

Seeing Providence Throughout Our Lives

Week 1 - Journey Program

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INTRODUCTION

Today, we start a 4 Week Journey Program about, "Seeing Providence"

Will be using the life of Moses to illustrate the Lord's providence in action

- next week, the early years
- following week, adulthood
- final week, old age

Today's sermon is an introduction to the topic...

What providence is...

How it works

And why it matters

1. THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE IS A GIFT

Everything about the Lord's providence is a gift.

It's a gift we may not fully understand or appreciate in our younger years

but as we mature and grow older,

we begin to see its *profound* significance and meaning.

We begin to see why the Lord operates in the way He does.

We begin to see why the Lord in His infinite wisdom

chooses to guide us outside our "peripheral vision,"

in ways that are hidden from our eyes,

instead of out in the open for everyone to see.

2. WHAT PROVIDENCE IS

In the New Church, we have a book dedicated to the topic of the Lord's Providence titled, *Angelic Wisdom Regarding Divine Providence*

but it is a topic that is discussed in great detail throughout the teachings of the New Church - a huge body of doctrine (a *systematic* theology)

Definition: the "*government of the Lord's Divine love and wisdom*" (DP 1)

The Lord rules the universe **from love**, by **means of wisdom**

The "end" or "goal" of the Lord's providence is

- our reformation and salvation (DP 257)
- a heaven from the human race (DP 27)
- that we act in freedom according to reason (DP 97)
- our *eternal* happiness for the nature of Divine love...

"is to will that what is one's own should be another's" (DLW 47)

3. HOW IT WORKS

It may sound like a contradiction to say this,

but the Lord loves us too much to force His will on us.

He could demand all sorts of things from us:

our obedience,
our loyalty,
our faith,
and trust.

He could even dictate what we think, say, and do.

He could force us to choose heaven over hell

since heaven is the end or goal of Divine providence.

But the Lord loves us too much to do any of these things.

Instead, the Lord leads us by means of our freedom.

He waits for us to make the "first move" in everything of life.

He leaves us in freedom to

doubt,
to question,
to rebel,
to struggle,
to make mistakes,
to even wonder if He exists!

The Lord gives us this incredibly long "leash,"

this incredible *gift* of freedom,

because this is the only way faith, our spiritual rebirth, can become our own, something we choose (see DP 175).

The great irony in the Lord choosing NOT to intervene in our earthly lives,

in NOT "showing His hand" (even though He is pure love)

...is that we would object and fight against Him if He were to do this (see DP 180).

...we would object because we would see what the Lord is doing and it is His constant endeavor,
His constant WILL,

to move us toward heaven and, *frankly*, we're not always ready or willing to let go of our selfish ways

- sometimes we can't handle the truth
- sometimes we're simply not ready for the next thing that would help us on our spiritual journey...
 - and so the Lord works "behind the scenes"
 - preparing the ground, the soil, **for the moment when we make the decision on our own!**

Like the people of every age, we want a "sign"

- show us a "sign" Lord, and I'll believe...
- give us some solid, concrete "evidence" of Your existence
 - ...that You are in control
 - ...that life is not a random sequence of events
 - ...that the pain and sadness I'm going through right now has a purpose, a point

Our physical senses demand "proof"

This is why science is appealing - we can point to empirical "data"

to prove things and yet,

even science changes because science is based on theories

- and theories change, get disproved...

So, to understand how providence works, we have to move to a different, higher level of thinking...

"The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

Luke 17:20-21

4. WHY IT MATTERS

The Lord's seeming absence in our day-to-day lives can

feel as if we've been abandoned

because terrible, confusing things happen and the Lord doesn't appear to be doing anything about it

There is suffering in this world.

We, or our loved ones and friends, experience tremendous pain and loss.

Evil seems to triumph,

while good seems to go unrewarded, unnoticed.

But we are poor judges of what's really happening on a spiritual level because

"Nothing is permitted [to happen in this world] unless some good may come out of it" (AC 6574).

Think of the life of Joseph and his brothers.

In our reading from the last chapter of Genesis (50), Joseph, in looking back at his life, understood what happened to him very differently from his brothers:

*"But as for you, **you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good**, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid: I will provide for you and your little ones. And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them." (Genesis 50:20-21)*

Or think of what happened to the descendants of Jacob later on

How their life in Egypt, leading up to the birth of Moses, turned to slavery

How there was...

- a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph
- who set taskmasters over the Israelites and afflicted them with their burdens (Exodus 1)

When things turn out well for us, like they eventually did for Joseph and his brothers, it is relatively *easy* to trust the Lord's providence

But when things become hard, like they did for the descendants of Jacob in Egypt, it becomes a lot harder to see the hand of providence

So much of our life is based on our INTERPRETATION of life...

- interpreting with the eyes of our body (worldly appearances)
- or
- interpreting with the eyes of our spirit (according to the Word)

5. SEEING PROVIDENCE IN RETROSPECT

Let's try this exercise...

There are two ways of "interpreting" AC 8478 (reading today):

Those who trust the Divine, although concerned about the future, are nevertheless not anxious, let alone worried, when they give thought to it. They remain even-tempered whether or not they achieve their desires, and they do not grieve over loss. They are content with their lot. If they become wealthy they do not become infatuated with wealth; if they are promoted to important positions they do not consider themselves worthier than others. If they become poor they are not made miserable either; if lowly in status they do not feel downcast. With those who trust the Divine, all things are moving towards an everlasting state of happiness. No matter what happens at any time to them, it contributes to that state. Divine providence is over everything. It is present within the smallest details. People in the stream of providence are being carried along constantly toward happier things, whatever the appearance may be at the time.

Secrets of Heaven no. 8478

Now, if we use the eyes of our body...

1. "Don't worry," just trust in the Lord - seems patronizing, annoying.

*Stop saying that.
It's not that easy.
Wishful thinking, Pollyanna?*

Or...if we use the eyes of our spirit...

2. We could say to ourselves, there's so much that I'm not seeing/don't know...

*A letting go...
What really matters here?
Lord is in charge..."whatever the appearance may be..."*

While the Lord doesn't permit us to see how He is leading us in "real time,"

He nevertheless permits us to see His leading in retrospect,
- after the fact (see DP 187).
- when it doesn't threaten to take our freedom away

Great things happen when we're not looking, when we're working on something else...

Some of the greatest industrial, scientific and medical discoveries of the modern age were found by "accident"

- dynamite, synthetic rubber, Velcro, Penicillin, plastic

all "discovered" by scientists while working on other things.

In a similar way, the Lord's providence can seem "serendipitous," working off to the side as it were.

We're taught that *"those who have faith seldom obtain what they desire when they desire it, but still obtain it afterwards, when they are no longer thinking about it - if it is of use to them"* (SE 3538)

As we grow older, we find more and more evidence

of the Lord's merciful "hand" gently guiding our lives
unexpected twists and turns

We can't predict the future.

But we start to notice patterns...

I planned to do X,Y, Z _____ and then this _____ happened...

Patterns that are clearly of the Lord's doing...

- the people we meet
- the places we go
- the occupations or uses we choose
- changes in priority
- a softening of our spirit

This is what we will be doing in this Journey series:

- going through the humble, rewarding exercise of looking back at our life...

to our childhood years

to our adulthood years

to either anticipating our senior years or reflecting on them...

And saying, "*...this is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes*" (Psalm 118)

AMEN.

Lessons: Genesis 50: 15-21, Exodus 1, AC 8478