

ON THE CHRISTIAN RITE OF CHURCHING WOMEN AFTER  
CHILD-BIRTH.

GOD, in the old law, declared several actions unclean, which, though innocent and faultless in themselves, had a constant, but remote regard to sin. One of these was child-birth, to denote the impurity of man's origin by his being conceived and born in sin. For the removal of legal uncleanness in general, God established certain expiatory rites, consisting of ablutions and sacrifices, to which all were strictly obliged who desired to be purified; that is, restored to the privileges of their brethren, and declared duly qualified members of the synagogue or Jewish church. It would be superstitious since the death of Christ, and the publication of the new law, to stand in awe of legal uncleanness, or to have recourse to Jewish purifications on account of any of them, whether after child-birth or in any other cases. It is not, therefore, with that intention that Christian mothers come to the church, as Jewish women did to the tabernacle, in order to be purified from any uncleanness they contract by child-birth. It is not on any consideration peculiar to the Jews that this ceremony was established in the Christian church, but on a motive common to all mankind, the performing the duty of thanksgiving and prayer. Hence in the canon law, Pope Innocent III. speaks of it as follows: "If women after child-bearing desire immediately to enter the church, they commit no sin by so doing, nor are they to be hindered. Nevertheless, if they choose to refrain out of respect for some time, we do not think their devotion ought to be reprehended."(1)

In some diocesses this term is limited to a certain number of days. Where this is not regulated by custom, or by any particular statute, the party may perform this duty as soon as she is able to go abroad. Her first visit is to be to the church: firstly, to give God thanks for her safe delivery: secondly, to implore his blessing on herself and her child. It ought to be her first visit, to show her readiness to acquit herself of this duty to God, and to give him the first-fruits of her recovery and blessing received; as the first-fruits in every thing are most particularly due to God, and most agreeable to him, and which, in the old law, he was most jealous in exacting of his people. The acknowledgment of a benefit received is the least return we can make for it: the

(1) Cap. unico de Purif. post partum.

law of nature dictates the obligation of this tribute; God strictly requires it, and this is the means to draw down new blessings on us, the flowing of which is by nothing more effectually obstructed than by insensibility and ingratitude: wherefore, next to the praise and love of God, thanksgiving is the principal homage we owe him in the sacrifice of our hearts, and is a primary act of prayer. The book of psalms abounds with acts of thanksgiving; the apostle every where recommends and inculcates them in the strongest terms. The primitive Christians had these words, *Thanks be to God*, always in their mouths, and used them as their ordinary form of salutation on all occasions, as Saint Austin mentions, (1) who adds, "What better thing can we bear in our hearts, or pronounce with our tongues, or express with our pens, than *Thanks be to God?*" It is the remark of St. Gregory of Nyssa, (2) that besides past benefits, and promises of other inestimable benefits to come, we every instant of our lives receive from God fresh favours; and therefore we ought, if it were possible, every moment to make him a return of thanks with our whole hearts, and never cease from this duty. We owe a particular thanksgiving for his more remarkable blessings. A mother regards her safe delivery, and her happiness in being blessed with a child, as signal benefits, and therefore she owes a particular holocaust of thanks for them. This she comes to offer at the foot of the altar. She comes also to ask the succours of divine grace. She stands in need of an extraordinary aid from above, both for herself and her child. For herself, that, by her example, instructions, and watchfulness, she may fulfil her great obligations as a mother. For her child, that it may reap the advantage of a virtuous education, may live to God, and become one day a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem: otherwise, what will it avail her to have been a mother, or the child to have been born? Now prayer is the channel which God has appointed for the conveyance of his graces to us. The mother, therefore, must be assiduous in begging daily of the Father of mercies all necessary succours for these purposes: but this she should make the subject of her most zealous petitions on the occasion of her first solemn appearance after child-bed before his altar. She should, at the same time, make the most perfect offering and consecration of her child

(1) Ep. 41. olim. 77.

(2) Or. 1. de precat. t. 1. p. 715.

to the divine Majesty. Every mother, in imitation of the Blessed Virgin, ought to perform this triple duty of thanksgiving, petition, and oblation, and through her hands, who, on the day of her purification, set so perfect a pattern of this devotion.

## ST. LAURENCE,

### ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

HE was one of those who accompanied St. Austin into this island, about the year 597, and was his immediate successor in the see of Canterbury, in 608, in which he sat eleven years. When Eadbald, son and successor to the holy king Ethelbert, not only refused to follow his father's example in embracing the faith, but gave into idolatry, and incestuously took to his bed his father's widow. Laurence having laboured hard for his conversion to no purpose, and despairing of reclaiming him, thought of nothing but retiring into France, as some others had already done. But he was severely scourged by St. Peter, in a dream, on the eve of his intended departure, with reproaches for designing to forsake that flock for which Christ had laid down his life. This did not only prevent his going, but had such an effect upon the king, when he was shown the marks of the stripes he had received on this occasion, that he became a thorough convert, doing whatever was required of him, both for his own sanctification and the propagation of Christianity in his dominions. St. Laurence did not long survive this happy change, dying in the year 619. He is mentioned in the Roman Martyrology. See Bede, Hist. b. 2. c. 4. 6, 7.\* Malmesb. l. 1. Pontif. Angl.

---

## FEBRUARY III.

### ST. BLASE, BISHOP AND MARTYR.

The four modern different Greek acts of this saint are of small authority. Bollandus has supplied this deficiency by learned remarks.

A.D. 316.

HE was bishop of Sebaste in Armenia, and was crowned with martyrdom in the persecution of Licinius, in 316, by the command

---

\* From these words of Bede, b. 1. c. 27. Austin sent to Rome Laurence the priest, and Peter the monk, some modern historians infer that Saint