

Receiving Good Things from Lord

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Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. *Luke 6:38*

The Lord continually works to give us as much joy, peace and fulfillment as we can possibly receive. When He considers the tiniest details of what happens in this world, He looks at them in terms of how they will affect our state of mind to eternity.

The image presented in the Gospel of Luke is one of the Lord giving us as much as our lives can hold and more. It describes Him filling the measure of our lives, pressing down the amount that first fits in, shaking the container to help it settle and receive more, and finally filling it so full that it is overflowing. He loves us that much. His approach is the opposite of the scrooge who doles out the tiniest amount that he can get away with, hoping to make less seem like more, all along trying to keep as much for himself as possible. When we see the Lord in our mind's eye as He truly is, we will feel tremendously cared for and blessed.

The Lord constantly works to give good things for us beyond measure, but we don't always feel well cared for by Him. Sometimes we don't feel much joy and contentment in any of the major areas of our lives. Why is this? We pray for our daily bread, but sometimes feel like we're in the midst of a famine and may never eat again.

There are a number of reasons why we may not feel like we are getting much from the Lord. Firstly, the Lord promises to fill the measure of our life to overflowing, He doesn't promise to miraculously enlarge that measure. We know that there are times when we are more prone to states of mind which incline us to focus on our own perspective, our own needs, and tend to make us feel like taking as much as we can and giving as little as possible. To the degree that we accept these evil states as our own, we turn away from the Lord and so turn away from receiving anything of real happiness from Him. We need to recognize these states when they dominate our conscious thoughts and intentions and reject them in the Lord's name as hurtful to others and hurtful to us. This is what is meant by shunning evils as sins.

A second reason why we may not feel like we are getting much from the Lord is because we are in an active state of temptation or spiritual battle between the growing presence of the Lord in our intentions, thoughts and deeds and the natural inclinations to evil that pull us the other way. A person who is on the road to a heavenly home will feel utterly desolate during these spiritual battles. It isn't a sign of spiritual failure. Jesus had many times when He felt this desolation, in fact, shortly before He died on the cross, just prior to the end of His final temptation that would remove His last remaining imperfections, He still uttered the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" (*Matthew 27:46*). The teachings of the New Church foretell that this will be our state of mind during temptations.

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 Caelestia 2334*)

When people are in temptation, they are 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 those people are as it were in darkness...But when they emerge 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 Caelestia* 6829)

During the times of spiritual darkness, we will not feel cared for nor will we sense anything of the Lord's presence. During such states of mind it is impossible to have a clear perspective on our own lives. But if we hold on, call out to the Lord as best we can, and do what we can to continue to fulfill our daily opportunities to be useful, a spiritual morning will eventually dawn in our minds and we will once again sense the Lord's presence and blessings.

We will not sense the Lord's blessings in an actively self-centered or worldly state of mind, nor will we during times of spiritual temptation. A third factor that influences a person's ability to sense the Lord's blessings has a broader scope than the immediate state of mind we are in at the time. Each of us will have ups and downs in our lives, lasting minutes, hours or days. We also have a general trend to our lives. We are either drawing closer to heaven or closer to hell.

Those on their pathway to heaven will go through a long time of spiritual development that is sometimes like the experience of the widow facing a crisis in II Kings 4. She appealed to Elisha because her debts threatened to take her two sons from her. In the teachings for the New Church we are taught:

A widow is referred to many times in the Word; but anyone unacquainted with the internal sense inevitably thinks that "a widow" means a widow. In the internal sense "a widow" means the truth of the Church without good [things to express this truth], that is, people who have truth that is without good [things to express this truth], but who nevertheless have a desire for good, who consequently love to be led by good; for "husband" means good which ought to take the lead. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4844:3)

We are like this widow when our lives seem empty of things that bring us fulfillment. Things large and small can occur that have us doubt the likelihood of future happiness.

In II Kings 4 the widow is afraid she is going to lose her sons due to her debts. Her sons mean the true things each of us knows (*Arcana Caelestia* 489). Their potential loss seems to be a state in which we feel empty not only of fulfillment but also of any sense that we know how to guide our lives away from this emptiness. Elisha is the Lord speaking to us through divine revelation. His second question to the widow was "Tell me, what do you have in the house?" Her answer was that she had a jar of oil. This small quantity of oil seems to mean the desire each of us can have to do good and useful things in this world. Although we have this desire, without an outlet, it can seem relatively insignificant.

