

## *When the Lord and the Angels Seem Absent*

By Rev. Erik Buss (October 27, 2019)

Most of us experience times when we feel unseen, and even abandoned, not just by others but by the Lord and the angels. This happens especially in times of temptation. We can say, like the Psalms, “Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?” (Ps 10:1)

When Elijah fled from Jezebel he felt hopeless and alone. He had won a great victory, but now was running for his life. He felt alone, just as we do in our times of struggle (despite the fact that we know angels are always with us – AC 5848), and he wanted to die. “It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”

We know we are never alone, yet the Lord has organized His creation such that we do not experience His presence. The fifth law of Divine Providence states, “It is a law of Divine Providence that a person not perceive or sense anything of the operation of Divine Providence, but still know about it and acknowledge it.” (DP 175) If we were to feel His presence we would interfere and destroy His effectiveness, so we’re told, we see the Lord’s providence only from the back, meaning after the fact (DP 187ff.)

In temptation evils rise up and surround us. Old desires and thoughts are reactivated (AC 5036:2). Although the angels are defending us from within we cannot feel their presence because of the negative thoughts and emotions (AC 8159:3). In fact, despite the inner battle raging we may notice nothing more than the “outward appearance of fear and distress.” (AC 4249)

There’s irony in Elijah’s feeling alone given that an angel came to him twice and fed him, and on that strength he travelled 40 days to Mt. Horeb. His being asleep, his entering a cave, and then his covering his face with his mantle all represent an obscure state (AC 2463). That’s what happens when we are in a time of trial. It’s as if we are asleep. The Lord is showing us clear as day that He is with us. He is sending angels to feed our spirits, but it does not change how we feel.

Why didn’t Elijah feel better when the angel came to him? Why don’t we, in our times of temptation? It’s not just stubbornness or deep depression on our part, or the pain of the evil we are facing. We think of temptation as a battle between good and evil in us, but there’s a more important way of thinking about it. “This temptation or struggle is not between good and evil, but between the truths that accompany good and the falsities that accompany evil. For good is unable to struggle of itself, but does so by means of truths. Nor can evil struggle of itself, but does so by means of its falsities. This is like the will being unable to struggle of itself, but doing so by means of the understanding, which is where its truths are.” (TCR 596) We can’t change our feelings, but we can change our thoughts. We win the battle in temptation when we see the lie within the falsity that is providing armor to the evil desires.

The Lord was not what we would characterize as sympathetic to Elijah in his deep distress. But He did, compassionately, give Elijah what he needed. The lies Elijah was buying into were that his work had been a failure (“the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars”) and that he was alone (“I am left, I alone; and they seek to take my life”). Instead the Lord showed him that his work would continue because Elisha would carry it on, and that there were 7000 in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. Similarly with us, the path through temptation starts when we see the Lord’s truth, the reality, about our situation and assert that until we can see the lie within the falsity coming from hell.

He is always there. All along He sends His angels to feed us and sustain us, until we are brought, as one teaching says, "into a bright state of hope and the comfort this brings, and also into a state of bliss." (AC 8165:2)

Lessons: 1 Kings 19; *Arcana Coelestia* 4249:1-2; 2338