

## “From Use, in Use and for Use”

**Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled. (Matt 5:6)**

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What if we, as human beings were **as** aware of our need for spiritual nourishment as we are for our need for natural food and drink? What if, for example, after hours of active living, we were consumed with pangs of a spiritual hunger for our ‘spiritual selves’ in the same way our physical hunger would kick in after an active day without food? Angels do, after all, get hungry, but they know that the Lord will provide just the right spiritual food that they need to keep their angelic selves healthy and functioning.

But what if we intensely felt ‘spiritual hunger pangs’ when we were so deprived of spiritual food that we were experiencing what we might call a ‘spiritual famine?’ – times when we were experiencing such a lack of spiritual nourishment so that our spiritual bodies were wasting away? If we experienced our spiritual hunger in this way, what would we do about it? If we observed others wasting away with from spiritual starvation, how would we choose to respond?

The story we read this morning of the widow and her son who were starving to death in a famine is symbolic of this exact situation.

The famine is a spiritual metaphor for our states of suffering in times when we lack the Lord’s love and wisdom that He wishes for us through a religious life. The famine can be so great that we feel like we are dead inside because we don’t know how to satisfy the legitimate spiritual cravings that are coming from our souls -feelings that originate with Lord Himself. It represents times when we know we are struggling, but we don’t know what to do about it.

I chose this story because it seems to characterize the world we live in today. Hunger and famine certainly exist on our planet. People still die from a lack of available food (a sad fact in our modern world). But isn’t it true, if we really looked at it, that as many people die each year in our culture from ‘spiritual famine’ today as from starvation.

There are stories in the Word that teach about spiritual deprivation and the harm it causes to human beings. What one notices, is that in each story, there is some kind of lack that is not caused by natural disaster, but by human beings making poor choices.

We see one illustration of this frustration when the Israelites were gathered at the foot of Sinai while the Ten Commandments were being given. They, having forgotten the miracles that were happening at the top of the mountain, were worshipping the image of a calf made of gold- and later eating that gold.

In another example Jesus asks who would feed a hungry child a stone when he or she is asking for bread.

In the story we read in our lesson, the deprivation was represented by a famine brought on because King Ahab was trying to stamp out the worship of Jehovah in favor of an image carved out of a stone - Baal.

Each of these analogies used in the Scriptures allude to different states of spiritual famine that we can go through. First, the golden calf speaks of a state of mind when we make external pleasure or self-centered delight a false god or an end goal of our life. It is as if we are so focused on 'bowing down' to that external pleasure, that we lose all consciousness of what God wishes for us - as seen by Jehovah on the mountain next door (AC 10407).

Next, the analogy from the New Testament, the swapping of a child's bread for a stone, represents a state of mind where we are plotting and pursuing purely materialistic ends forcing the thought that these materialistic goals could actually feed our spirit. (See T 342, AC 1690).

And finally, the famine in our story – a famine caused by the worship of Baal, is noted because "Baal" represents the false idea that we can act on any self-indulgent feeling we want, as long as we can say we with our lips that 'we believe in a god'. This 'faith alone' behavior is often unwittingly promoted by religion today leaving a person thinking that they are fed when they are in reality receiving nothing of spiritual value (AR 132).

It is heartbreaking to see people dying like this because it all seems so incredibly unnecessary. The book Conjugal Love speaks of the hellish delight experienced from a lust of adultery, calling that delight the 'pleasure of insanity' (ML 442). Why 'insane'? Because from a spiritual perspective, chasing after evil delights doesn't help a person connect with life or happiness. The reality is that any action that seeks that kind of pleasure is, in reality, spiritually starving oneself and damaging to others. It makes no rational sense.

So, what is spiritual food and how do we get this 'bread of life'? One wonderful passage in the Arcana Caelestia describes it this way: **"Angels do not feed on material food, which is the food for that body which a person carries around in the world. Rather [they] hunger for the kind of food that nourishes their minds, and this, which is called spiritual food, consists in understanding what is true and in having a wise discernment of what is good. And what is amazing, angels are nourished with this food"** (AC 5576).

The food that angels eat is essentially a most delicious embodiment of 'truth' and 'discernment of that which is good.' To put it a different way, all the variety of foods in their world represent the many concepts of truth and the varying ability to see and do good actions that help other people. In heaven, the Lord is soul source of this food with His love and wisdom being the food itself.

