

THE BREAKING OF BREAD

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And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" (Luke 24:17).

On the very first Easter morning, on the day that the Lord rose from the sepulcher, two of His followers set off on a journey from the city of Jerusalem toward a small village called Emmaus. It was a distance of sixty stadia, or about seven miles. As they walked, they spoke sadly with one other. They were sad because, though they had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth would redeem Israel, He had instead been put to death on the cross.

The two men had indeed heard the reports of the women at the sepulcher that Jesus had risen, that He was still alive. It is obvious, though, that they did not really believe these reports. They thought Jesus was dead, which is why they talked so sadly as they walked along the road.

Not much is known about these two followers of the Lord. We know that they knew the apostles. We also know that one of them was called Cleopas. But we don't really know just who they were, nor do we know why they were traveling toward Emmaus. In fact, nobody even knows for certain exactly where the village of Emmaus was located.

These external details, though, are relatively unimportant, for in a deeper sense each one of us is familiar with these sad men, and each one of us can understand something of what their journey was like. They represent a state that each one of us will experience, and the journey to Emmaus is a journey which each one of us must make.

The two men were sad because they felt disillusioned. They had trusted in the Lord. They had hoped that He would prove to be the long-awaited Messiah. Now they were disappointed, because those high hopes now seemed to have been misplaced. Jesus of Nazareth was dead. He had been condemned to death and crucified, and it was now the third day since His execution.

Every follower of the Lord comes eventually to experience this bitter sense of disillusionment. We all come to a point when we feel that our religion has, in one way or another, failed to live up to our expectations. There are, of course, those times when the teachings of the Word affect us deeply, when we see so clearly the wonder and power of the Lord as He teaches us within His Word. But then there are other times, other states, when religion seems so cold, so dry, so ineffective. Life seems pointless and without meaning, and the fact that we have a religion, the fact that we believe in the Lord, does not seem to make any difference at all.

Intellectually we know that religion is important. But the problem does not really lie in what we think; it has to do with the way we feel. Whatever we may still believe and think about the fundamental importance of the Word and its teachings, it somehow doesn't seem to matter that much anymore. It doesn't seem to have any real effect on the way we feel about things. We have a very real problem, as we try in vain to discover the cause of our disillusionment.

Now there is, in each one of us, a deep-seated reluctance to blame ourselves when things go wrong. Our love of ourselves blinds us to our own faults. We look outside of ourselves for something else to blame. For the two men on the road to Emmaus, the reason they felt discouraged seemed obvious to them. It wasn't their fault they felt sad and discouraged. They were sad because of what had happened in Jerusalem. They were discouraged because the Lord had been arrested and crucified. They didn't see that the real problem lay within themselves—in their closed-minded refusal to accept the wonderful news that Jesus was indeed still alive.

Now Jerusalem represents the church, specifically the church as to its doctrines. If religion has lost its meaning for us, if it seems dry and ineffective and we are disillusioned, we are tempted to place the blame for this upon what has happened in Jerusalem. Our tendency is to blame the doctrines. We may still believe these doctrines, but we feel that they are somehow too abstract, too complicated, too irrelevant, to be of much use in the course of real everyday life.

Yet, when we feel this way, the underlying problem is not really with the doctrines at all. It lies, instead, within us, and in our own relationship with these doctrines. Though we may not realize it, the problem lies in the fact that we have not yet really seen these doctrines to be true. We do not yet truly believe them, just as the two men did not really believe the reports about Jesus.

A person cannot truly believe the doctrines of the church until he truly lives according to them. It might not seem to be this way. We can seem to ourselves to believe, to be fully convinced of the truth of the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, even if we do not fully live what it teaches. The Heavenly Doctrine, though, would ask us this: Do we really believe the truth of something if we do not live it? When a person does not live according to his beliefs, then, despite all appearances to the contrary, his faith is not yet a faith in the truth. He is placing his faith, not in the truth, but in himself. He believes in the Heavenly Doctrine, not because he sees the truth within it, but because he sees himself within the teachings.

In the *Arcana Coelestia* there is a remarkable description of this kind of faith. "Faith from self, or from what is man's own," we read, "is not faith, for it causes him to see falsities as truths, and truths as falsities; and if he sees truths as truths, still he does not see, because he does not believe, for he sees himself in them, and not the Lord" (3863:14).

To see oneself in the truth and not the Lord! A person can actually believe the truth to be true, and yet believe it for the wrong reason. He might, for example, see the truth as something which he himself is wise enough to understand. He may see the truth as true because *he* finds it intellectually stimulating; it is interesting to *him*. But if a person believes only for self-centered reasons, then he has failed to see the essential truth of the Heavenly Doctrine. And so his faith is weak and he is easily disillusioned. He may think he has faith. He may think he believes. But if, his state happens to change, he may well change his mind about what he believes. He may even forsake his faith.

True faith, though, is different. True faith is from the Lord and can only be received by a person who actually lives his religion. True faith is to see the Lord Himself speaking within the pages of revelation. It is to accept His words as the words of a King. Think of how many people welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem as their King. And indeed He is a King. He is the King of our

souls! And because He is our King, we are to accept and obey what He teaches us. It is not to be merely our *opinion* that His Word is true—an opinion that may or may not be changed later on. True faith is not an opinion at all, but a vision, a sight of the truth—truth that is always true, whether or not a person accepts it. Indeed, a person’s vision or sight of the truth is not from himself at all, but is from the Lord. It is the Lord who gives a person to see the truth. It is the Lord who gives faith. And it was to give people such a vision of the truth that the Lord came into the world. As He told Pilate: “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37).

