
PEACE & REST

Have you found peace this Christmas?

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Peace and rest! Isn't that what we all long for, peace and rest? But what kind of peace? There are different kinds of peace that we hope for. We are all aware of the wars that our country fights in other lands across the globe, with the hope of bringing stability and peace to foreign nations. This is a kind of peace that we all hope for, that we can live in a world that is without fear. To live without fear of attack and destruction on our country's soil, to be at peace with our neighbours. This is a kind of peace that we hope for on a global scale.

But have you found your own peace and rest this Christmas? Is there fighting and combat closer to your home and to your heart? We long for peace in our relationships. We get upset and frustrated with people at work who have different work ethics to us. We feel hurt and even betrayed by our communities when they discard values and dreams that we have been working towards for our families and our own lives. We get angry with our parents or our spouses when what they want, and even need, conflicts with our desires. In all these relationships when the combats are over, when there is calm and co-operation, we experience a kind of peace.

We also experience a kind of peace when the things we plan and do, work out favourably for us. When a problem is weighing on our minds and we manage to resolve it, we feel peace at the easing of the problem. Again this is only an earthly kind of peace that is temporary, it is not real peace. Where do we find peace that lasts? Where do we find true peace and rest from the conflicts in our lives?

We read from the teachings for the New Church,

That this peace of mind, this relief and delight when anxieties are banished and things turn out well for us, may look like effects of peace; but they do not come from real peace except in people who are focused on heavenly good. This is because peace occurs only in [heavenly] good. (*Heaven & Hell* 290)

This passage is saying that we cannot obtain true peace from the world. We cannot obtain true peace through our own doing. There is only one source of true peace and the Lord is that source. We read further from the teachings for the New Church that,

Peace actually flows in from the Lord into the very core of [people who are focused on heavenly good], and from that core comes down and spreads into their lower natures, causing peace of mind, relief of the spirit, and a consequent joy. (*Heaven & Hell* 290)

There are many places in the Christmas story where people experience joy, relief of spirit and peace of mind. Mary sings a beautiful song of how her spirit rejoices in God her saviour. The wise men from the east rejoiced with exceedingly great joy when “the star came and stood over where the young child was.” Simeon lifted baby Jesus up in his arms and blessed God. These and more are reactions to a sense of peace that finding the Lord brought to their lives. These are the kinds of peace, relief and joy that we long for in our lives. And it all comes from the Lord and is present with us if we have created space for Him in our core.

What can we learn from Mary, Simeon, the shepherds or the wise men that will direct us to what needs to be at our core?

Let us consider more closely the shepherd. The shepherds were out in the field and after the host of angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds made their way to Bethlehem to find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. After finding the Lord they left glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. They too found the Lord and found an inner peace from which they felt blessed and were joyful.

Right in the literal story of the shepherd we can see how finding the Lord brought with it happiness and peace into their core. The shepherds represent one of the ways that we can find the Lord and make space for Him in our heart and minds. The shepherds represent special truths that we have learned from the Lord’s Word.

There are many, many true things we learn from the Lord’s Word that we store in our memories waiting for them to be of use to us one day. The shepherds represent a few of those truths which first answer the call to go find the Lord. The shepherds are the spiritual truths that are vessels for what is good and loving. These truths are able to lead us to the Lord when we recognise the potential for love and for happiness in them. We are able to see where truths can lead us when there is a basic goodness in the way that we live.

The shepherds were simple people whose way of life entailed caring and protecting their flocks from harm. When there is simple goodness in our lives of loving our family and helping our neighbour not for reward but from an enjoyment of performing those acts, then the Lord is able to work in us. The Lord is able to call to those truths that resonate with our existing good life, and give them the good news that the Lord can be found. The shepherds represent these truths that touch us, they have always touched us and mean more to us than other truths do.

Each person has different truths that touch them. A love for the truths about children and how they are raised in heaven inspire some to become teachers. An architect is drawn to the layout and sphere of heaven and reflects that in his work. Or a couple are moved by the ideals of a conjugal love and strive to grow their marriage on a spiritual as well as natural level.

At the cores of each one of us are these truths that have been touched by the Lord and He is working to join the goodness of the way that we live with the truths of His Word. There may be many other areas of our lives that don’t yet reflect this potential union of what we know to be true and the way that we live our lives but the Lord still calls. He is calling to those truths we have learned that can be joined to the goodness of our lives. These are the

truths that are the shepherds in our live, truths which are moved and inspired by love, by the Lord.

