

Finding Unity in a Fragmented Life

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It's easy to get through a day and feel like we were running from one thing to the next, hardly having time to draw a breath. Modern life seems to be speeding up. In days of yore, we would send a letter and the earliest we could expect a response was a week. Now we send a text or email and are tapping our fingers if we do not receive a reply within an hour. Things are coming at us faster and faster, and it makes our lives feel fragmented.

The Lord's teaching indicates that at heart living a good life *is* unifying at a deep level, whatever our outer experience may be, and that living a selfish one fragments our life, however outwardly focused we may be. This is reflected in teachings about scattering and gathering.

We read in the tower of Babel story about how people had one language, but feared being scattered, so they built a tower which resulted in their actually being scattered (Genesis 11:1-9). How ironic that their effort to avoid being scattered causes them to be scattered.

When Mary is praising the Lord after she's been told she will give birth to the Messiah she says, "He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." (Luke 1:51) Here the message is more obvious. When we engage in selfish thinking like pride, it scatters our thoughts and forces.

We've probably all experienced this scattering. Think of the disconnect you feel when you do something you know is wrong. Part of you finds delight in doing so, and another part feels uncomfortable. Part of you often pretends it's okay, while other parts know it's not. We can feel dislocated, fragmented, scattered, and unable to settle in our skin.

The Lord also speaks of gathering people together. "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young." (Isaiah 40:11) Notice the gentle tone here compared to the idea of people being scattered.

The Lord teaches that when we act from love according to our sincere spiritual beliefs of what the Lord says, we become embodiments of charity (*Arcana Coelestia* 2385:3-5). When we do this, we don't look at what others say in order to disagree. Instead look at how they live, seeking to connect with them, to find safety in people who are sincerely doing their best, even in trying circumstances. One teaching says, "dissent in matters of doctrine concerning faith does not mean that the Church cannot be one Church, provided all are of one mind in willing what is good and doing it." (*Arcana Coelestia* 3451:2).

A question for each of us is if we are on the side of scattering or gathering. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." (Matthew 12:30). When we do what is good from love we are part of the gathering force in the world and our lives. And when we act selfishly we scatter our own forces and act as a divisive presence in the world. When we root our behavior in the Lord we gain a center, a moral compass, that may be swayed by the wind, but not changed by it. We find that inner unity.

Lessons: Ezekiel 11:16-20, 34:12-28; *Arcana Coelestia* 2385:3-5; *True Christian Religion* 399