We get a picture of just how creatively spectacular this food is when Jesus asked the Disciples to feed a mob of five thousand hungry people with only five loaves and two fish. Jesus' words around the miracle show us that the 'food' that sustains us spiritually comes only from Him. We read: **"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."** (Jn 6:51)

This miracle of the feeding of the five thousand is strikingly similar to the miracle that occurred with Elijah and the Widow. Essentially, it is the same petition that initiates each miracle. In each the message is: "Give of what little food you have and you will receive much" Or to quote from the Sermon on the Mount: **"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you"** (Luke 6:38)

This is the principle of all true spiritual nourishment. All angels receive their food in proportion to their actions – in the measure that they use what they know and love to help others. And without that use, there is no fulfillment and no reality. In heaven, angels are very much aware of this. Heaven is, therefore called a 'kingdom of useful service' And as we read in our lesson from the Arcana Caelestia: **"angels never feel happier than when they are informing and teaching spirits that stream in from the world, or when they are ministering to people [on earth]. The happiness they find in all this is more than can possibly be described.... Consequently, angelic happiness consists in use, stems from use, and is proportionate to use, that is, to the good deeds of love and charity"** (Arcana Caelestia 454).

By contrast, the passage also teaches that angels view a life of idleness as **"shameful, repulsive and nauseating"** (ibid).

To focus back on our reading of the story of Elijah and the widow, here the spiritual lesson is a slightly more specific message about how we can be fed spiritually when we feel in a state of depravation and need and we don't know how to change it. It speaks to those times when we don't feel like angels, and we are not sure what to do about it. For example, it might be a time when we open our eyes and see that we have slid emotionally into a really bad place. Or maybe it is a time when our egoistic impulses are getting the better of us. Or maybe we feel we just feel drained by private fears and worldly concerns that just won't go away.

The message about the widow is for us in those times especially if we feel as if we are down to our last little bit of spiritual life and beginning to wonder if we can go on and we are feeling lost.

These are times when we need to be raised up by 'a little' miracle. When we feel in need like this, we don't need some 'big complicated answer.' The Lord asks us to just use a little of what we have left in a simple act of obedience. Just a simple act, even if small – it doesn't have to feel like much or even like it will solve everything. It is just a small step forward. The point here is that simple obedience is an external motivator, it is a superficial willingness to do

something, not because we are excited about it, but because it is the right thing to do. And when we are willing to act, even in small ways, because it is the right thing to do, that is enough to start being fed by the Lord. One can think of the petition in the Lord's prayer: "give us this day or daily bread" meaning, give us enough - just enough to get through today. And He does.

This is the food the Lord was speaking about when He said: "**He who eats this bread will live forever**" (Jn 6:38). Action and service, motivated by the truth, no matter how small, is the key in being satisfied by the Lord's love and wisdom when we are in a spiritual famine. Through our willingness to act, the Lord immediately comes to us to us as our gentle shepherd and feeds us our daily bread. He will never leave us or forget us for He loves us with everything that He is.

And so, this brings us to the church and why I chose this sermon for today. Our church is a church offers a spiritual fulfilment, healing and joy that come through our actions connected with the Word. In a nutshell, this church exists to help people be spiritually fed by the Lord, fed through spiritually informed ways of serving the Lord's spiritual Kingdom. As in heaven, the true fulfillment offered by our church "consists in use, comes from use and is proportionate to the uses we serve. The Lord, as divine love, wishes that everyone find that spiritual fulfillment. He wants no one to go hungry. And so, could that be a call for our church to band together, go out and do what we can to help end spiritual hunger.

Amen.

#### **Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 454**

Some spirits think that heaven and heavenly joy consist in a life of ease in which they are waited on by others. But they are told that happiness in no way consists in being inactive and finding happiness in that. This would mean that everybody wished to subordinate other people's happiness to their own, and when everybody wished to do that nobody would have it. Such life would not be an active life but a life of idleness in which they would become listless, even though they may well know that unless one is active there is no happiness in life.

Angelic life consists in use and in good deeds of charity. For angels never feel happier than when they are informing and teaching spirits that stream in from the world, or when they are ministering to people [on earth] and are preventing the evil spirits with them overstepping the mark, and inspiring people with what is good; also when they are arousing the dead into the life of eternity, and after that introducing such souls into heaven if they are capable of it.

The happiness they find in all this is more than can possibly be described. Angels in this way are images of the Lord; they love their neighbour more than themselves; and this is what makes heaven heaven. Consequently, angelic happiness consists in use, stems from use, and is proportionate to use, that is, to the good deeds of love and charity. As for those spirits who had adopted the idea that heavenly joy consisted in being idle, and that in idleness they would be experiencing eternal joy, they were allowed - once told all this to make them ashamed of that idea - to perceive what such a life was really like. They perceived that it was an utterly dreary

kind of life, and destructive of all joy; and that after a short while they would find it repulsive and nauseating.

**Lessons:** I Kings 17: 8-16; Arcana Caelestia 454