

Peace

A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Sr.

Readings

Isaiah 55:10-13

"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.
"For you shall go out with joy,
And be led out with peace;
The mountains and the hills
Shall break forth into singing before you,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree,
And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;
And it shall be to the LORD for a name,
For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

Arcana Coelestia 2780

The state of peace in heaven is like that at dawn on earth. Within the state of peace in heaven all heavenly and spiritual things manifest themselves. From it comes a delightful and gladsome air, spreading through all things. Similarly at the time of dawn all things appear before us full of delight and gladness.

Arcana Coelestia 5662

"Jehovah lift up His face upon you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:26). Almost everyone believes that peace consists in being kept safe from enemies and in living in serenity at home and among companions. That kind of peace is not however what is meant here but another kind that is immensely superior, namely heavenly peace. You cannot receive this peace unless you are led by the Lord and abide in the Lord, that is, unless you are in heaven where the Lord is the All in all. For heavenly peace enters in when the desires that spring from self-love and love of the world are removed. These are the desires that take peace away. They molest you inwardly and cause you at length to consider rest to consist in unrest and peace in molestations, because you consider delight to consist in evil desires.

Peace is central to every form of happiness and bliss and is therefore what reigns universally within every individual thing. Therefore the ancient people used the common saying "Peace to you", meaning, "May all be well." Or else they would ask people "Did they have peace?" meaning, "Was all well with them?" All unrest is due to evil and falsity, whereas peace is due to goodness and truth.

"I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

1. Nearly all people long for peace, and pursue it.
 - A. We may go to war for peace. We may stay with our particular friends or families, renouncing others. We may go to a favorite holiday spot to enjoy it. We may try for riches, thinking that the worries of low finance will then be banished.
2. None of these things bring true peace. Wars break out all over, our lovely holiday spot or family group can still be pained by conflict. The pursuit of riches is a very unrestful thing.
 - A. And more than anything, people cannot escape themselves: not in worldly security, nor in quiet, restful surroundings.
 - i. If there is in them that which is opposed to peace, then the quietness of the world God made so beautiful is in itself a torment, and paradise will be a prison. The jailer is within.
3. Worldly things bring an interim of rest, perhaps.
 - A. But it passes, and peace itself is no nearer than before.
 - B. The calm of this world is transient, and so it is not peace. "Not as the world gives do I give to you."
 - C. People are afraid, and their hearts are troubled, because the rest of their soul is threatened.
 - D. If they have any intelligence at all, they long for the peace that is within, knowing that if they have that, even tragedy will not remove it permanently. "My peace I give to you.... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

4. Today, let us talk about three things:
 - A. The ingredients of peace.
 - B. The joy of peace.
 - C. The path to true peace.

5. Ingredients:
 - A. The Writings for the New Church re-define two words - peace and tranquillity.
 - B. They say that true peace is so deep that we just feel its blessing. We'll know it to the full in heaven.
 - C. Tranquillity is the word they use for what we call peace on earth.
 - i. They define it as "the rest of mind that those enjoy who are content in God" (HH 284).
 - ii. It also exists when combat with evil ceases, when no more are people driven here and there by evil forces which they have to resist, and whose attack they never know when to expect (AC 92).

6. Peace and tranquillity are thought of as negatives – freedom from stresses and challenges. That is not how the teachings of the New Church define them.
 - A. They are found in an active life. They are not neutral states, as we so often conceive them to be.
 - B. They do not make us sit still, and revel in the absence of turmoil.
 - C. Peace is inflowing joy or delight, and tranquillity is the life itself, the going forth into useful effort, the reaching out to benefit of a mind freed from evil.
 - D. It is the joy in creative work with people who no longer fear that selfish desires or animosities are going to intrude on those things they love to do (AC 92).
 - E. We know from experience that a person who works without pressure and worry can work many more hours than the one who has anxiety and frustration. They who are at peace put their heart into their labors, and are not harmed by them, even when they are pushed.
 - F. If we are anxious or mad or resentful at someone, we find our mind divided, and the work frustrating.

7. So if you are following the Lord you will enjoy tranquillity.
 - A. But peace itself will be in your heart, and you will reap its benefits, even here.
 - B. And here is the benefit that makes it so precious.
 - C. The teaching of the New Church says that peace rules every delight that we have. Peace rules every delight that we have.
 - D. It is the essence of every delight we have.
 - E. They say that an innocent heart receives goodness from the Lord, and then that goodness, coming from the Lord, flows down softly, gently, imparting a quiet, restful enjoyment to the good things we are doing.
8. This is peace. People who receive it know what they love to do, and they set about doing it with no interference, and no anxiety, for they are content in the loves that the Lord has given them.
 - A. They have come into a covenant of peace with the Lord. The Lord gives, and they receive, and know the blessedness of receiving that soft, gentle beauty that flows into their hearts. They are joined to the Lord, and the joy of this conjunction is peace (HH 284, 285; AC 4783, 3788).
 - B. "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My mercy shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:10).
9. So an essential requirement of peace is trust in what the Lord offers.
 - A. That's why He has given so many assurances of peace to those that would follow Him.
 - B. It seems elementary to say that we must trust the Lord, yet it is a knowledge that does not come easily to the unregenerate mind.
 - C. To know that life is part of a simple faith that life and goodness are from the Lord, yet we are tempted not to think of it very often.
 - D. To believe that happiness and good are from Him is almost impossible when we want something that He has forbidden, and it seems only this thing that can bring us happiness (AC 2893, 6469).

