

WITH GREAT JOY

Lessons: Luke 24:44-53, Arcana Coelestia 547; 548 (portion)

Have you ever noticed how many times the word “Alleluia” appears in Easter hymns? The word means “Praise God,” or “Glorify the Lord.” It is not a sad word, but a happy one, and these hymns are sung with joy in our hearts.

When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the sepulcher that first Easter morning, they were sad. They were sure that Jesus’ body, which had suffered on the cross, would be in the sepulcher, and they came to anoint it with spices and oils. Their sadness turned to fear when they saw the great stone rolled away and standing beside it a shining angel. But once they heard the good news that “The Lord had risen as He said,” their fear turned into great joy. Then they ran to tell the disciples the good news and glad tidings.

Everyone knows what it is to feel sadness and fear and joy. When we first learn of a dear friend being hurt or sick in the hospital, we know the meaning of sadness. We may even fear that our friend will not get well. But then, when we hear of his or her recovery, we experience great joy and happiness. And our first reaction is to tell others the good news. It makes us feel good all-over. We may even sing or dance or clap our hands. That was the joy felt in the hearts of the two Marys when the glad tidings were announced by the angel.

This same joy was felt by the Lord’s disciples when they were led out by the Lord to Bethany some time after His resurrection. There, He gave them their final words of instruction. He opened their understanding so that they could more clearly see the teachings given in the Scriptures. He told them to go out and preach to all people, explaining that heaven awaits all who recognize their evils and begin to shun them.

Imagine, if you can, what His disciples felt when the Lord blessed them. While doing so, *“He was parted from them and carried up into heaven”* (Luke 24:51). What a remarkable experience that must have been!

The disciples reacted like the two Marys at the sepulcher. First they worshiped Him. Then they *“Returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God”* (Luke 24:52, 53).

Even though this happened nearly two thousand years ago, all of us can feel the joy that those disciples felt as our own. Experiencing this joy is like being in heaven. There, we will not only behold the beauty of nature *around* us, but *within* us will be the happiness that comes from being with other angels. In

fact, when we celebrate Easter by thinking about the Lord and singing songs to Him, we are really already in the company of angels.

Easter is a time when we make a special effort to surround ourselves with beautiful things. If we live in a country where it is spring, we surround our altar of worship with fresh budding flowers. Easter Sunday is a time when we wear our finest garments. And when we hear the familiar Easter story, we feel the joy that began that first Easter season.

Have you noticed that not only at Easter, but also at other times when we are happy inside, we discover beautiful things around us? When we smile, others respond in the same way. When we are happy we become more aware of the beauty of nature, and we are reminded of those treasures around us that we hold dear. Everything looks cheerful and bright regardless of the weather.

When we feel joy and gladness, we want it to last forever. But it doesn't, while we live in this world. Before long we become distracted, and our mood changes. If we lose our temper and get angry, or if we start feeling sorry for ourselves, the joy that was once in our hearts leaves us. It seems as if we are losing the sphere of the angels and their company. Though we can't actually see angelic people around us when we're in a happy state, they are really there; when we begin to think only about ourselves and not others, they leave, allowing room for evil spirits to take their place.

The disciples who watched the Lord being raised up into heaven certainly must have felt the sphere of angels around them. They, like you on Easter morning, felt great joy in their hearts and wanted to praise the Lord with prayer and song. They understood that if they would shun evils, they would rise up into heaven—like the Lord Himself—to enjoy this happiness forever.

But they also knew that there would be times when evil spirits would try to take away their joy. At times they would feel fear or sadness. The world would no longer look beautiful and happy when they were in the company of evil spirits.

How wonderful it is, though, that we can be rid of evil spirits *anytime* we want to—if we put our minds to it. It is as simple as thinking about others and doing something to serve them. When we do this, evil spirits cannot stand, and they soon leave. As they depart, the angels come closer to us and fill our hearts with joy. Our eyes again begin to see the beauty around us, which restores our cheerfulness. This is also a time when we think about the Lord with gratitude and love. And, like the disciples of years ago, we want to praise Him with joyful songs. We want to shout "Alleluia" and feel once again the company of angels whom we will join someday, when the Lord calls us to heaven.

Amen.