Elisha's instruction to the widow was:

Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors--empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones” (II Kings 4: 3-4)

The many empty vessels or pots mean us finding useful things to do in this world. For some of us this can sound like we need to add additional things to what we are already doing and this can feel rather overwhelming. For others, the first thing that may come to mind is that things they have found fulfilling in the past no longer are opportunities. A parent may mourn the fact that children are grown and no longer as significant a focus of useful activity as in the past. A person can mourn that a spouse is no longer present to give attention to. Or for whatever reason, something has changed and a useful focus no longer seems present.

While life can seem relatively empty of fulfillment at times, each day the Lord offers us our “daily bread.” He wants us to have things that do bring us fulfillment. For those who feel like their life is already too full, the advice of Elisha may not be to add more, but rather in the things you are already doing you can bring a wise kindness to more of your interactions and efforts? Yes, you are busy and but amidst this busy life can you consciously work to share eye contact and smiles with the people you interact with? Yes, you are busy and what part of your efforts can you focus on doing as an expression of loving care.

For those whose life just seems too empty, what are ways in which your attention and care could be a blessing to others? In our present circumstance many of us may feel restricted in how we can get out and interact with others. Even here, are there people you might phone to check in with, to hear about their current lives, to give them a listening ear and another person to talk to? Even someone who is highly limited due to ill health, there are still relationships and interactions. Can those of us who are bed-bound consciously smile at helpers and when appropriate give appreciation for the care being received. Aren't there always “empty vessels” that we can pour kindness and service into?

The Lord continually works to give us as much joy, peace and fulfillment as we can possibly receive. If we find there are times that this idea seems foreign to us, perhaps we have not been including the Lord in our perspective enough, not trusting in Him enough, and taking too much on ourselves. In this busy world, we may not have been consciously remembering His role and perspective. Daily expectations and deadlines have crowded the Lord out of our thoughts. Making time to talk to the Lord each morning is one way to avoid this. He calls us to a relationship with Him. He calls us to turn to Him for help, for guidance, for strength. If we do our part to follow Him, He will bless us as He has promised: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (*Luke 6:38*). AMEN

Lessons: II Kings 4: 1-7, Luke 6:27-38, *Arcana Caelestia* 886, 6073

2 Kings 4:1-7

¹ A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves.” ² So Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.” ³ Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors--empty vessels; do not gather just a few. ⁴ And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you

and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.”⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured *it* out.⁶ Now it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “*There is* not another vessel.” So the oil ceased.⁷ Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debt; and you *and* your sons live on the rest.”

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.²⁹ To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either.³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back.³¹ And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.³² But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.³⁴ And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.³⁶ Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

³⁷ “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.³⁸ 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.”

Arcana Caelestia 886

“Olive” means the good things that stem from charity. . . Olive oil in addition to spices was used to anoint priests and kings, and it was also used in the lamps. . . The reason olive oil was used in anointing and in lamps was that it represented everything heavenly and so everything good that stems from love and charity. Oil is in fact the essential element of the tree, its soul so to speak, as the heavenly or good things that stems from love and charity is the essential element or soul itself of faith.

Arcana Caelestia 6073

Every good [action] that is called a good thing of charity [or a wise kindness] consists in nothing other than useful service, and useful services are nothing other than works done for one’s neighbor, country, Church, and the Lord’s kingdom. Regarded essentially charity [or a wise kindness] does not actually become charity until it passes into action and becomes an actual thing that a person says or does; for loving someone but not doing anything good for that person when the possibility exists is not really loving that person. Doing good for someone when the possibility exists, and doing it with all one’s heart, is loving that individual; for then the actual deed or work contains all that constitutes charity towards a person. For works embrace every aspect of charity and faith present with a person and are called forms of spiritual good, made such through the exercise of charity, that is, through useful services. Because the angels in heaven are governed by good things received from the Lord, they have no greater desire than to perform useful services. These are the very delights of their life, and in the measure that they perform useful services they enjoy blessing and happiness