

Peace from Trusting in the Lord's Loving Guidance

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When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" *Revelation 6:10*

The souls under the altar cried out in sadness. They cried out to the Lord that a problem had not been fixed. They cried out wondering how long it would be until this problem was fixed. We can know this state of mind ourselves. We can recognize a distressing situation in our own lives, in the lives of loved ones, or in the institutions and communities we care about, and sadly reflect, "Lord, how long will it be until this problem is solved?"

For example, a woman can know that she tends to be impatient with others. She can acknowledge this problem to the Lord and can try to change this life habit. But over and over again, she recognizes too late that she has once again expressed impatience in ways that were hurtful to others. She could cry out to the Lord, "How long will it be until this impatience no longer troubles me and those around me?" If we want something that seems good and useful and ask for it, why doesn't the Lord clearly provide us help that we can recognize?

The souls under the altar spoken of in *Revelation* reflect a clear example of a difficult situation that the Lord was allowing to continue. This prophecy written by the disciple John describes a disorderly time in the future church and in the life after death. It reflected a time when the intermediate place between heaven and hell, called the World of Spirits, was infested with people whose deeply evil lives were hidden from view. The "souls under the altar" were simple people that would have been led astray by the evil if the simple people interacted with them. To prevent this destructive interaction the Lord had these simple good people safely living in an out-of-the way part of the World of Spirits referred to as "the lower earth." Concerning this sanctuary the teachings for the New Church state:

The place where they were hidden away is called a lower earth, which exists just above the hells, below the world of spirits, and there, by a communication with heaven and by being joined with the Lord, they lived in safety. There are many such places, and the people there lived happily with each other and worshipped the Lord. Nor did they have any knowledge of hell. After a last judgment the people who are there were from time to time raised by the Lord into heaven, and when they were being raised, those meant by the dragon were removed. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 845:2)

The “souls under the altar” had to stay for a time distant from heaven. It was for their own protection and long-term welfare. Eventually it would be the right time for the light of heaven to shine on the deeply evil hypocrites. Their hypocrisy would be revealed. They would lose the power to lead simple people away from the Lord and a good life. Then those in the lower earth would be raised to their eternal homes in heaven, but this could not take place until the right time. The Lord similarly knows that it is essential that important changes in our lives must take place “little by little.” (See *Arcana Caelestia* 9335:2)

A primary foundation of the church in a person is that individual’s faith in the Lord. Faith in this sense means a deep and profound acknowledgment of the Lord’s love, wisdom, and guidance. It means a recognition that we need His help if we want to live truly happy and useful lives. It carries a confidence that the Lord has been, is, and will be watching over every least aspect of our lives and is unceasingly working to lead us to the highest and greatest possible eternal happiness and usefulness.

In the book of the Writings of the New Church, *The Doctrine of Faith*, we’re given the following definition of faith:

The universal of the Christian faith on a person's part is that the person should believe in the Lord. For by believing in Him conjunction [which is a close relationship of love] with Him is effected and this is the means of salvation. To believe in the Lord is to have trust that He will save: and because no one can have such trust except a person who lives a good life, therefore, this also is meant by believing in Him. (*The Doctrine of Faith* 36)

The Lord calls us to seek a growing confidence in His loving and powerful guidance of our lives. This confidence affects us to the very core of our lives. We are told in the *Arcana Caelestia*:

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads toward an end that is good. When we believe these things about the Lord we are at peace, since we fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs us. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8455:1)

While the Lord wishes this peace for us, He has also stated in the Beatitudes, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (*Matthew* 5:4) It isn’t that sadness and mourning are desired states in themselves. The Lord doesn’t want us to be sad, but He knows that real happiness will not come to us unless we are willing to receive His help in changing our lives. We won’t receive much benefit from this help unless we do our part to bring about change and we won’t do our part or seek the Lord’s help unless we come to a state in which we feel a deep sadness about the harm our current faults and flaws are causing.

Apparent peacefulness can be the state of a person who is feeling no responsibility for his life or who isn't feeling a need to change some aspect of it. This state of apathy or resigned acceptance isn't the peacefulness the Lord wishes for us.

