

# AN ENGLISH MARTYR ON THE JUBILEE YEAR

A SERMON

BY

BL. PETER WRIGHT, S.J.

The Indulgences of the Holy Year are usually extended to the Universal Church after the closing of the Holy Doors. In 1650 there was such an extension till Easter Sunday, 1651, which fell on 30th March in England, but on 9th April in countries that had adopted the reformed calendar. The following sermon was written by Bl. Peter Wright, S.J., and exists in a volume of sermons, all in his own handwriting, at Stonyhurst. I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of Fr H. Chadwick, S.J., the Librarian, in allowing me to transcribe and publish it.

Bl. Peter Wright was born at Slipton in Northamptonshire of a Catholic yeoman family, lost his faith as a young man, and went to Holland to fight with the English Protestant regiment against the Spaniards, who then possessed half the Netherlands. He soon, however, deserted, was reconciled to the Church and became a Jesuit. He was appointed chaplain to the English regiment fighting on the side of the Spaniards. On the outbreak of the Civil War in England he returned with his regiment to fight for Charles I. After the King's defeat he became chaplain to the Marquis of Winchester at their London home.

This sermon breaks off in the middle of a sentence, and these were probably the last words he ever wrote, for he was surprised and arrested on 2nd February, 1651. He was taken to Newgate prison, where among his companions was Fr Thomas Middleton, *alias* Dade, the Dominican Superior. These two were arraigned together on the capital charge of being priests, and it is infinitely sad to record that the chief witness against them both was an apostate Dominican, Fr Thomas Gage, who belonged to an illustrious Catholic family. His Catholic relations got him to promise not to give evidence as to the priesthood of the two victims. With respect to Fr

Middleton he kept his word, testifying that although he was Superior of the Dominicans it did not follow that he was a priest, instancing St Francis, who was a Founder but not a priest. On this evidence Fr Middleton was acquitted. But when Fr Wright was brought to the bar, the apostate provided all the evidence required by the court, which was not much, and he was condemned to death. He suffered at Tyburn in the presence of a huge concourse of people on 19th May, 1651.

The sermon that he was never allowed to finish has had to wait three hundred years to see the light. I have modernised the spelling and corrected a few obvious slips. If the language is archaic, the matter is just as applicable to 1951 as it was to 1651, and it comes down to us with all the deep sincerity of one who was so soon to lay down his life for his Faith.

GODFREY ANSTRUTHER, O.P.



*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.—Is. 61, 1, 2.*



**T**HAT year must certainly be a year grateful unto our heavenly seedsman in which he sees the fruits of his Gospel to flourish and spring forth in the hearts of those in whom he has sown the same. The sower went forth to sow his seed. This heavenly seedsman went forth upon a certain time to sow his seed but a great part thereof fell upon such barren ground that it prospered not, for it was either eaten up by the fowls of the air, or it fell upon such dry ground that it took no root, or it was choked by thistles or weeds insomuch that the seedsman took no pleasure or content in any part thereof, but only in that which fell in good ground and brought forth thirty, sixty, yea an hundred fold. This heavenly seedsman intends this year to sow again his seed; he intends to play the careful husbandman and for three months together to cultivate the souls of his servants and to fertilise them with the fruits of Jubilee or plenary indulgences. To the end, therefore, that we may concur with this heavenly seedsman and bring forth fruit according to his desire, we will first explicate what a Jubilee is. Secondly who

hath power to grant the same. Last what disposition is required for obtaining thereof.

