

“Care for the Saints”

John Thomas Mawson

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I had made my plans for the day, which would have taken me out of the town where I was staying. But on my way to the Railway Station I felt an inward urge to visit an aged servant of the Lord just entering on his 89th year who lived in the town. So strong was this impression that I decided it was the Lord’s will for me and I had better abandon my own plans and follow the Lord’s. Arriving at his door it was opened by his daughter, who, when she saw me standing there, broke down and sobbed, “Oh, you’ve come. Father has been asking for you all the morning, he’s very ill.” I went to his bedroom and he stretched out his hands in welcome and said, “I want you to speak at my funeral and to take charge of all my papers in that drawer; you’ll find my will there.” I assured him that I would do anything and all that he wished me. Then he put his hands together and repeated, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy Name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits ... He who crowns thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.”

He had been taken suddenly ill and his doctor had said that morning that it was just a question of hours with him. It was my privilege to sit at his bedside the following night and to hear him communing with his God, apparently oblivious of my presence, but several times during those sacred hours he opened his eyes and turned to me and said each time, “Care for the saints.” It was all he had to say to me, and they were the last words I heard from his lips.

The saints are the children of God; this is the name that is given to them many times in the New Testament: the youngest child in God’s family is a saint equally with the oldest and most revered. Knowing this, I knew of whom my aged friend spoke, and his words impressed me the more for I knew how much he had cared for the saints for many years; it had been his very life. Not more than a fortnight before I had seen him tramping through a storm of wind and rain to visit a sick Christian, when he seemed more fit to be in his own bed, or at least in an easy chair by a warm fire.

His dying words reminded me of the Lord’s final commission to Simon Peter. He said to him, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?” then “Feed My lambs,” “Shepherd My sheep.” I remembered also Paul’s words to the elders at Ephesus, “Take heed to yourselves and *to all the flock ... feed the church of God*, which He has purchased by His own blood.” My aged friend was in the true Apostolic succession; he loved and cared for those who are precious to the Lord, those for whom He gave Himself. Let the Lord’s question to Simon come home to every one of us. “Lovest thou Me?” Can we answer as Simon did, “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee”? Then how can we show our love to Him? Not by our talk or by our knowledge, but by loving and caring for those who are dear to Him. Our love to Him can be measured by our willingness and readiness to serve His own. “Care for the saints”. That’s the test.

The hireling neglects them, “he cares not for the sheep” are the Lord’s own words concerning him. The wolf scatters them (John 10), “grievous wolves not sparing the flock,” Paul calls them; and men professing to be shepherds divide them, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20), and Peter who faithfully fulfilled the Lord’s commission has warned us that the adversary of the flock, “the devil as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour” (1. Peter 5). Many are the foes of the saints, many are the dangers that beset them, but the good and great Shepherd cares for them, and all who love Him will care for them too. Yes, that’s the test. Do I, do you, care for the saints?

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