

KNOWING OUR LORD

Rev. Norbert H. Rogers

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30-31).

Life in the natural world is a means to an end. For us, the end is that we may enter into the light and life of heaven, that we may receive a full measure of the Divine influx of love and wisdom and, by making it our own, be conjoined with the Lord. By that conjunction a person is born again; he is made anew and becomes a spiritual being, an angel, whose freedom of life, capacity for use, states of peace and joy, clarity of vision, breadth of wisdom, and keenness of intelligence are restricted by no extraneous limitations whatsoever.

The case was similar with the Lord. His life on earth was also a means to an end—a Divine end. That end was that, as to the Human, He might enter into a new state—that His Divine might descend and be manifested in ultimates, uniting the Human with itself. By that union the Lord was glorified, His Human was made Divine; He became the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. And by His glorified Human, the Lord took upon Himself, in a manner not possible before, all power in heaven and on earth to maintain order, to redeem and save, to uplift us and to bless us.

For a person, the attainment of the end or goal—the reception as his own of what flows forth to him from the Lord—is not possible so long as he remains in his natural state, that is, so long as he is corrupted by the presence of selfish or proprial inclinations, concepts, ideals and desires. For these are by nature false and evil. They have an affinity with the hells, and are opposed to all that is heavenly and Divine. They keep wide open the infernal approaches to the mind, tightly shutting the entrances of heaven. For this reason, they must be removed. Their hold on a person must be loosened completely. Their power over him must be reduced to nothing. And this can be effected only by means of temptations, by spiritual assaults sustained during life on earth. Hence, we are taught that temptations are a necessary means of regeneration, and that by steadfastly resisting them to their end, in spite of the severe conflicts, doubts, anxieties and humiliation involved, a person is given consolation and is admitted by the Lord into new states of heavenly life and vision.

With the Lord, who came on earth as a man, temptations were also a necessary means by which the Divine end was attained. Through temptation—by allowing infernal assaults upon the infirm natural that He had assumed from Mary and overcoming them through His own Divine power—the Lord subjugated the hells and reduced them into order, and, at the same time, put off from Himself what was merely natural. This process of glorification began at His birth into the world and was carried forward throughout His earthly life by successive temptations and victories over the hells, even to the last, which was the passion of the cross. Being the last, it was also the most grievous, for by means of it the last desperate assault of the hells was overcome, and their power completely brought under the dominion of the Lord. At the same time, the last vestige of what had been derived from Mary, the final residue of the material human the Lord had joined to

Himself, was destroyed on the cross and dissipated in the sepulcher. As a result, He was able to rise again on the third day fully glorified, and to reveal Himself in His Divine Human. Thus, those who saw the Lord after His resurrection saw neither a material body nor a spirit without a body, but the Divine itself in human form. They saw God in a Divine body.

The Lord's last supreme temptation was not only the final means by which He completed His glorification. It was also, and still is, a supreme temptation to all who have knowledge of the Lord, a test of their love and faith. For by it people are compelled to make a decision as to how they regard the Lord: as God incarnate, who rose again on the third day as He had said, or as a man who died on the cross. Just as the Lord's victory enabled Him to reveal Himself to people in His Divine Human, so also does a person's successful resistance to the doubts raised by that temptation enable him to see the Lord's Divine Human as it is revealed to him.

This temptation is intended to contribute to a person's spiritual progress and to perfect his vision of the Lord, but the Lord's passion does not achieve its purpose with everyone. It scarcely appears as a temptation to those who deny the Lord at heart; it only confirms their denial. Nor does it achieve its intended purpose with those who are unwilling to raise their minds above proprial and material things, and so can see only the infirm natural the Lord had assumed. Such look to the expected Messiah to free them from natural grief and oppression, and to satisfy their heart's natural desires. To such the crucifixion is but a painful dashing of hopes, a disappointment, making it necessary to look elsewhere and to continue to wait for the promised Savior. The passion of the cross is a genuine temptation only to those who attend to the Divine teachings, seeking to understand them, who are willing to abandon their own natural activities and desires in order to follow the Lord. For such people the crucifixion seems to threaten and to destroy all that they cherish most; it seems to extinguish the very light of their life; it reduces them to states of bleak despair. Such was the case with the disciples!

