

“Palm Sunday: Jesus Wept for the People of Jerusalem”

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Now as Jesus drew near Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, (Luke 19:41)

Last Sunday’s sermon had as its text Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus and spoke of the importance of us recognizing the Lord in His Divine Humanity. Within days of this event the Gospel of Luke records a second example of Jesus weeping. It happened as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This event is sometimes referred to as the “Triumphal Entry.” There was great celebration with multitudes shouting, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!” Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” He rode on a colt in symbolic testimony that He was a king. And yet within this setting Jesus wept when He beheld Jerusalem. He wept because He had feelings of mercy and grief for the people of that city and the Church it represented.

There certainly were reasons that might have had Jesus not feeling merciful but rather ready to condemn evil actions and false ideas as He had numerous times in His criticism of the religious leaders at that time and also the disciples themselves. Specifically, on Palm Sunday, the Pharisees were offended at the joyful celebration of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They were not happy to see His success. Others responded quite differently. They shouted with joy and praise. They made a pathway of garments and palms for the Lord to ride in on. However Jesus would have been acutely aware that many who took part in that joyful celebration deeply misunderstood why He rode into Jerusalem as a king. He was not coming to set up an earthly kingdom. He had come to bring us the happiness of heaven.

The Lord knew of the people who rejected Him. He knew the terrible events of Good Friday culminating in His crucifixion were a vivid symbol of how the people of the Church had abused and annihilated the truth revealed in the Old Testament (*True Christian Religion* 130:3). As Jesus was being crucified He said: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). He had feelings of mercy and grief for their terrible actions.

A healthy Church on earth is crucial to so many here and in the next life. When it is threatened or dies as a whole or in the life of an individual this is a very sad event. The *Apocalypse Revealed* speaks of the Lord’s response to His Church being harmed in explaining the words “And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars (Revelation 10:3).

To cry aloud as when a lion roars symbolizes a grievous lamentation over the church, which was taken from Him. This is apparent from the explanations in the preceding chapter, where the states of life of people in the church were examined and exposed, states that were lamentable . . . Especially is it apparent from the fact that people do not acknowledge the Lord and turn to Him, even though He is God of heaven and earth. A lamentation over this is what the angel's roaring like a lion symbolizes; for a lion roars when it sees its enemies and is attacked by them, and when it sees its young or its food carried off. The same is comparatively the case with the Lord when He sees His Church carried off by devils. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 471:1)

The Lord wants us to acknowledge Him. He wants us to live lives of wise kindness. He is saddened when we do not. True happiness does not exist without free choice. The Lord came to ensure our spiritual freedom. He came to ensure that each of us today has the freedom to choose between a mind and life focused on hellish things or heavenly ones. It is not a simple choice. It is one we make over and over again. What are we focusing on? What do we make most important? What do we long for? The Lord came into the world to fight the power of the hells because He loves us and wants more than anything that we make choices that are good for us and for others.

It is hard for us to remotely envision what the Lord's battles against the hells were like. In *True Christianity* we are told:

The Lord's battle with hell can also be compared, although inadequately, with someone fighting against all the wild animals in the world, slaughtering or taming them until not one animal would dare to go out and attack any human being who is with the Lord. (*True Christianity* 123:4)

The Lord fought against the hells throughout His life. At the end, on Good Friday, He endured enormous physical pain and suffering during His crucifixion. He witnessed the people who loved and cared about Him in the world mourning His apparent defeat. He was aware of the taunts and ridicule of the Pharisees and others. He was fighting against the temptations brought by all the evil spirits of hell. But it didn't stop there. An amazing idea taught in the Heavenly Doctrine is that in the extreme of the Lord's temptation He even fought against the all the angels. We read:

. . . the Lord at length fought with angels, indeed with the whole angelic heaven . . . in order that the Lord might bring the whole of heaven into proper heavenly order, He even allowed angels into Himself to tempt Him, who, insofar as they acted from themselves [proprium], did not do so from good and truth. These temptations are the inmost of all, for they go to work solely on the ends one has in view and with a subtlety such as can by no means be detected. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4295:2-3)

Very few of us like to face conflict. The image we are given of the Lord's final temptations is that He was battling against the entire spiritual universe.

What was behind His efforts? - A love for all human beings like you and me. We read:

. . . the Lord was filled repeatedly with an inmost confidence and faith that, because it was pure love out of which He was fighting for the salvation of the whole human race, He could not but be victorious. . . The Lord . . . in all His conflicts brought about by temptations, never fought out of self-love, that is, for Himself, but for all throughout the universe. He did not fight therefore to become the greatest in heaven, for that is contrary to Divine love. He scarcely did so to become the least. He fought solely so that all others might become something and be saved. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1812:1-2)

The Gospel of John have Jesus dying with the words: "It is finished." Some picture these words being whispered with the last shreds of strength and consciousness left in His natural body, but nevertheless spoken with the realization that He had triumphed and that our spiritual freedom to

choose heaven, its usefulness and joy had been re-established. He had accomplished His work as Savior and Redeemer. It was a magnificent gift of love for all of us.

