

“Welcoming the Lord as King”

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April 14, 2019

Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10)

The Lord is always working to help us and guide us. He watches over each of us as a most loving and wise father would. He watches over us all like a powerful and benevolent King would. We can feel grateful when we consider this loving care. We can welcome the Lord's role in our lives. We will increasingly value the Lord role when we realize ever more clearly that we need His help. Think of the implications of the following passage:

The Lord is present with each and every human being. He exerts insistent pressure on us to receive Him. We receive Him when we acknowledge Him as our own God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. (*True Christian Religion* 766)

When we humbly reflect that we need redemption and saving, welcoming the Lord's help can bring great joy. A part of us can resist the idea that we need help. A part of us can foolishly seek independence of any need for help. But life doesn't work very well when we try to do it without the Lord's help. Accepting this humble recognition doesn't need to beat us down. It actually is the source of heavenly happiness.

In the gospel of Mark, the multitude welcomed Jesus as a King. The expressed joy of the people was happy and loud. They recognized the symbol of kingship in Jesus riding on a colt. To prepare the way for Him they spread garments and palm branches creating a pathway of color and feathery green covering the dirt and dust of road. Many of them would have been well aware of the prophecies of the Messiah. They had long been under the control of foreign rulers – currently the Romans. They could think of the prophecy in Isaiah: “. . . they will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them” (Isaiah 19:20). They could have reflected on another promise in the same prophet:

Arise, shine; For your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. . . . The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. The multitude of camels shall cover your land, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the LORD. (Isaiah 60:1-4, 6)

The job of a benevolent king, or any leader of a country, is to help the people of that kingdom or country. That leader is supposed to be able to put personal concerns below the welfare of the country. That person is supposed to consider not just the issues of here and now but what is

going to lead to a healthier country in the long run – with a healthier country providing for the welfare of each member of that country.

But this is not what people sometimes expect of a leader. They may be focused on the personal benefit they expect to get from that ruler. Some people are not concerned about the long-term welfare of the country and perhaps are not the least concerned with anyone outside of their own immediate circle or nor anyone they perceive as different from themselves. They are happy to hail a leader who seems to be a benefit to themselves.

The reality we are called to believe in is that the Lord is always working to help us and guide us. Sometimes people picture that He is, of course, helping people who are trying to be good, but that He does not help people who are regularly choosing evil. This is not what we are taught. We are told in the teachings for the New Church that:

People who are ruled by evil are constantly falling, and they are also being raised constantly by the Lord. But He does this so that they will fall not into the most oppressive hell of all, to which if left to themselves all their efforts take them, only into a milder one. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8391)

Even for people who have rejected the Lord He wants good things for them, better than they would achieve on their own. In this work the Lord is regularly knocking at the door of our mind to get us to pay attention to what we are making most important, the patterns of our thoughts and how these show themselves in our words and deeds. The Lord wants us to recognize what our internal patterns are and how these manifest themselves in our lives.

In the Gospel of Mark the Lord was welcomed into Jerusalem with great rejoicing. For many what He did next was probably confusing. Jesus came into Jerusalem and went to the temple -- looked around and since it was late left to a town called Bethany which was about two miles away from Jerusalem. After the joyful reception of Jesus this could easily have been a disappointing turn of events. Was this really the behavior of the king prophesied to save them?

Jesus did exactly what He was supposed to do. His kingdom was a heavenly one, not one of an earthly ruler. He went to the temple because the direct counterpart to the Lord's heavenly kingdom is His Church on earth. This was going to lead to the final confrontation. We are told that the Church at that day:

. . . knew that He was to make His coming, but believed that this was to set [their nation] above all people throughout the world. As this did not happen it rejected Him altogether. Of His heavenly kingdom it had no wish to know anything at all. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4899:2)

What did the Lord see when He looked around the temple? Was it a peaceful and quiet place with people praying quietly at different places? Unfortunately, not. The temple courtyard looked and sounded more like a noisy market place. People were selling animals for the sacrifices that were made at the temple. Others were exchanging various foreign coins for the one coin that people were to give for their offering. Imagine people calling out to the Lord as He walked in--

maybe even coming up to Him hoping to get his business. Perhaps you can imagine the state of mind of Jesus as He beheld this sight and then left for the evening.

The next morning Jesus arrived at the temple and drove out these merchants and tipped over their tables and chairs. The problem was not just that people were selling. Jesus proclaimed, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” This reference to a den of thieves is quoting from Jeremiah.

“Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Make your ways and your works good. Do not put your trust in the words of a lie, saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord is here.” When you steal, kill, commit adultery, and swear falsely, then do you come and stand before me in this house that carries my name? Do you say, “We were carried away,” when you are committing all these abominations? Has this house become a den of thieves? Behold I, even I, have seen it,’ says the Lord.” (Jeremiah 7:2-4, 9-11)

Whenever people of the church think of God as their helper but don’t concern themselves with the life He wants us to lead, they make the church a den of thieves. They will be inevitably angered that they don’t get the reward, the power, the recognition in this life or the next they think they deserve as God’s chosen people.

A person might think that the conflict between the church at that time and the Lord was a singular event, but it was not. In the book, *Apocalypse Revealed* a portion of the book of Revelation is explained involving an angel telling John to eat a book. We read:

“And [the Angel] said to me, ‘Take and eat [the small book]; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’” This symbolically means that accepting the doctrine from an acknowledgment that the Lord is the Savior and Redeemer is pleasing and agreeable, but acknowledging that He alone is God of heaven and earth, and that His humanity is Divine, is displeasing and difficult, owing to their false ideas [about God and the life of religion]. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 481)

This means that people who have the New Testament can similarly rejoice that the Lord is the Savior and Redeemer like the crowds welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday, but they are displeased that this means that they need to follow what He teaches.

The Lord is always working to help us and guide us. He watches over each of us as a most loving and wise father would. He watches over us all like a powerful and benevolent King would. We can feel grateful when we consider this loving care. We can welcome the Lord’s role in our lives. And if we truly understand His kingdom in this world and the next we will seek His help to put away the motivations, thoughts, words and actions that make our lives like “a den of thieves.” This change will not happen in a moment. Gradually, as we learn from the Word, pray to the Lord and consciously try to live a better life than part of our mind inclines to, the Lord will lead us to know Him and heavenly life better.

Each day our lives can be imaged by a pathway of green branches and clothes laid down to welcome the Lord as our king. The green branches or palms are images of us thinking about

what He teaches. In the *True Christian Religion* there is the statement “See if you are able to think about God, the Lord, the Holy Spirit, and the divine matters known as the spiritual concepts of the church seventy times a day or three hundred times a week (*True Christian Religion* 480). Picture a pathway of three hundred palms reflecting your week of thinking about the Lord and what He wants us to do. The garments in the pathway are the good things that we can do in our lives. Think about as you live your life in the coming week how are you going to lay down in tangible words and deeds what you care about and know that the Lord want us to do. That makes the church a house of prayer. We are told that the angels say they pray or are in worship all the time (*Arcana Caelestia* 1618). But it is not because their hands are folded and they are raising their eyes to God. They think of their life of wise caring as being a constant prayer. This is what we wish for this church – that we in our lives make this church a house of prayer – one that can so welcome the Lord as our God and king because we understand His kingdom and know how He rules over us and leads us to that eternal home. AMEN.

Lessons: Mark 11:1-11, 15-17 *Heaven and Hell* 400-401

Mark 11:1-11, 15-17

Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples; and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here." So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it. But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?" And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, . . . they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple. Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "

***Heaven and Hell* 400-401**

Hell is separated from heaven because all the people who are in hell, while they lived in the world, were wholly focused on pleasures of the body and the flesh because of their love for themselves and love for the world; while all people who are in heaven, while they lived in the world, were focused on pleasures of the soul and the spirit because of their love for the Lord and their love for their neighbor. Since these loves are opposed to each other, the communities of hell and the communities of heaven are completely separated, even to the point that spirits who are in hell do not dare stick out a single finger or raise the top of their heads, for the moment they do so, even the slightest bit, they are in torment and agony.

As long as people who are caught up in the love for themselves and the world are living in the body, they feel the pleasure that stems from those loves. As long as people who are focused on love for God and love for their neighbor are living in the body, though, they have no obvious sense of the pleasure that stems from those loves and from the good affections that arise from them. All they feel is a sense of well-being that is barely perceptible because it is hidden away in their deeper natures, veiled by the outer sensations of their bodies and dulled by the cares of this world. Our state changes completely after death, however . . . the faint sense of pleasure, the almost imperceptible sense of well-being that was found in people who were focused on love for God and love for their neighbor in the world, turns into the pleasure of heaven, perceptible and palpable in countless ways.