

Good times and Bad: Both Summer and Winter Are Part of the Lord's Plan

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“While the earth remains seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:22)

Can you think of some of the happiest times in your life? Perhaps it was times with good friends or family when you had a shared experience that was a joy to everyone involved and maybe it took place at a favorite vacation spot. We can treasure these times and yet know that life cannot always have this quality.

Another experience that can be filled with tremendous happiness occurs when we get wonderful, unexpected good news about someone or something we care very deeply about. I think we can recognize that the joy of those moments occur partially because of the apprehension and doubt that preceded the good news. Compare this to an event you had been confident would happen sooner or later with an outcome that was never in doubt. When this assured conclusion happens you might smile, but it wouldn't fill you with the same upwelling happiness following a time of doubt. This is true even in the less momentous parts of life. Take the outcome of a sporting event, if you were unable to see it live but then heard the outcome before watching it, would it have the same interest? We know that spoiling the plot of a book or movie for someone who is waiting to read or see it can significantly reduce that person's enjoyment. We can know that this is a human response to missing anticipation, but what does this have to do with how the Lord guides our lives.

The Lord told Noah there were going to be “cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night.” Does this represent what the Lord wants for us? Does He send us hard times so that we will better appreciate the good times. This doesn't sound right, does it?

The Lord's words to Noah followed his time in the ark during the flood. In the teachings for the New Church this flood represents times of spiritual temptation. These temptations are part of the wintry, cold and dark times of the soul. Concerning them we are taught:

All temptation is an attack upon the love a person has for someone or something; and the temptation is in the same degree as the love. If the love is not attacked, there is no temptation. To destroy anyone's love is to destroy that person's very life.... (*Arcana Caestia* 1690:3)

In temptation evil spirits bring to mind a person's false ideas and evil loves. From that person's memory they bring forth things that he has thought and done from his infancy, which they do so skillfully and maliciously that it cannot be described; but the angels who are with the person bring to mind his good loves and true thoughts and thus defend him. (*Arcana Caestia* 751)

We can recognize these kinds of hellish spiritual attacks from the pattern of thoughts coming to mind. Rather than thinking “That didn't go well. I want to do better in the future” we find ourselves thinking “I never get things right.” Or we think “I'll never be good enough” or “My life is ruined.”

Another passage these kinds of spiritual attacks teaches:

In all temptation there is a state of doubt concerning the Lord's presence and mercy and concerning salvation and other similar things; for those undergoing temptation are in interior distress, even to despair...." (*Arcana Caestia* 2334)

Why do times of spiritual temptation exist? We're told that they are absolutely essential to our spiritual growth. Without them we cannot become a humbler person who has a deep acknowledgment of how much we need the Lord's help. Without them we cannot become spiritually reborn or regenerated. We read:

People uninformed about human regeneration suppose that a person can be regenerated without temptation, and some that he has been regenerated after he has undergone a single temptation. But let it be known that no one can be regenerated without temptation, and that he suffers very many temptations, following one after another. The reason for this is that regeneration takes place to the end that the life of the old self may die and a new, heavenly life may be instilled. From this one may recognize that conflict is altogether inevitable; for the life of the old self stands its ground and refuses to be snuffed out, and the life of the new self cannot enter except where the life of the old has been snuffed out. (*Arcana Caestia* 8403:2)

Another passage that speaks to this same idea is:

As for temptations themselves, they are going on while a person is in the actual process of being spiritually reborn or regenerated, for no one can be regenerated unless he also undergoes temptations; and the evil spirits around him are the means through which those temptations are brought about. In temptation the person is brought into a state in which the evil that possesses him, that is, possesses his own essential self, is dominant. Once he enters this state evil and hellish spirits surround him, and when they realize that inwardly he is protected by angels those evil spirits reactivate the false ideas he has previously contemplated and the evil deeds he has committed. But the angels defend him from within. This conflict is what the person experiences as temptation, yet the experience is so vague that he is aware of it as scarcely anything more than a feeling of anxiety. . . Yet a battle is taking place at such a time over that person and his eternal salvation, with both sides using what is within him; for both draw on what resides with the person and engage in conflict over it. (*Arcana Caestia* 5036:2)

We know that every person goes through times when life isn't going well. A person can have no belief in God and be not the least concerned about spiritual values or the choices he or she makes so long as trouble is avoided and yet hard times can still come. These hard times are not necessarily spiritual temptations but nevertheless the Lord uses even these natural challenges to accomplish some good.