According to the learned Hebricians, the word *Jebul* from which the word Jubilee is derived, signifies in their language all sorts of fruits, so that, as well observes Cardinal Bellarmine (*Lib. I c. de Indulg.*) by a year of Jubilee is understood a springing year, profitable and fruitful, which with the Israelites was every fiftieth year. For as we read (Lev. c. 25 and 26; Num. c. 36), God out of his infinite goodness and mercy did so dispose that although there was every fiftieth year a general rest given to men, beasts and the earth, for no man did either sow or mow or cultivate his lands, yet there was all plenty of fruits and other provisions, for to the end there might be no want or scarcity during this year, God caused in the year before a triple increase to be of all sorts of commodities. He caused also all lands and houses which had been mortgaged or sold to be restored to their former owners, and all slaves and those who were kept in captivity or bondage to be set free and have their liberty. This fiftieth year of the Israelites' Jubilee was a true type of those plenary indulgences which Christians have under the law of grace. Wherefore Clement the sixth of that name, Pope of Rome, granting according to the ancient custom a plenary indulgence every fiftieth year to all those who should visit the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Rome did most fitly and deservedly call a year of Jubilee. For as in the Hebrews' Jubilee the fruits of the earth were given by Almighty God to men without cost for their own labour, and as possession of lands were restored to their owners and liberty to men in thralldom, so in this Christian Jubilee year the merits of Christ and his saints are freely granted unto us to satisfy that temporal pain which should have been inflicted upon us by reason of our sins committed. It frees us from the servitude of the devil, restores unto us our right to the kingdom of heaven, and puts us in possession of celestial benefits. For albeit it be true that indulgences do not remit the guilt of sins but the temporal pain which is due unto them, yet men, to the end they may obtain the remission of such pains are excited to such sincere and general confessions, to such acts of contrition, to such works of mercy, that they may be truly said to obtain for man all these admirable effects of comfort and

glory. To give, therefore, a true definition of what an indulgence is, I will use that which the learned divine, Gregory de Valentia, sets down. (*Tom. 4 dis 7 Q. 20 punc 2.*) An Indulgence, saith he, is a merciful relaxation or absolution of temporal punishment due to sin, by applying out of the Sacrament the superabundant satisfactions of Christ and his saints, by him that hath lawful authority.

Concerning the first, namely that a sin may be pardoned and yet a punishment remain, it is manifest by divers examples recorded in holy Scripture. We find (2 Kings c. 12) that the prophet David being told by the prophet Nathan of his two crying sins of murder and adultery, the prophet David presently cast himself, if I may say so, at the feet of God's mercy and with brinish tears breaking forth into these words *Miserere mei Deus* did humbly beg pardon for the same. God seeing his penitent heart bid the prophet Nathan tell him that our Lord had pardoned his sin. Notwithstanding in that chapter he told him, because thou hast made the enemies of our Lord to blaspheme, therefore thy son which is born to thee shall die the death, by which we see the guilt of the sin pardoned, but the punishment still to remain, namely the death of David's child. God pardoned at the intercession of Moses the crime of idolatry the Jews committed in adoring the golden calf. Nevertheless he said: I will visit this their sin in the day of revenge. (*Exod. c. 32, v. 34.*) God pardoned the sister of Moses and received her into his favour and notwithstanding he punished her with seven days leprosy. (*Num. c. 12, v. 15.*) And not to be overlong in particular examples, all mankind findeth the bitter scourge and calamity of sin, as hunger, cold, thirst, sickness and death, the just imposed penances of our forefathers' transgressions. Notwithstanding we know many have had the guiltiness thereof cleansed by the Sacrament of Baptism. Wherefore, St Augustine saith excellently well, the punishment is more prolonged than the fault, lest the fault may be little accounted of, if the punishment ended with it. (*Tract. 124 in Joan.*)

