

THE LORD'S LIFE: AN EXAMPLE TO US

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Lessons: John 13:1-17; Divine Providence 178,179; Arcana Coelestia 2493

At the first of every year many people make resolutions to live a good life. They are inspired to do this by the example of others, or by doctrine in the Word. The Writings teach repeatedly that the Lord's life on earth, short as it was, and though confined to a small area, therefore known then to few people, was the highest example for people in all ages, of all races, everywhere throughout the universe.

"The Lord's life in the world", we read in the Writings, "was an example according to which the men of the church are to live, as also He Himself teaches in John 13: 15,17, I have given you an example that ye also should do as I have done to you. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (*Apocalypse Explained* 254:2). His whole life on earth, from His birth to His death, was an example to people of the church. Only people of the church know this example: only people who have the Word know the Lord to be their example.

"The reason the Lord Himself was baptized by John," we read further in the Writings, "was not only that He might institute baptism for the future, and go before as an example, but also because He glorified His Human, and made it Divine, as He regenerates people and makes them spiritual" (*True Christian Religion* 684e). "The glorification of the Lord's Human is the pattern (*exemplar*) of a person's regeneration, and hence man's regeneration also is presented in the internal sense of the Word at the same time with the glorification of the Lord" (*Arcana Coelestia* 5688e).

Many times in the Gospels, therefore, the Lord compared Himself to others, or to His disciples, that is, to those who would follow Him; as when He said, "Even as the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; abide ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9, 10). "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.... As Thou didst send Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:16, 18). "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John 20:21). "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them, that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me..." (John 17:22, 23).

The Lord's life in the world is not a set example for our rigid imitation of it; but the purpose of it, and the means He used for accomplishing its purposes, or

the spirit of it, these are our example. And He is an example, not only in that internal work by which He made Divine the Human He put on by Mary, but in all His works for the people to whom He ministered, or in His attitude towards the works and care of the people. “In the internal sense of the Word the Lord’s whole life is described such as it was to be in the world, even as to the perceptions and thoughts, for these were foreseen and provided because from the Divine” (AC 2523). This refers to the internal sense of the Old Testament. If we are to understand the Lord’s life as described in the New Testament, we must know also the internal sense of the Old Testament. The internal sense reveals much that is not recorded in the New Testament, more particularly as to the perceptions and thoughts, which the Lord had while in the world. By means of both the literal sense and the internal sense of the Old Testament we are instructed and prepared in childhood and youth to understand the work which the Lord came to do, and how that work can be continued in us, thus how we can be redeemed and saved, or reformed and regenerated.

The Lord had washed the disciples’ feet. He then said, “Ye call Me Master and Lord, and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:13-15).

The regeneration of a person’s natural degree was represented by the Lord’s washing the disciples’ feet. What the Lord did represented and signified genuine charity and genuine humility. To wash the feet means not to reflect on the evils of another. The Lord is ever ready to forgive us, and to remove our evils. He can do this in our natural lives when we as of ourselves have shunned evils in our internal lives, or in our thought and will. The Lord’s words to Peter, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit” (John 13: 10) mean that the internal has been washed, or reformed. The Divine order in regeneration is that the internal person the plane of thought and affection that is hidden from others — must first be reformed and regenerated, and that the external person, or the plane of speech and action which appears plainly to others, be afterwards reformed and regenerated by the internal, or by the Lord by means of the internal person. “First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside may be made clean also” (Matthew 23:26).

Truly is it said in the Writings, “the Lord’s life in the world was an example according to which people of the church must live”. His was a life of love and mercy, of usefulness and justice, of self—denial and thought of others, of uncompromising warfare against evil and falsity, a Divinely Human life. His perfection is infinitely beyond our attainment, but by His own words it is possible for us to emulate it. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) is His own exhortation. “I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them” (John 13:15,17). *Amen.*