Picture a man whose relationship with his children is relatively superficial because he knows little about them and has told them very little of what he values or believes in. The man may have shared the same house with these children for years, but neither would know each other very well. Why would this happen? Perhaps the man has placed such a comparatively low value on spending time with his children. Other priorities, and in his eyes more important ones, absorbed his time and attention. If some event causes him to focus at least momentarily on the emptiness in his relationship with his children how would we hope he would feel? Would we want him to shrug his shoulders and say to himself, "That is just the way things have to be."? Wouldn't we rather hope that he would feel a deep sadness that he had missed opportunities in the past to be a part of his children's lives? Wouldn't we rather hope that he would dedicate himself to changing his previous patterns of little or no involvement? If this father's recognition of the cost of his previous choices led him to a changed way of life, his initial sadness would, in the long run, be a source of blessing.

The Lord doesn't want us to be sad, but He knows that we absolutely must be willing to seek His help and do our part to change if we are going to have true and lasting happiness. He also wants us to have a deep faith that if we are seeking His help and trying to do our part that this will allow Him to lead us and change us in exactly the ways we need to change. And the Lord wants us to recognize that sometimes His time frame for what should be changed and when it should be changed is quite different from ours. His methods are beyond our understanding and recognition. We're told that "There are thousands and thousands of hidden ways, scarcely a single one of which is known to human beings, by which the Lord leads a person from the life of hell to the life of heaven." (*Arcana Caelestia* 9336:3)

Change will come as we receive the Lord's love and wisdom as our own. It will come as we intentionally, and over time, shun the evils in our lives that have harmed us and those around us. The sacrament of the Holy Supper represents our reception of the Lord's life within our own as we seek His help in daily living better than we have in the past. The bread represents all of the better, healthier inclinations and motivations that the Lord seeks to bring to our lives. These new loves and affections will focus our attention and give us the strength and commitment to do so many things that are required in following the Lord, serving our neighbor, and wisely caring for ourselves. The wine represents all of the wisdom, insight, even "common sense" that the Lord would bring to our thoughts. From these gifts we will recognize what we should and should not think, say, and do. The bread and wine represent the Lord's life being received within our own. It is His greatest desire that we receive these gifts.

The Lord knows that we will have times when we don't understand why things are happening the way they are. He knows we will sometimes wish that change was happening more rapidly than it is. He knows that there will be times in which our hearts cry out, "How long, Lord, how long?" Even as we may mourn aspects of the present and wish they could be changed now, we need to acknowledge that the Lord has a plan and a hope for us. He wants us to have deep faith in His loving care. He wants us to trust that we are being guided by Him in countless more ways than we can possibly know. May we pray for this trust. AMEN.

Lessons: Revelation 6:9-11, *Apocalypse Revealed* 325:1-2

Revelation 6:9-11

When [the Lamb] opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Apocalypse Revealed 325:1-2

"I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." This symbolizes people who were hated by the evil, treated with scorn and expelled because of their life in accordance with the Word's truths and their acknowledgment of the Lord's Divine humanity, and who were protected by the Lord to keep them from being led astray.

"Under the altar" symbolizes a lower earth where the inhabitants were protected by the Lord. An altar symbolizes worship of the Lord out of the goodness of love.

The souls of those who had been slain mean here, symbolically, not martyrs, but people who were hated, treated with scorn, and expelled by the evil in the world of spirits, and who could be led astray by followers of the dragon and by heretics.

"For the word of God and for the testimony which they held" means, symbolically, "because of their life in accordance with the Word's truths and their acknowledgment of the Lord's Divine humanity." Testimony in heaven is given only to people who acknowledge the Lord's Divine humanity, for it is the Lord who testifies, and who enables angels to testify; "for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10).

Since the souls were under the altar, it is apparent that they were being protected by the Lord. For the Lord protects all people who have lived some life of charity, to keep them from being harmed by the evil; and after the Last Judgment, when the evil have been removed, they are released from their asylums and elevated into heaven.