

THE GREATEST GIFT

by the Rev. David R. Simons

In the first two chapters of the Word we learn about creation. We might ask ourselves, “Why did the Lord create the universe? Why did He create the rocks and metals of the mineral kingdom, the plants of the vegetable kingdom, and the creatures of the animal kingdom?” The answer is: for the sake of human beings. Creation is full of special gifts from the Lord to people! Gifts to make people happy—better still, *happier* to all eternity. Yes, happier, since His love is never content just to give life and happiness, but wills that life and delight shall be received ever *more* abundantly (see John 10:10).

If you wanted to make someone happy, what kind of gift would you select? You might give a golden ring which would shine out every day to tell the person you gave it to of the constancy of your love—that it will go on and on unchanging, just as gold goes on shining day after day, year after year. You might want to enhance your gift by adding a beautiful precious stone—a diamond, ruby, or sapphire—which would sparkle with light and say, “I want to light up your life and fill your heart with joy!”

Giving gifts from the mineral kingdom—metal and precious stones—is one way to tell others how you feel about them, that you want them to be happy, and that your love is constant and fixed. But there are other things you might want to express with a gift. What if you want to tell someone that your love will grow—that your love is greater today than it was yesterday? How would you go about this? Perhaps the best way would be to give a gift that did change. Something that would get bigger and bigger, more and more beautiful; something that was full of surprises, so that every day your friend would be given a new delight! One gift that would do this would be a plant—a living, growing plant. It would start out as a small, unexciting thing, a seed or a tiny shoot, but every day it would get more and more exciting. The shoot would stretch up and produce leaves, and, after a bit, buds would form. Then one day surprises would pop out—beautiful flowers which can stir the affections and say, in their beauty, how you feel about that person! And you might want to make your gift just that much more delightful by giving a fruit tree which would not only produce fragrant flowers to delight the eye and nose, but also luscious fruit to satisfy the taste and bring good health, nourishment and satisfaction. A fruit tree would last for years to make your friend happier and happier and be a growing reminder of your love.

But there are other gifts that grow to express the idea that our affection for someone is more today than yesterday, more next year than this year. How about an animal that can become a useful pet? If you give a baby animal—especially one that can learn—then, as it grows up and learns to do what its master wishes, your love for that person can be more and more fully expressed. A puppy is a good example. He can learn tricks that please his owner. He can be useful as a companion so that there is no loneliness. He can grow up to guard property, warn of danger, and even be trained to lead blind people safely through a crowded city. What wonderful gifts animals make, especially when they can be trained to be useful! Yet, when we think

carefully, we can see that even animals are not the absolute best gifts. They have their limitations. They are good companions and friends, but they cannot really talk to their masters.

How about a gift whose ability to learn and grow has no end, whose ability to think and talk can increase year by year? How about a gift whose ability to bring happiness will improve every year to eternity, bringing ever more delight to those to whom it is given? Wouldn't that be a super gift? You might object, "Such a gift is impossible." "It sounds too good to be true." "No one could make a gift that can grow forever." But the answer is that there is a gift we can receive that is more constant than the minerals of the earth, that can grow to bring more happiness than all plants put together, and that can learn to become more and more intelligent and skillful than the cleverest animal. It is the most precious gift of creation! The most precious gift from the Lord.

Do you know what this most perfect gift is? *A little baby! A little human being! A baby girl or boy!* Here is someone who can learn more every day. Here is someone whose skills can improve year by year. Here is a creation by the Lord who can become more and more human, that is, *more and more like the Lord* to all eternity, more and more able to bring uses and happiness to others.

The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us that the perfection of animals at their birth is really their imperfection, but the imperfection of a human at his birth is really his perfection (*Conjugal Love* 133). What does this mean? Although animals have the wisdom of life built into them as instincts—which tell them what to eat, how to build their nests and raise their young, and what to do to escape from their enemies—still they are not free to change their ways. Their lives are pre-programmed, so to speak. But although human beings start life in total ignorance and helplessness, they have the ability to learn and grow forever. Their minds can grow from knowledge to intelligence and wisdom, and they can become more and more useful in life by growing in new loves from the Lord.

And growth in learning can be raised even into the light of heaven which enables people, in wisdom, to see the Lord in His creation and to be grateful for what He has given us. Wise people see the constancy of the Lord's love in the unchanging forms of the mineral kingdom. They see the Lord's desire to give life ever more *abundantly* in the growing things of the plant kingdom. They see His love expressing itself in the uses of the animal kingdom. And they see the greatest gift of all in the truth *that the Lord created people in His own image and likeness!* People can receive the gift of eternal life to become more and more intelligent and wise, more and more useful to others, and more and more happy and delight-filled to all eternity!