

An Affirmative Spirit

A Holy Supper address by the Rev. Mark D. Pendleton
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It's hard to miss the affirmative and cooperative spirit encapsulated in the Virgin Mary at Christmastime each year. The news that the angel Gabriel brought was earth-shattering to say the least. Mary would conceive in her womb and bring forth a son whose name and quality of life would be Jesus—Savior. He would ascend the throne of the kingdom of heaven and reign forever, and of His kingdom there would be no end. In Him all people would find safety and salvation from everything that causes suffering and harm. Would all of the things the angel said to Mary take place? Yes, they would. For with God nothing will be impossible.

Mary's response to the angel was brief, and in that response we hear a spirit of affirmation for each of the things the angel foretold. She believed that the things the angel said were true, and that they would happen just as he said. And so she offered herself up and said (in essence), "Let these things happen to me as you say": "Behold the maidservant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

We know that Mary represents that part of each one of us that longs to know the way to real and lasting love, and that longs to have that love become a growing reality in our lives. Joseph represents the part of us that knows from the Word how to demonstrate that love to others around us. Each time these two parts in us (Mary and Joseph) come together in a committed relationship, a way is opened, and the Lord enters into us and touch our hearts with the next piece of that love. Because of these things, the annunciation to Mary represents each new sense of promise we experience which says that true and unselfish love is possible in our lives; and Mary's response to the angel is actually our affirmative response to that promise. We believe it is true; we believe it can happen of the Lord. And so, like Mary, we offer ourselves up to the Lord—soul, mind, and body—and we say to Him, "Let it be to me according to Your Word."

Well, what does an affirmative spirit or an affirmative attitude have to do with the Holy Communion at Christmastime? It has a lot to do with it, because when we come to take part in that Holy Communion, it's an opportunity to affirm some of the foundational things that have to do with the Lord's birth in our lives. Then, after we have taken part in the Holy Supper, that same spirit of affirmation goes forth from us and is experienced by us in a living way with all who we meet and associate with.

We're taught in the New Church that at the heart of a true and genuinely affirmative spirit are three things:

- First, there's an affirmation that the Lord is our salvation.
- Second, there's an affirmation that the Lord's Word, and genuine doctrine drawn from the Word, are true.
- And third, there's an affirmation that love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor are the way that life ought to be lived.

In short, a truly affirmative attitude is one which says, *The Lord is the Lord; the Word is the Word; and a life of love is the way to go.*

Well, when we come to the Holy Supper it's an opportunity to affirm these three things. First, it's an opportunity to affirm that the Lord is our salvation. We know that the Lord was born on earth at Christmastime with a mission or purpose in mind, and that was to personally overcome the power of hell that had risen up in both the spiritual and natural worlds at that time. We also know that in the process of accomplishing this, the Lord gathered everything of His own love, wisdom, and true humanness to Himself—to the point that He became Humanness itself. This means that if we want to experience some of the same power to overcome things hurtful or destructive in our own lives, and if we want to experience the next level of true human love ourselves, we can only do so by looking to the Lord and borrowing on these things from Him. In this way He truly is our salvation. And so, when we come to the Holy Communion we affirm that *the Lord is the Lord.*

In addition, when we come to the Holy Communion it's an opportunity to affirm that the words the Lord speaks to us in His Word, and also all genuine doctrine drawn from His Word, are true, and that we need that truth to govern the way we feel, think, and behave, so that good things can happen in our lives. When we come to the Holy Communion we affirm that *the Word is the Word.*

And finally, when we come to Holy Communion, it's an opportunity to affirm that a life of love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor is the way we ought to live. Why else do we come to this Holy Communion than with a final hope and goal of becoming channels of the Lord's own love and faithfulness to others? So when we come to the Holy Supper we affirm that *a life of love is the way to go.*

But we know that a spirit of affirmation (or genuinely positive attitude) isn't something that ends with the closing song at a Christmastime Holy Supper service. It's something we carry forward with us from that service into our daily lives. It's something that's experienced between us and other people, as it impacts all of our relationships and associations for good.

One of the main things this affirmative spirit does is to help us see and focus on what is good, true, worthwhile, and affirmative in each and every person we meet and interact

with. We're told in the New Church that those who are possessed of a true and genuinely positive attitude "hardly notice the evil in another person, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are his or hers; and on his evils and falsities they place a good interpretation." "Of such a nature are all angels," we're told, "It being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good."

So each year at Christmastime we're reminded of the true and genuine spirit of affirmation encapsulated in the Virgin Mary. And each year at Christmastime we have the opportunity to come to the Holy Communion with that same spirit of affirmation. It's a spirit which confidently affirms that *the Lord is the Lord*—He is our salvation; that *the Word is the Word*—it is true, and it is the guide for our lives; and that *a life of love is the way to go*. When we come to the Holy Communion with a true and genuinely affirmative attitude a way is opened and the Lord enters into us and is born anew in our hearts. He strengthens His love and that positive attitude in us; and these things then go forth from us and touch each and every relationship and association we experience in positive ways.

"Then the angel said to Mary, 'Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest.' Then Mary said, 'Behold, the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.'" Amen.

Readings: Luke 1:26-38

Quote for the week:

There are two basic attitudes of mind called negative and affirmative. An affirmative attitude occurs when someone regards affirmatively the things which comprise doctrine drawn from the Word, that is, when he or she thinks within himself and believes that those things are true because the Lord has spoken them. This attitude leads to perfect intelligence and wisdom. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2568:4)

The Word teaches that the first and foremost matter of doctrine is love to the Lord and charity towards the neighbor. People with an affirmative attitude towards this are able to enter into whatever things of a rational, factual, and indeed sensory kind they please, each according to his or her ability, knowledge, and experience. Indeed the more they do so the more they are confirmed, for the whole natural order is full of what is confirmatory. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2588:3)

...Those who have charity hardly notice the evil in another person, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are his or hers; and on his evils and falsities they place a good interpretation. Of such a nature are all angels, it being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good. (*Arcana Caelestia*) 1079:2)

It is angelic to look for good in a person. (*Spiritual Experiences* 1675)

The truth is that the Lord is the human race's salvation. Once a person develops an affirmative attitude toward this truth, countless things are added to it and are filled with the good that is flowing in. For good is flowing in constantly from the Lord, but where no affirmative attitude exists it is not accepted. An affirmative attitude is therefore the first means and so to speak first dwelling-place of the good flowing in from the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3913:5)