books_of_homilies.pdf).

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Transcript

An homily, for repairing and keeping clean and comely adorning of churches. It is a common custom used of all men, when they intend to have their friends or neighbors to come to their houses to eat or drink with them, or to have any solemn assembly to treat and talk of any matter, they will have their houses, which they keep in continual reparations, to be clean and fine, lest they should be counted sluttish, or little to regard their friends and neighbors. How much more then ought the house of God, which we commonly call the Church, to be sufficiently repaired in all places, and to be honorably adorned and garnished, and to be kept clean and sweet to the comfort of the people that shall resort thereto? It appeareth in the Holy Scripture, how God's house, which was called His holy temple, and was the mother church of all Jewry, fell sometimes into decay, and was oftentimes profaned and defiled, through the negligence and ungodliness of such as had charged thereof.

But when godly kings and governors were in place, then commandment was given

forthwith, that the church and temple of God should be repaired, and the devotion of the people to be gathered for the reparation of the same. We read in the fourth book of the kings, how that King Joas, being a godly prince, gave commandment to the priest to convert certain offerings of the people towards the reparation and amendment of God's temple. Like commandment gave that most godly King Josias, concerning the reparation and re-edification of God's temple, which in his time he found in sore decay.

It hath pleased almighty God, that these histories touching the re-edifying and repairing of His holy temple should be written at large. To the end we should be taught thereby, first, that God is well pleased that His people should have a convenient place to resort unto, and to come together to praise and magnify God's holy name. And secondly, He is highly pleased with all those which diligently and zealously go about to amend and restore such places as are appointed for the congregation of God's people to resort unto, and wherein they humbly and jointly render thanks to God for His benefits, and with one heart and voice praise His holy name.

Thirdly, God was sore displeased with His people, because they built, decked, and trimmed up their own houses, and suffered God's house to be in ruin and decay, to lie uncomely and fulsomely. Wherefore God was sore grieved with them, and plagued them, as appeareth in the prophet Haggaius, thus saith the Lord, Is it time for you to dwell in your sealed houses, and the Lord's house not regarded? Ye have sowed much, and gathered in but little. Your meat and your clothes have neither filled you nor made you warm, and he that had his wages put it in a bottomless purse.

By these plagues which God laid upon His people for neglecting of His temple, it may evidently appear that God will have His temple, His church, the place where His congregation shall resort to magnify Him, well edified, well repaired, and well maintained. Some, neither regarding godliness nor the place of godly exercise, will say the temple in the old law was commanded to be built and repaired by God Himself, because it had great promises annexed unto it, and because it was a figure, a sacrament, or a signification of Christ, and also of His church. To this may be easily answered, first, that our churches are not destitute of promises, forasmuch as our Saviour Christ saith, Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midders among them.

A great number, therefore, coming to church together in the name of Christ, have there, that is to say, in the church, their God and Saviour Christ Jesus presently among the congregation of His faithful people by His grace, by His favour and godly assistance, according to His most assured and comfortable promises. Why then ought not Christian people to build them temples and churches, having as great promises of the presence of God as ever had Solomon for the material temple which he did build? As touching the other point, that Solomon's temple was a figure of Christ, we know that now, in the time of the clear light of Christ Jesus the Son of God, all shadows, figures, and significations

are utterly gone, all vain and unprofitable ceremonies, both Jewish and heathenish, fully abolished. And therefore our churches are not set up for figures and significations of Messiah and Christ to come, but for other godly and necessary purposes, that is to say, that, like as every man hath his own house to abide in, to refresh himself in, to rest in, with such like commodities, so almighty God will have His house and palace, with the whole parish and congregation shall resort, which is called the church and temple of God, for that the church, which is the company of God's people, doth there assemble and come together to serve Him.

Not meaning hereby that the Lord, whom the heaven of heavens is not able to hold or comprise, doth dwell in the church of lime and stone, made with man's hands, as holy and only contained there within, and nowhere else, for so He never dwelt in Solomon's temple. Moreover the church or temple is counted and called holy, yet not of itself, but because God's people resorting thereunto are holy, and exercise themselves in holy and heavenly things. And to the intent ye may understand further why churches were built among Christian people, this was the greatest consideration, that God might have His place, and that God might have His time, duly to be honoured and served of the whole multitude in the parish, first, there to hear and learn the blessed word and will of the everlasting God, secondly, that there the blessed sacraments which our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus hath ordained and appointed, should be duly, reverently and honourably ministered, thirdly, that there the whole multitude of God's people in the parish should with one voice and heart call upon the name of God, magnify and praise the name of God, render earnest and hearty thanks to our Heavenly Father for His heap of benefits daily and plentifully poured upon us, not forgetting to bestow our alms upon God's poverty, to the intent God may bless us the more richly.