But some may object and say, Christ hath wrought for us a plentiful redemption, this is, hath satisfied and discharged us of whatsoever we have deserved to suffer for sin. This is an objection which heretics have continually in their mouths, to

which I answer that it's true Christ hath fully and super-abundantly satisfied the wrath of his Father for all the sins and transgressions of man, and infinite more if they had been possible, for he is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world—he who is our propitiation and by whose stripes we are healed. Yet as it hath pleased his divine Majesty, by faith, hope and charity and by the sacraments of the Church to grant unto us the inestimable benefits of his sanctifying grace, for without these it is impossible to obtain it; for although our Saviour hath suffered never so much for us, yet without faith it is impossible to please God, and again if I have faith sufficient to move mountains, if I have no charity I am like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; so he hath ordained by our penal works to apply unto us for sins voluntarily committed after baptism the precious fruits of his bountiful and abundant satisfaction. For as it is certain that our Blessed Saviour, by his prayers obtained of his heavenly Father all the gifts and graces which are bestowed upon men, yet he commanded us to ask and pray, and by prayer to obtain the self-same things, which he before by his prayers procured. So although he hath perfectly satisfied for all our offences, yet he requires some satisfaction at our hands for the injury we have done to his divine Majesty by our sins and trespasses. Which St Basil, that great Doctor, doth excellently declare when he saith (*Interrog. 12 in Reg. brevior*): Albeit God in his only begotten Son as much as lieth in him hath granted remission of sins to all, yet because mercy and judgement are joined together by the prophet, and he witnesseth God to be most merciful and just, it is necessary that things which are spoken of penance by the prophets and Apostles be performed by us, that the judgements of God's justice may appear, and his mercy consummated to the condonation of sins. (Ps. 100.) For as St Gregory Nazian saith (*Orat. in S. Lumina*): It is a like evil remission without chastisement and chastisement without pardon, for the one letteth go the reins too far, the other refraineth them too much. Wherefore, that God may carry over us an even hand, and his clemency may be mingled with some severity, his justice and mercy met together, although he always of mercy pardoneth the iniquity of repentant sinners, yet he often bindeth them over to some justice, and this is the

cause that sometimes God pardons the offence, and yet punisheth the offender with some temporal punishment, either in this world or in purgatory. Yet it may happen, though it be a thing rare, that a man's sorrow may be so great and his contrition so admirable that he shall not only obtain pardon for them and for their eternal punishment, but for their temporal punishment also, as appears by the example of St Peter, St Mary Magdalen, the publican, the thief upon the Cross, the adulterous woman and divers others.

I come to the second point wherein I am to show there remains in the Church a surplusage or common treasure of public satisfaction. It's a thing most certain, every action of our Blessed Saviour was of infinite value, and as Clement the sixth doth define, every the least drop of his precious blood was sufficient to have satisfied for all the sins of mankind, which if this be so, if the least drop of his blood was of such infinite value, what a great price, what a copious redemption, what an inestimable ransom did he offer, which did not only preach, labour, sweat and suffer for us unspeakable injuries and affronts, but shed all his precious blood to redeem us. O this was a price surpassing all prices, a ransom which as much exceeds the sum of our iniquity as the main ocean surmounts a little spark of fire cast into it. Likewise our Blessed Lady, who was never stained with the stain of original sin, who was replenished with fountains of grace, who went daily forward increasing in many charitable and painful works, had doubtless a rich heap of satisfaction to augment the sum before mentioned. St John Baptist, the apostles, sundry other martyrs and other holy persons have abounded with the like, especially St Paul who writeth thus (Col. c. 1, v. 24): I accomplish those things which want of the passion of Christ in my flesh, for his body which is the Church. And what was this which was wanting in the sufferings of Christ? Was there any defect in his passion? No, certainly, no: it was not for this. For what was it, then? It was as the word enfaceth, to fulfil the plenitude of Christ and his members' passions for the benefit of the Church, and likewise of others to whom they be communicated. For as Christ our Lord with all his elect make one mystical, common and public body, so his sufferings with the afflictions of his members concur to make up one common and public weal, one

general and public treasure.