But in the case of people who are natural, those experiences which they so often call temptations, and the pricks of conscience, are not really temptations at all but merely anxious cares resulting from attacks on their loves - for example, when they foresee and feel that they are being deprived of honor, the good things of this world, reputation, pleasures, physical powers, and so on. Nevertheless these so-called temptations do normally achieve some good. Temptations are also experienced by people who are moved by natural charity, and so by all manner of heretics, by gentiles, and by idolaters. They are caused by the things which go against the way of life which their faith demands and which

they hold dear. These however are anxious cares, which are mere imitations of spiritual temptations. (*Arcana Caelestia* 847:3)

For those who are consciously trying to live a good life times of spiritual attack are inevitable. They like others can hit hard times in which they wonder how bills are going to be paid or even where food for the next week is going to come. They can be worried about getting sick and the consequences this could bring. All people whether they have deep spiritual values or essentially none can face these natural challenges. Those are trying to live good lives find that these challenges can be accompanied by fundamental doubts about their own capabilities, their lot in life and whether the Lord exists and is looking after them. They can find themselves thinking “Am I capable of being loved?” or “Are the things I’ve dedicated my life to ultimately going to fail.” For this person the issue is not just how to pay a bill but rather some of the fundamental foundations of their life come under attack and a state of spiritual temptation can occur.

In the story of Noah picture the forty days and nights of rain followed by months of time the ark floated on the flood waters with nothing but sky and waves to see in any direction. This desolate picture is like a time of spiritual temptation. And then it says in Genesis “And God remembered Noah” (Genesis 8:1). Concerning these words we read:

“And God remembered” means the end of temptation and the start of renewal . . . “God remembered” in particular means His being merciful. His remembering is mercy, and this is attributed to Him especially when temptation is past because at that time new light is shining. As long as temptation lasts, a person assumes that the Lord is not present, for he is being harassed by evil genii, so harassed in fact that sometimes he has so great a feeling of hopelessness as scarcely to believe in the existence of any God at all. Yet at such times the Lord is more present than that person can possibly believe. But once temptation subsides he receives comfort, and for the first time believes that the Lord is present. Consequently, because He appears to do so, “God’s remembering” mentioned here means the end of temptation and the start of renewal.

For those of us trying to follow the Lord and live a good life there is the promise that we will face times of spiritual temptation over and over again. If we do what we can to hold on in these spiritual battles, turning to the Lord even in our darkness and trying to make good decisions even in our times of doubt, the Lord holds out for us an eventual end of these spiritual battles. When a humble willingness to follow the Lord becomes a foundation of our lives and we receive from the Lord the gift of good loves and the true ideas enlivened by these loves the spiritual battles will cease. This is represented by the seventh day or day of rest. In this state the evil spirits will no longer be able to attack us, just as they cannot harm the angels. But as was described in the final lesson, even angels go through a pattern of change from morning through evening. This is because they still are not perfect and this lack of perfection leads to happier and not so happy times, but even here the Lord is using this alteration to bless and help further perfect the angels.

For most of us in this world we will face changing states including times of hard spiritual battle. May we try to hold on during these hard times of spiritual darkness and know that the Lord is leading us to a better life. As we are taught:

When a person is in temptation, he is attacked on all sides by false ideas and evil loves, which hinder the spiritual light flowing in from the Lord, that is the good motivations and true thoughts flowing from Him, and then the person is at it were in darkness...But when a

person emerges from the temptation, light appears with its spiritual heat, that is true thoughts with their good affections. From this the individual has gladness after this troubled time. This is the morning which follows the night. (*Arcana Caestia* 6829)
AMEN.

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Genesis 8:13-22

¹³ And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first *month*, the first *day* of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried. ¹⁵ Then God spoke to Noah, saying, ¹⁶ "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that *is* with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." ¹⁸ So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. ¹⁹ Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, *and* whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark. ²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. ²² "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."

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I have been told from heaven why changes of state . . . occur [with angels]. Angels have said that there are many reasons. First, the delight of life and of heaven that angels enjoy because of the love and wisdom given them by the Lord would gradually lose its value if they were constantly engaged in it, the way it happens for people who are involved in pleasures and enjoyments without variety. A second reason is that angels have a sense of self or self-image just as we do, and this involves loving themselves. All the people in heaven are kept free of their sense of self, and to the extent that the Lord does keep them free, they enjoy love and wisdom. To the extent that they are not kept free, however, they are caught up in love for themselves; and since all of them do love that sense of self and carry it with them, these changes of state or successive alternations do occur. A third reason is that they are made more perfect in this way, since they become accustomed to being kept in love for the Lord and kept free from love for themselves. Further, by these alternations of delight and discomfort, their perception of and sensitivity to what is good become more and more subtle.

They have gone on to say that the Lord does not produce these changes of their states, since the Lord as the sun is always flowing in with warmth and light, that is, with love and wisdom. Rather, they themselves are the cause, since they love their sense of self and this is constantly misleading them. They illustrate this by comparison with our world's sun, which is not the cause of the changes of warmth and cold and of light and darkness, of distinct years and distinct days, because it stays motionless. The reason can be traced to our earth.