10. Yet without this trust in the Lord there is no peace, no, nor ever can be.
- A. When a person feels they govern themselves, then the first thing they do is look at what they desire, and then they try to seek it.
 - B. It may be wrong, but they want it. But in seeking it, they have care and anxiety, because how are they going to ensure that they get it?
 - C. They have their own ingenuity, their brains, their capacity for work, and luck.
 - D. If they meet with others who can outstrip them, they may lose what they want, and if their health falters they may lose their goal, and if their luck fails, or another's luck holds, they may not gain their desires.
 - E. So there is care for the morrow, distrust of others, contempt for some, anger with others. No peace.
 - F. And there is the tendency to cling to present delights, and to imagine future ones and plan feverishly for their realization.
 - G. Such is the life of so very many on earth, for without trust in the Lord, nothing is secure, nothing safe. "I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8).
11. These are some of the ingredients of peace but what its joy is like is really impossible to describe.
- A. The Writings present an analogy when they say that the state of peace is like the feelings of a person who wakes gently at early dawn in the springtime, and looks forth on the quietness of the Lord's world, and feels the wonder of the dawn and the spring.
 - B. It is only an analogy, but it imparts a feeling.
 - C. Also, the beauty of spring is something that is not tangible and specific, it is something which permeates the whole creation and touches everything from within, breathing in a new life, awakening to new joy.

12. That is how peace is with the angels of heaven.
- A. It is gentle and soothing, but it also awakens every sensitivity with its gentle touch, as it flows down from the Lord of love.
 - B. It is peace that the angels feel each new dawn as they wake in heaven, and hear songs expressing heavenly affections, and, together with their partners in the quietness of their homes they pray to the Lord, and think with delight of the work to be done that day.
 - C. They know that they may labor with no interference from angry sources, nor any disturbance from indolent or selfish loves within.
 - D. They know that the labor will be fruitful, because it is a labor in peace.
 - E. The joy that inflows each day of eternity is represented in the Lord's Prayer by the request, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is new every morning (AC 357, 1726, 2780; HH 289).
13. And, of course, there is peace only in mutual love, for when people love others as much as themselves, they bear them no enmity.
14. What of the path towards peace?
- A. We can see that the enemies of this state of mind are within us, not out there with other bad people.
 - B. For a person who has chosen to love evil knows no rest.
 - C. They may seem to at times, especially when they have just gained something that they want very badly, for then they think to themselves that at last they are happy.
 - D. But they quickly look for new goals, and even in the enjoyment of success there are within them hatreds and resentments and contempt which, as soon as they are thought of, destroy all rest of mind (HH 290).
 - E. Peace that comes and goes is not peace, and in the other world is lost altogether, for the true internal state with an evil person is combat for the things they love against God, against law, against others and it keeps breaking out (see AC 2183).
 - F. "All unrest is from evil and falsity, and all peace is from good and truth" (AC 3170). A simple statement, yet true for all that.

15. Therefore we enter into combat that we may have peace.
- A. We seek a state of unrest by declaring war on the foe within, knowing that they and the hells will fight back and give us no rest for a long time.
 - B. Just as it takes courage for an adult to declare war on one who threatens them and their own, so it takes courage to declare war on the evil spirits that afflict us.
 - C. That is why the Lord said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For... one's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36).
 - D. The interior household, that is! For the things which destroy our rest of mind are all things that we treasure. They are spiritually our close relatives, although they would kill our spirits. We have to see them as enemies, which is why the Lord came to send a sword upon them.
 - E. That battle is never pleasant. It is not enjoyable to be at war with our own desires, to be fighting a part of ourselves, to have the torment of temptation. In such states it seems there is no peace.
 - F. It is easier if we realize that these feelings don't come from ourselves! They are inspired, every one of them, by the hells. We don't create evil or bad feelings, the hells inspire them, and we can see them as our enemies.
16. And yet there is peace in this battle!
- A. After all, what are we fighting for?
 - B. We are fighting for our own peace!
 - C. We fight so that the enemy may be cast out, whatever evil the hells inspire.
 - D. Peace is our goal, and is inwardly within the person who fights. Peace is within us, even as we fight.
17. The moment you decide to turn from evil, something of peace is within you.
- A. That's where your strength comes from.
 - B. You long for that wonderful moment when evil doesn't threaten your happiness, and you can live in the tranquillity of heaven.
 - C. If you didn't have this as your goal, the Lord says, "you would in no way have the power and strength to combat" (AC 3696).

18. So I ask you to picture, in your mind's eye, your own peace.
- A. Think what your lives will be like when the things that bring unrest are cast out, imagine what your tranquillity will be like on earth, and envision your hope of peace in heaven.
 - B. Think what it might be like for you to wake in your home in heaven in the early dawns of perpetual spring, to labor with your partner into eternity in peace, to love unselfishly in a kingdom which knows no turmoil.
19. And then we reflect on what stops your present enjoyment of beautiful surroundings, or a quiet home, or a job simply done, and discover the enemy within which is making worthwhile joys to seem undelightful.
- A. Then we will fight, so that we can have those joys, and the peace that they bring, knowing that no other state of life is worth striving for if we don't have this.
 - B. Thus peace is within in the battle, and causes us to have strength.
 - C. And, at times during our fighting, there are many moments when we know tranquillity, when the Lord gives us rest so that we may experience a little of that for which we are fighting, and return to the combat strengthened (AC 1726).
 - D. But it was of the end of this confrontation that the Lord promised, when He counseled people to have confidence in His power to overcome those foes.
 - E. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but have confidence! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Amen.