Thus ye may well perceive and understand wherefore churches were built and set up amongst Christian people, and dedicated and appointed to these godly uses, and utterly exempted from all filthy, profane and worldly uses, wherefore all they that have little mind or devotion to repair and build God's temple are to be counted people of much ungodliness, spurning against good order in Christ's church, despising the true honour of God, with evil example offending and hindering their neighbours, otherwise well and godly disposed. The world thinketh but a trifle to see their church in ruin and decay, but whoso doth not lay to their helping hands, they sin against God and His holy congregation. For if it had not been sin to neglect and pass little upon the re-edifying and building up again of His temple, God would not have been so much grieved, and so soon have plagued His people, because they built and decked their own houses so gorgeously, and despised the house of God their Lord.

It is sin and shame to see so many churches so ruinous, and so foully decayed, almost in every corner. If a man's private house wherein he dwelleth be decayed, he will never cease till it be restored up again. Yea, if his barn, where he keepeth his corn, be out of reparations, what diligence useth he to make it in perfect state again? If his stable for his

horse, yea, the stive for his swine, be not able to hold out water and wind, how careful is he to do cost thereon? And shall we be so mindful of our common base houses, deputed to so low occupying, and be forgetful toward that house of God, wherein be ministered the words of our eternal salvation, wherein be entreated the sacraments and mysteries of our redemption? The fountain of our regeneration is there presented to us, the partaking of the body and blood of our Saviour Christ is there offered unto us.

And shall we not esteem the place where so heavenly things be handled? Wherefore, if ye have any reverence to the service of God, if ye have any common honesty, if ye have any conscience in keeping of necessary and godly ordinances, keep your churches in good repair, whereby ye shall not only please God, and deserve his manifold blessings, but also deserve the good report of all godly people. The second point which appertaineth to the maintenance of God's house, is to have it well adorned and comely and clean kept, which things may be the more easily performed when the church is well repaired. For like as men are well refreshed and comforted when they find their houses having all things in good order, and all corners clean and sweet, so when God's house, the church, is well adorned with places convenient to sit in, with the pulpit for the preacher, with the Lord's table for the ministration of his holy supper, with the font to christen in, and also is kept clean, comely and sweetly, the people is the more desirous and the more comforted to resort thither, and to tarry there the whole time appointed them.

With what earnestness, with what vehement zeal, did our Saviour Christ drive the buyers and sellers out of the temple of God, and hurl down the tables of the changers of money, and the seats of the dove-sellers, and could not abide that any man should carry a vessel through the temple? He told them that they had made his Father's house a den of thieves, partly through their superstition, hypocrisy, false worship, false doctrine, and insatiable covetousness, and partly through contempt, abusing that place with walking and talking, with worldly matters, without all fear of God and due reverence to that place. What dens of thieves the churches of England have been made by the blasphemous buying and selling, the most precious body and blood of Christ in the mass, as the world was made to believe, at diriges, at munts, mines, in trentles, in abbeys and chanteries, beside other horrible abuses. God's holy name be blessed for ever, we now see and understand.

All these abominations, they that supply the room of Christ, have cleansed and purged the churches of England of, taking away all such fulsomeness and filthiness, as through blind devotion and ignorance hath crept into the church this many hundred years. Wherefore, O ye good Christian people, ye dearly beloved in Christ Jesus, ye that glory not in worldly and vain religion, in fantastical adorning and decking, but rejoice in heart to see the glory of God truly set forth, and the churches restored to their ancient and godly use, render your most hearty thanks to the goodness of almighty God, who hath in our days stirred up the hearts, not only of his godly preachers and ministers, but also of

his faithful and most Christian magistrates and governors. To bring such godly things to pass, and forasmuch as your churches are scoured and swept from the sinful and superstitious filthiness wherewith they were defiled and disfigured, do ye your parts, good people, to keep your churches comely and clean.

Suffer them not to be defiled with rain and weather, with dung of doves and owls, stairs and chuffs, and other filthiness, as it is foul and lamentable to behold in many places of this country. It is the house of prayer, not the house of talking, of walking, of brawling, of minstrelsy, of hawks, of dogs. Provoke not the displeasure and plagues of God for despising and abusing his holy house, as the wicked Jews did.

But have God in your heart, be obedient to his blessed will, bind yourselves, every man and woman, to their power, toward the reparations and clean keeping of your church. To the intent ye may be partakers of God's manifold blessings, and that ye may the better be encouraged to resort to your parish church, there to learn your duties toward God and your neighbour, there to be present and partakers of Christ's holy sacraments, there to render thanks to your Heavenly Father for the manifold benefits which he daily poureth upon you, there to pray together and to call upon God's holy name, which be blessed, world without end. Amen.