The union of good with truth only happens when we make a conscious effort to live according to what the Lord teaches. Without an understanding of the truths and a conscious effort no union is possible. The shepherds discussed among themselves and chose to act on what the angels had told them. This represents our co-operation with the Lord as we choose to live a good life, not from an innocent ignorance, but from a fully committed understanding of what the Lord wants for our live.

A life of use from a full understanding unites good with truth. This is what forms the core of our being. The life of use, the life of charitable living is the core into which the Lord can flow and be present with us. The marriage of good and truth in a life of use is the core of heaven from which all happiness, peace and innocence flows. We read from the teaching for the New Church,

Eternal happiness, which is also called heavenly joy, is imparted to those who are in [good] and [truth] in the Lord, from the Lord. For this [good] and [truth] have that joy in them. (*Heavenly Doctrines* 236)

But those who are in evil, peace is impossible. They may experience a kind of peace, a peace, rest and delight when things go their way but it is an external peace, a temporary peace because internally there is always a burning love of self which leads them into their next torment.

All unrest is from evil and falsity and all peace is from good and truth (AC 3170). We experience states of unrest and anxiety when we are going through temptations and a state of peace and rest when we are victorious over those temptations. The combat and labour of temptations are represented in the six days of creation and on the seventh day there was peace and rest.

The state of peace and rest is not a state of idleness. We are in a state of eternal rest when we are free to elevate our minds and to apply our selves to studying or to work that arouses our mind and gives it life and delight. We experience the blessing of peace and rejuvenating rest when we are being active, when we are performing uses, participating in the life of our families, sharing in the activities of our communities.

We experience peace and rest when through all these activities we are focused on heavenly good. When we focus on sharing our love with others through all our interactions with them, then we experience heavenly joy and happiness. We read from the teaching for the New Church that,

The delight itself which is in the love of doing what is good without any end of recompense, is the reward which remains to eternity; for every affection of love remains inscribed on the life. Into this there is insinuated by the Lord heaven and eternal happiness. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9984)

When you hear or read the stories of Christmas and feel the delight and peace that those wonderful stories hold, be reminded that we too can have peace and rest. Not just the fleeting peace offered by worldly calm but lasting peace that comes to us from the Lord through our core. A core made up of a good life, lived with purpose and a full understanding of what the Lord requires of us.

I'll end with a sentence from the book *Conjugal Love* that reminds us of where our true peace & rest come from, "What are the delights of the bodily senses without the delights of the soul?" (CL 16)

Amen

Lessons: Isaiah 9:2-6; Luke 2:8-20; AC 9983; AC 9984; CL 16; AR 306

To do good that is good must be from the love of good, thus for the sake of good. They who are in this love dislike merit, for they love to do, and perceive satisfaction from it; and on the other hand, they are saddened if it is believed that it is done for the sake of something of self. The case herein is almost as it is with those who do what is good to friends for the sake of friendship, to a brother for the sake of brotherhood, to wife and children for their own sake, to their country for their country's sake; thus from friendship and from love. They who think well also say and insist that they do not do well for the sake of themselves; but for the sake of those to whom they do it. The delight itself which is in the love of doing what is good without any end of recompense, is the reward which remains to eternity; for every affection of love remains inscribed on the life. Into this there is insinuated by the Lord heaven and eternal happiness. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9983; 9984)

But what are the delights of the bodily senses without the delights of the soul? It is the soul which makes them delightful. In themselves, the delights of the soul are imperceptible happiness and inner peace; but as they descend into the thoughts of the mind, and from these into the sensations of the body, they become more and more perceptible. In the thoughts of the mind, they are perceived as states of happiness; in the sensations of the body, as delights; and in the body itself as pleasures. From all these together comes eternal happiness; but the happiness which comes from the last alone, is not eternal but temporary. It comes to an end and passes away and sometimes becomes unhappiness. (*Conjugal Love* 16)

By "peace" are signified all things in their whole which are from the Lord, and thence all things of heaven and the church, and the happiness of life in them; these are of peace in the highest or inmost sense. It follows therefore that "peace" is charity, spiritual security, and internal rest; for when man is in the Lord, he is in peace with his neighbor, which is charity; in protection against the hells, which is spiritual security; and when he is in peace with his neighbor, and in protection against the hells, he is in internal rest from evils and falsities. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 306)