

Prayer of the Month • July 2012

Almighty everliving Father, who hast promised unto thy faithful people life by thine incarnate Son, even as he liveth by thee; Grant unto us all, and especially to those whom thy providence hath in anywise entrusted with the treasure of thy holy doctrine amongst us, thy good Spirit, always so to believe and understand, to feel and firmly to hold, to speak and to think, concerning the mystery of the Communion of the Body and Blood of thy dear Son, as shall be well pleasing to thee, and profitable to our souls; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

John Keble, 1792–1866



John Keble prays inclusively and generously. He prays for himself, for those entrusted with theological teaching, and for all the Church. His prayer is centred on the Blessed Sacrament and how we regard it, with our minds, and our hearts, in our stability, and in our sharing with others. He prays that all this may be ‘profitable to our souls’, which is not the same as giving us a good feeling. And he prays also that God may be pleased. It is a temptation to regard the sacraments from the limited perspective of what we get out of them, or think we do. Keble opens this up to wider benefit, to us, known and unknown.

John Keble was born in Fairford, Gloucestershire, in 1792, the son of the Revd John Keble, Vicar of Coln St Aldwyns. He excelled academically at Christ Church, Oxford, was ordained in 1816 and became a tutor from 1818 to 1823. In 1827 he published a book of poems entitled *The Christian Year*, containing poems for the Sundays and Feast Days of the Church. Although published anonymously, its author soon became known, due to its immediate popularity. It became the best-selling book of poetry in the nineteenth century – 95 editions were published in Keble’s lifetime, and 158 by the time it fell out of copyright in 1873, with total sales of over 375,000. One result of this was that Keble was appointed to the Chair of Poetry at Oxford in 1831, a post he held until 1841.

Keble’s famous Assize Sermon of 1833 on ‘national apostasy’ gave a first impulse to the Oxford Movement, and Keble had a leading role in its initial development. In 1835 he was appointed Vicar of Hursley, near Winchester, and was a devoted parish priest for the rest of his life. Some of his poems are still used as hymns, among them: ‘New every morning is the love’, ‘Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear’, and ‘Blest are the pure in heart’. He died on 29 March 1866. His feast day is 14 July (the anniversary of his ‘Assize sermon’ in 1833).

Colin Lunt