How great the disciples' trial was may in some measure be realized when we remember that although they had endeavored to understand the Lord's teachings, they had not fully grasped their meaning. Their minds had not been sufficiently freed from the traditional, materialistic concepts of their civilization. Thus, though they sensed that more was involved, the essence of their thought was that the Lord had come to assert His natural power over people and to establish a natural kingdom. Nor could they conceive of life continuing after death.

When the Lord made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem they felt their faith was being vindicated, and that their natural expectations were about to be fully realized. They must have been surprised, then, and not a little disappointed, when the Lord did not take advantage of His evident popularity. They must have been bewildered when He allowed Himself to be taken prisoner. They must have been extremely distressed and anxious when they saw Him rejected, ignobly treated, and led to Calvary. They must have experienced the extremes of sorrow and despair when they saw Him give up the spirit on the cross, dissipating their hopes of a miracle. And then, when they had laid His body in the sepulcher, they must have suffered intense mental torments as, rendered inactive by the Sabbath day restrictions, they waited through the long hours until the dawn of the third day.

Because their love for the Lord was genuine, the disciples were able to retain their faith when there appeared to be no reason for faith. Because of their love and faith, they were willing to revise the ideas they had previously held, and they sought to understand the significance and implications of the tragic events they had witnessed. Because of this, the Lord's passion and the severe temptation states it had caused, served to introduce them into a new state. Their hearts were thereby purified, so that they might be blessed with a vision of God!

The women who had gone to the sepulcher on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, had reported to the disciples what they had seen and heard—that they had seen the risen Lord. The disciples could scarcely believe their report that such a miracle had taken place. Yet it raised their hopes and re-activated their thoughts concerning the Lord.

And so, later on the same day, when two of the Lord's disciples set out for Emmaus, a village about seven and a half miles from Jerusalem, they discussed the events that had taken place and the report of the women. Their thoughts were actively concentrated on the Lord. Because of this, according to the spiritual law that thought brings presence, the Lord was present with them as they walked. And because they had not yielded to the temptation they had sustained, their spiritual eyes could be opened to see the Lord. But they did not recognize Him. Like those in the first state of life in the world of spirits, their minds were still bound by natural concepts, preventing them from understanding what they saw. Yet they were drawn to Him, opening their hearts to Him, confessing their hopes and their fears.

Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:25-27).

The two gladly listened to the Lord's instruction. It gave new meaning to the Word; it renewed and strengthened their faith; it warmed their hearts; it shed light on their perplexities. And so, when they reached their destination, they were loath to part with Him, but constrained Him to turn with them and to tarry with them. "Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, 'Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?'" (Luke 24:30-32).

It is significant that their recognition came as they ate together, in the Lord's blessing and breaking and sharing the bread. This was what identified Him to them, freeing their minds from preconceptions. For they had seen Him bless and break bread when He had fed the multitudes, and, more recently, at the Last Supper. But the significance of the act was not merely that it reminded the disciples of something that identified Him to them. The Lord's act had a deeper significance.

We are taught that

in the Ancient Church bread was broken when it was given to another, and by this was signified to communicate good from one's own, and to appropriate it from one's own, thus to make love mutual.... When bread is broken among several, then the one piece of bread becomes a mutual possession, and consequently there is conjunction; from charity. From this it is plain that the breaking of bread was significative of mutual love (Arcana Coelestia 5405).

We are also taught that to eat bread given by the Lord signifies appropriation of good from Him and conjunction with Him, from which comes enlightenment (*Apocalypse Explained* 617:21); and that to eat and drink in the Lord's presence means to be instructed from the Word about the goods and truths of faith, by means of which the Lord appears (*Arcana Coelestia* 9412:16).