In the book of Revelation we are told of a scene of huge rejoicing in heaven where a “new song” was being sung. *The Apocalypse Revealed* states “To sing a new song means to joyfully confess from the heart and affection that the Lord alone is the Savior and Redeemer and the God of Heaven and earth. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 662:1)

Can you think of times when you have cheered with joy? Sometimes we share this joy with many others and sometimes we find others don't see it the same way. An experience common to many people is that of watching an athletic team potentially going down in defeat but who then rally and pull out an unexpected victory. In response people can be cheer wildly. If we have longed to see the kind of spiritual changes that the Lord can bring in our own life or that of a loved one when we see signs of these changes it is a tremendous source of joy. So too we can feel tremendous sadness if people we care about seems to be making choices that will inevitable cause them and others harm.

The teachings of the New Church clearly state that if we care about living according to what the Lord teaches, that is if we are moved to do good things for others because this is what true charity means, then it will be easy for us to not only know how dependent we are on the Lord, but to also deeply believe it (*Arcana Caelestia* 2343:3). When this life in us is attacked by the hells the deep concern and distress that these temptations bring will not be from a fear of losing something natural but because we fear that the qualities of faith and charity that are essential for salvation are at risk. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8164:2) We will long for the Lord to come to us.

If we have been trying to better understand and live what the Lord teaches, if we have been paying attention to the spiritual welfare of people around us, when we see the kind of spiritual changes that the Lord can bring in our own life or that of a loved one it is a tremendous source of joy.

Palm branches are the symbol of this Sunday. These branches symbolize the wisely caring things that we can do for others because we know the Lord wants us to do these things (*Apocalypse Explained* 458:5). Each time we lay down one of those palms, it is like a pathway for the Lord to enter into their lives. Each time we say a prayer, it is like laying down a palm that the Lord may enter into our lives. If, over and over again, we have been seeking that the Lord may come into our life, may come into the lives of others, when we see it, it can be a source of great joy. But we should not forget the sadness of the Lord when He beheld Jerusalem and knew its end as a Church had come. His Church can also come to an end in our lives if we choose evil loves and false ideas in making our life decisions, large and small. May we have a holy fear which “is a fear of sinning or acting contrary to the Commandments, thus contrary to the Lord” (*Arcana Caelestia* 8925).

The Lord promises us the gift of deep joy as we do our part in leading wisely kind lives. Sometimes this is easy and sometimes it takes huge effort because other motivations pull us away from it. Still other times we are so caught up in day-to-day things that we don't long for the Lord. We don't think about it. We are focusing in other things. If we keep trying and over and over again to seek the Lord's help to be better human beings, He will come to each of us to serve us and bless us. His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is a symbol of His desire to come to

us and bless us. The song that follows this sermon begins “Shout the glad tidings.” May this song reflect our joy in seeing the Lord’s role in our lives and those of our loved ones. AMEN.

Lessons: Luke 19:29-48, *Arcana Caelestia* 5480

Luke 19:28-48

²⁸ When He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ And it came to pass, when He came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mountain called Olivet, *that* He sent two of His disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village opposite *you*, where as you enter you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Loose it and bring *it here*." ³¹ And if anyone asks you, 'Why are you loosing *it*?' thus you shall say to him, 'Because the Lord has need of it.' " ³² So those who were sent went their way and found *it* just as He had said to them. ³³ But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of him." ³⁵ Then they brought him to Jesus. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. ³⁶ And as He went, *many* spread their clothes on the road. ³⁷ Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, ³⁸ saying: "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!*" Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." ⁴⁰ But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

⁴¹ Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

⁴⁵ Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it,

⁴⁶ saying to them, "It is written, '*My house is a house of prayer,*' but you have made it a '*den of thieves.*' " ⁴⁷ And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, ⁴⁸ and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

***Arcana Caelestia* 5480**

“And wept” means mercy. This is clear from the meaning of “weeping”, when used in reference to the Lord, who is represented here by “Joseph”, as showing mercy. It is well known that weeping is an expression of grief and love; it is consequently an expression of mercy since mercy is love that is grieving. Divine love therefore is called mercy because left by itself the human race is in hell; and when a person recognizes within himself that this is the case he prays for mercy. Since in the internal sense “weeping” also implies mercy, there are many occasions in the Word when Jehovah or the Lord is spoken of as weeping, as in Luke, “As He drew near, Jesus saw the city and wept over it.” (Luke 19:41).

The Jerusalem over which Jesus wept, that is, for which He had feelings of mercy and grief, was not only the actual city of Jerusalem but also the Church, whose last day, when there will no longer be any charity or consequently any faith, is meant in the internal sense. His feelings of mercy and grief led Him to weep.