Touching the third point, to wit, that this common treasure of penal afflictions is dispensable unto others by them to whom God hath committed the government of his Church is likewise plain by those words of Christ to St Peter (Mat. 16, v. 19): Whatsoever thou shalt loose in earth it shall be loosed in heaven, which being generally spoken without restriction are not only to be expounded of all spiritual power to forgive sins in the holy Sacraments by the application of Christ's merits, but also out of the Sacraments to release the punishment due unto the same by dispensing his own and saints' satisfactions. Thus St Paul as we read (II Cor. 2). granted an indulgence to the incestuous Corinthian of his deserved punishment, whom at the intercession (as Theodoret and St Thomas writing upon this place) of Timothy and Titus [he] pardoned in the person of Christ. Thus, the bishops of the primitive Church gave many pardons and indulgences to sundry penitents by the mediation of Confessors or designed Martyrs, of which St Cyprian (Ep. 13, 14, 15) and Tertullian (*lib. ad martyres*) make mention. Thus also the Council of Nice appointed mercy and indulgences to be used to such as perfectly repented, whereas others should perform and expect the whole time of their penance. Nay, that indulgences and pardons should be dispensed of, of the public treasure of the Church is most conformable to God's justice, answerable to the Communion of Saints, which we profess in our Creed, agreeable to the mutual intercourse between members of the same body, that the wants of one be supplied by the store of others, and that there be, as I say, a communication of benefits, not only of the head to the members, but also of one member to the rest of his fellow members. After which manner not only the chief magistrates and stewards of God's house to whom he hath given commission to dispense his mysteries, but every particular man may by special intention apply his satisfactory works, as his fastings, almsdeeds, prayers, watchings, etc. to others who stand in need thereof. So St Paul offered his afflictions (II Cor, 1, 6) one while for the Corinthians, (Col. 1, 24) another while for the Colossians; (Rom. 9, 3) now he desired to die for the Romans, then to be anathema, that is a sacrifice, as Origen expounds it, for the Jews. For this cause he exhorts the Corinthians to con-

tribute largely to the poor of Jerusalem, saying: Let in this present time your abundance supply their want, and their abundance supply your want (II Cor. 8, 14), that is to say, communicate you now unto them the superfluity of your worldly wealth, that you may interchangeably receive from them the supererogation of their spiritual good deeds. In fine King David acknowledgeth most plainly and clearly this mutual communication of which I now speak, where he saith: I am made partaker of all that fear our Lord (Ps. 118), and speaking of the Church, which he calls Jerusalem, he saith it is built as a city whose participation is in itself (Ps. 121, 3), that is, as in a politic commonwealth or public city there is a general traffic for the general good of all and every particular man's necessity, so in the Church or City of God there is a participation or communion of spiritual works of all to one end, to one public benefit and to the behoof of every private person. In our natural bodies one member speaketh in the behalf of another. The foot is trod on and the tongue crieth, why dost thou hurt me? The eye seeth, but it seeth not to itself alone; it seeth to the head, it seeth to the hand, it seeth to the foot, it seeth to the rest of the members. The hands only work and the feet only walk, but neither the hands or feet walk or work for themselves alone, but the hands work for the members of the body and the feet walk for them. So in this mystical body of the Church which St Paul compares to a natural body (I Cor. 12), one member may suffer for another, one member satisfy for another, one member communicate his good works to another. Much more the Catholic Church may do it, who is so plentifully stored with our Saviour's and his Saints' satisfactions.

But some may, out of the prophet Ezechiel (18, 20), object: the soul which sinneth even that shall die, and out of St Paul (Gal. 1): Everyone shall bear his own burden. I answer, there is no question but the soul which sins mortally of which Ezechiel speaks, incurs, without sorrow and repentance, death eternal, for as we shall show, that soul which is in mortal sin is incapable of pardon or indulgences so long as it remains in that miserable state. And there is no question but everyone shall bear his own burden, by way of merit or demerit, although he be helped by others by way of satisfaction, for no man can