Thus, what actually enabled the two disciples to recognize the Lord was that they received the instruction He had given them with affection. They had eagerly listened as He opened the Scripture to them. They had opened their hearts and minds to receive the things of love and faith He provided for them, and had appropriated them to themselves. Because of this they had come into a state of conjunction with the Lord and were enlightened. Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him to be their risen Lord, Redeemer and Savior, to whom all power and glory belong.

It is to be noted that the simple statement "and they knew Him," implies more than simple recognition. It was a sign that they had come into a new state of life, a state of conjunction with the Lord. Thus it implies that they had fulfilled the end of natural life, for only the regenerate can truly be said to know God.

When they had recognized the Lord, the disciples' spiritual sight was closed, so that "He vanished from their sight." For no person is able to remain indefinitely in an exalted spiritual state. Indeed, all of life is characterized by alternations of state. Activity alternates with rest, light with obscurity, ascent with descent. A state of rest prepares the way for a new state of greater activity; obscurity prepares the way for the perception of brighter light; descent makes higher ascents possible. Such alternations are not only necessary for life, but also make it possible to advance into ever more perfect states. The Lord's disappearance from the disciples' sight did not lessen the clarity, significance and use, of their vision; it prepared them for a vision even more exalted. It did not indicate a relapse into a state of disjunction with the Lord, but the beginning of a state of even closer conjunction.

The experience of the disciples must in some manner be shared by all who seek to be truly Christian. Though it may not appear so, and though it may assume different forms, the faith and love of every Christian must be tested as greatly as were those of the disciples, and, like theirs, it must survive the test.

Because of the New Testament, and especially because of the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, it might seem that we will not be called on to face the same temptation test. For we learn from childhood that the Lord is risen, that He glorified Himself by means of temptations, and

that He has revealed Himself to us in His Divine Human. And it is true that we have the advantage of possessing priceless knowledge that the disciples lacked.

But for all our knowledge, the first concepts we form from them—upon which our faith and love of the Lord are based—are not unlike the disciples'. Our unregenerate natural minds are similarly bound by purely natural and material limitations, so that our first concepts are very imperfect and very fallible. They do not give us a true and clear idea of the Lord. And so, though we may have considerable knowledge, we nevertheless do not know Him at first. We can come to know Him only when our faith and love have survived the test of temptation.

The Lord presents Himself to our view in the Divine truths of the Word. These constitute His Divine Human. We come into temptation states, then, only when we seek to know and to understand the truths of the Word so that our thoughts and lives may be governed by them, that is, by the Lord. In so far as we do this sincerely and not merely to confirm our own ideas, we will inevitably discover limitations, weaknesses and errors, in our concepts. This discovery will initiate us into temptation states, in so far as we have any faith and love. For in appearance, it will seem as if our concepts themselves are not at fault, rather that the teachings of the Word are fallacious and impotent, that they have utterly failed to fulfill their claims and are therefore to be cast aside. In appearance, the very basis of our faith and love will be destroyed, leaving us helpless. It will be as if the Lord were being crucified in our minds. As a result, we will experience severe temptations, doubts, and anxiety.

Our faith will be able to survive only if, as with the disciples, our love has made us willing to abandon all for the sake of the Lord—that is, to give up our own ideas and desires for the sake of the truth. Only such a love and willingness will cause us to be sufficiently humble to doubt the validity of our own concepts, to admit that the fault might be in them and not in the Word as it appears. And only in so far as we are willing to admit this, can we continue to trust in the Word, to have faith, even in the midst of temptation. The temptation will then serve the use of removing from our minds the fallacies and evils which prevent us from understanding the truth and from seeing the Lord.

As with the two on the road to Emmaus, when we are first granted to see the Divine truth of the Word after temptation, we may not recognize it for what it is—a vision of the Lord. Nevertheless, it will inspire us with greater love and will give us a greater desire to receive faith and love from the Lord. And in so far as we receive these, making them our own, so far we will be conjoined with the Lord and come to know Him in the breaking of bread.

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 24:13-35; *Arcana Coelestia* 9412:1-2,6