To see the Lord as the source of all truth, and to see truth in the Word as the words of the Lord our King, is to receive from Him a constant vision—a vision of the truth which does not diminish. Such a vision is given by the Lord to those who love and who obey His truth. On the other hand, if a person does not *live* the truth, any vision He may have of it will be weak and vacillating.

This is why the two men in the story lost their vision of the Lord in Jerusalem. For it was there that the Lord was crucified and appeared to die. We too can lose our vision of the Lord. We may read the Word and the Heavenly Doctrine and understand many wonderful things within them. Nevertheless, in certain states these wonderful teachings can seem dead, dry and devoid of life. We fail to see them as the living words of the Lord Himself. He seems to be absent from the very teachings which He Himself has given. So, too, it was in Jerusalem, in His very own city, the Lord was crucified and appeared to die.

But this apparent death of the Lord within Jerusalem is not permanent. In time the teachings of religion can once again be seen for what they are: meaningful, living, full of wonder. Eventually, we come to see once again that these teachings are the living words of the Lord Himself. But it can take time to regain our vision. Indeed, in a sense it takes a lifetime. To acquire a living faith in the Lord, we must make the journey from Jerusalem toward Emmaus. Jerusalem is the church, the Lord’s doctrine. Emmaus, on the other hand, is a village, and a village represents more external things. It is in the external things of life, or, rather, in the application of what we know to the way we live, that the Lord is to be found once again.

And so we must walk the road to Emmaus; we must strive, everyday, to do what the Word teaches. It can seem a long journey. To truly live our religion means that our inherent tendencies toward evil must be subdued. This does not come easily, and it does not come quickly. It is one thing to focus, in church or while reading the Word, upon the Lord’s love, and the need for charity and patience. But actually practicing this in the external affairs of everyday life poses a far greater challenge. As the daily aggravations and frustrations of a far-from-perfect world pile up in our minds, living what we know to be true and good can become very difficult indeed.

Yet, this is the goal—to subdue our impulses to do what is wrong and to bring under control the natural inclinations with which we have all been born. It is vital that we attain this goal, for only then can we really experience a lasting sense of delight in the life of religion. Until the evils of the natural man are actually subjugated, states of selfishness constantly return. This is why the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, the actual living of a life of good, can seem so arduous and long—and sad. For while we still love evil, we do not really enjoy the doing of good.

Nevertheless, the Lord is still with us. He joined the two men on their journey to Emmaus. But they didn't recognize Him. Their eyes, it is said, "were restrained" (Luke 24:16). They didn't know who He was until later on. So too, with us, the Lord can seem absent, and His Word can seem empty. We can lose our sense of vision. Yet, all the time, while we are trying to do what is right, the Lord is walking beside us, even though we don't recognize Him. And it is His desire that in time our vision will be renewed.

This is what eventually happened to the two disciples. As they continued toward Emmaus, the Lord began to explain the many things in Scripture that speak of Him. So, too, with us. As we continue to walk toward Emmaus—to apply what we know to life—we begin to see once more the real meaning and significance of the Word. We begin to see new things within the teachings of Divine revelation. As the Lord explained His Word to the two disciples, their hearts, it is said, burned within them. They were deeply affected by what this man was teaching them.

As the day began to end, the men stopped to eat. It had been a long journey, and they were very hungry. They urged this stranger to stay with them while they rested. And so the three of them dined together. And the man took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Then, suddenly, they recognized who this man really was. They were in the presence of the Lord Himself.

Bread is broken so that it can be shared. To break bread and share it with someone else is to communicate—to share—what is good. And to eat the bread that is offered is to make this good part of oneself. The bread which the Lord desires to share with us is His Divine good. He wants to give us of Himself. He wants to flow into our hearts with love and charity, and He wants us to receive this love, freely and with delight. The whole journey to Emmaus—the whole journey of life, with its struggles and temptations—has as its goal that we may eat the bread that He gives us, and delight in it. This is why the things of religion *must* be brought down to the everyday concerns of life. However much we may feel inspired by the teachings of the Word, and however clearly we might see that these teachings are from the Lord Himself, this inspiration and vision, will eventually die, unless we struggle to live the truth which the Lord has given us.

Yes, it *is* a sad journey at times. There are obstacles, evils, in the externals of our minds, which at times remove all sense of delight in the doing of what is good. They make the Word and religion itself appear to be only a meaningless exercise and duty. Our vision of the Lord can grow very dim on the way to Emmaus. But it is on this very journey that we will eventually meet the Lord. If we continue along the road toward Emmaus, continue to strive to live the truth in the external concerns of everyday life, then the evils which cause us to feel unhappy, will be cast aside. We will come to feel an ever-increasing sense of delight in living the teachings of the Lord. And with this sense of delight we will be given to see, to see beyond any doubt at all, that the teachings of the Word are true and full of life, and that they are the words—indeed the voice—of the living God Himself. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is alive and with us forevermore.

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 24:1-32; *Arcana Coelestia* 3863:14-15

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