merit or demerit for another, for to merit or demerit is to do some thing or action, with desiring to bring the party which doth it either praise or dispraise, reward or punishment. For example, if a Captain goes upon a piece of service to which he had no obligation, but merely to supply the place of his friend; if such a Captain performs that place with courage and resolution and doth bravely dare and put to flight his enemies, the praise of that action must be ascribed to him. He hath merited it, this is deserved it, and it cannot be given to the other Captain who was not there, neither in his advice or person. Nevertheless that Captain who performed the service may satisfy the obligation the other had to go upon that exploit, for oftentimes it happens that if the service be done, it imports not by whom it's performed. Yea, many times the party that had the obligation to have done the service is hindered by sickness or some other casualty, and the King is well satisfied with the service of his friend. So albeit we cannot merit for another, that is, by our works deserve that another be freed from the guilt of sin, or be put into possession of the joys of heaven (for as St Paul saith: What things a man sows, that shall he also reap, for he that soweth in his flesh, of his flesh shall reap corruption, but he that soweth in the spirit shall reap everlasting life. St Matthew saith: The son of man will render to everyone according to his works. It must be man's own works, man's own good deeds dignified with the grace of God inhering in his soul, which must merit for him reward in heaven). Notwithstanding, as I have already showed, being there is a surplusage of satisfactions in the Catholic Church, and being, as I have proved, out of the Communion of Saints and divers other places of holy Scriptures, that this may be applied for those who stand in need thereof, there is no doubt then but that the Holy Church out of its general treasure, or any good man out of his particular charity, may apply his satisfactory works for the satisfying of that temporal penalty which is due to the sins of others.

We have seen by this which we have now said what a Jubilee is: we have seen it remains in the treasure of the Church, and that he whom God hath appointed to rule his Church, to wit the Pope of Rome, Christ's Vicar upon earth, hath power to grant the same. Now let's show what disposition

is required in those who are to gain it, which, that I may better do I will read unto you the copy of a Bull or Breve found in the tomb of Sir Gerard Braybrook, Knight, in St Paul Church in London in the year of Our Lord 1608 and sixth year of King James, by the sexton of that Church, who digging a grave, light by chance upon the coffin of the said Sir Gerard who had been buried there two hundred years before and notwithstanding found the cads of the coffin whole, the flowers strewed upon it fresh and sweet and the charter of pardon not consumed or eaten or defaced in so long a time. God did thus miraculously conserve them to show plainly how much he doth approve this doctrine of Indulgences, which being translated verbatim in English was this:

Boniface Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to his beloved son the noble gentleman Gerard Braybrook, the younger, Knight, and to his beloved daughter in Christ, the noble lady his wife Elizabeth, of the diocese of Lincoln, salutation and apostolic benediction. It proceedeth from your affection, [and] devotion, with which you reverence us and the Church of Rome, that we admit your petitions to a favourable hearing, especially those which concern the salvation of your souls. For this cause, we, being moved to yield to your supplications, by the tenor of these presents do grant this Indulgence to your devotion, that such a ghostly father as either of you shall choose shall have power, by apostolic authority, to grant to you persisting in the sincerity of Faith, in the Unity of the Holy Church of Rome, and in obedience and devotion towards us or our successors, Popes of Rome, full remission only once at the point of death of all your sins whereof you shall be contrite and confessed, in such manner nevertheless that in those cases where satisfaction is to be made to any other, the same Confessor shall enjoin you to do it by yourselves if you survive, or by your heirs if you shall then die which you and they ought to perform as aforesaid, and lest, (which God forbid) you should by this favour become more prone to commit unlawful things hereafter, we declare that if upon confidence of this remission or indulgence you shall commit any such sins, that this present pardon shall not be any help to you concerning them, etc.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dugdale, in his *History of St Paul's* (ed. 1818, p. 52) refers to the finding of the

By this Charter we see four things necessary to obtain an indulgence. First to persist in the sincerity of faith; secondly, to be sorrowful, contrite and confess our sins; thirdly, to make satisfaction or restitution if any be needful; fourthly, not to presume hereby to commit unlawful things. These are the four things as necessary dispositions to gain an indulgence or Jubilee. For as for the first, namely that it's necessary to be in the true faith, this must be, for as no branch can receive nurriture from its tree no longer than it remains in the tree; nor a brook water from a fountain from whence it proceeds, if it be once cut off from that fountain, or a member from any part of a man's body if it be once disjoined and taken from his body, or a subject from a kingdom, commonwealth or corporation, if for his misdemeanours he be expelled and cast out thereof: so cannot one who by reason of his heresy or want of true faith, is out of this vine, this fountain, this body, this Communion of Saints which is found in the Holy Catholic Church. He is to be held for an outcast, or to use the phrase of holy Scripture for an heathen or publican, nor participates anything of the merits of Christ or his satisfactions. For there is no reason our blessed Saviour should communicate these favours or privileges unto him, sith that by his heresy he gives him the lie, he believes not what he saith or hath taught in his gospel, but followeth his own private dictances and judgement, not relying upon anything which our Saviour's spouse, the Holy Catholic Church, doth teach or interpret, wherefore it's no marvel the Apostle saith that without Faith it's impossible to please God.

The second condition is that we be sorrowful, contrite and confess our sins, for without this there is no indulgence to be gained, no pardon to be had. The reason whereof is most clear, for since as I have before declared an indulgence doth only bring remission for the temporal punishment due to a sin forgiven, it is necessary that the sin be forgiven, for it's contrary to all sense and reason that a punishment or penalty should be forgiven him that persists in his fault, or that God

---

*bones* of Sir Gerard Braybrook (who died in 1429) and prints this indulgence in Latin. A letter of 1608, however, in the archives of Westminster Cathedral states that the body was incorrupt. In the Fire of London in 1666, falling masonry crashed through the tomb of Sir Gerard's uncle, Robert Braybrook, bishop of London, who died in 1404, and *his* body was found incorrupt.

should bestow any so special a favour as is the forgiveness of a punishment upon him who remains yet his enemy: out of which consideration proceeds that which I said in the beginning, to wit, so many strange conversions from sin unto Almighty God, so many admirable and sincere confessions, so many heroic acts of virtue and devotion; in a word, that the year is a year truly pleasing and grateful to Almighty God, for men reflecting upon the number of their sins, and the grievous penalties inflicted upon sinners, even in this life for the same: for according to the ancient Canons of the Church sinners were enjoined by their Confessarius sometimes ten, sometimes twelve, sometimes thirty years, yea, sometimes to remain the whole remnant of their life in mourning and penance if their sins were enormous and great: and for lesser mortal sins a forty days or another Lent's fast or else they were to suffer for it in Purgatory which was an incomparable greater punishment. Reflecting upon this and knowing they may by this happy Jubilee, if they do by confessions put themselves in the state of grace, procure a *Quietus est*<sup>2</sup> or an absolute freedom from all these penances both in this life and hereafter. They cry out: this is the acceptable time, this the day of salvation. Whereupon severely examining their consciences endeavour to find out all that wherein they may any ways [have] offended Almighty God, or injured their neighbours. Which being done they cast themselves with contrition of heart at the feet of some lawful and approved priest with a resolution to make satisfaction where any satisfaction is due to a third person, and because true penance is to bewail things committed, and not to commit things hereafter to be bewailed, they make firm purposes by the assistance of God's grace not to offend his divine Majesty. And thus we see how easily we may gain this plenary indulgence or remission from all temporal punishment due for our sins. Here is not required much moneys or expensive labours or toils or penances: all that's required is these three little things which I have now touched, and some little thing expressed in the Breve or Bull by which the indulgence is granted. This which is required for gaining this present indulgence is (*The sermon breaks off thus abruptly.*)

---

2 a legal term for an acquittance.