

Anticipating the Famine

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*"And let them gather all the food of those good years that are coming...
Then that food shall be as a reserve for the land during the seven years of
famine...that the land may not perish during the famine."*

Genesis 41: 35,36

INTRODUCTION

We can certainly identify with times of "plenty" and with times of "scarcity" in our lives, both literally and figuratively.

Our times of "plenty" usually occur when things are going well,

when we feel strong, upbeat, and cheerful.

We find that we are alert, eager to learn, able to take criticism.

Loving our fellow human beings isn't hard during times of plenty and we're at peace with the Lord and the world around us.

But when "famine" strikes we suddenly find ourselves a lot less magnanimous.

Famines in this world are a serious thing - devastating!

Spiritual famines are no different...

We feel drained, depleted, with little to give or be hopeful about.

The suffering caused by "famine" in our lives makes it seem as if our years of plenty never existed!

PHAROAH'S DREAMS

Pharoah's dreams, along with Joseph's interpretation that the land of Egypt would experience seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine, is spiritually significant and instructive,

significant & instructive because Pharoah and his people were given a "heads up" -

- prepare for the famine by taking advantage of the good fortune (7 years of plenty) coming your way and you will prosper.

- this "revelation," if you will, enabled Egypt to

anticipate the famine, plan for it...

in such a way that their suffering was minimized.

ANTICIPATING THE FAMINE

This is the point of our sermon today...

The Lord wants to minimize our suffering in life by helping us take advantage of the "abundance" of spiritual nourishment He provides....

When we're going through a difficult time, say, an argument or struggle with a loved one or friend

or we're experiencing a health crisis or loss

or we're at a crossroads in our career

or we're dealing with our own shortcomings and evil tendencies...

- the first thing that usually happens is that we forget about our "years of plenty"

- we forget about the good, innocent times of our childhood and youth

- when the Lord was with us
 - when we had a clear sense of "right & wrong," of what we needed to do
 - when we took action and it worked!

So, this is what we'll be focusing on today...

First, exploring what it takes to be prepared/ready for when "famine" strikes

Second, understanding what it looks like to dig deep into the spiritual reserves the Lord has stored up within each one of us

SEVEN YEARS OF PLENTY

On a spiritual level, this story is about how the Lord takes care of us from earliest infancy to extreme old age,

by nourishing us with an *enormous* amount of *spiritual food*, a nourishment we first taste in childhood and then later in adult life, if we so choose.

This is what is meant by Joseph "*gathering very much grain*" so much so that "*he stopped counting*" (v. 49).

"Now in the seven plentiful years the ground brought forth abundantly. So Joseph gathered up all the food...and laid up the food in the cities...Joseph gathered very much grain, as the sand of the sea, until he stopped counting, for it was without number" (Genesis 41: 47-49).

We're taught that...

the collection and storage of "one fifth" of the produce of the land during the seven plentiful years...

is a description of how the Lord stores up within us, "remains" or "remnants," which are precious, heavenly affections hidden deep within our inner being.

Here's the key idea:

*"These remains or remnants are where a person's actual life resides, and they **are what a person is nourished by spiritually whenever need and desire, that is, whenever spiritual famine, arises...**" (AC 5297).*

What are these "remains" or "remnants?"

Some remarkable facts:

They are what connect us to the spiritual world, to heaven, ultimately the Lord.

They are the Lord's dwelling place in us (AC 1906).

Remains or remnants are heavenly loves, heavenly affections, stored (without our knowledge) in the deepest part of our mind (AC 1050)

Every human being receives them.

They are stored up and preserved for later use (AC 1738).

- for when famine strikes (see AC 5342:3).

They are:

"states of innocence from infancy, states of love for our parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, and states of charity toward our neighbor and compassion toward the poverty-stricken and needy" (AC 561).

This spiritual sustenance, these heavenly affections,

are what enable us to survive, to be human.

Without them we would not be able to **give or receive love**.

We would have no compassion,
 no empathy,
 no desire to learn
 no innocence or willingness to be led by the Lord
 no interest in spiritual things at all

But again, this is where the challenge comes in...

In times of famine, we *forget* that we have these reserves!

We feel depleted, running on empty...(spiritual starvation)

We are fooled, tricked, by the influences of this world

- there's no way forward
- your faith isn't going to help
 - belief in God shaken
 - not sure I believe teachings of the Word/New Church

But this is where the planning, the anticipation of the "impending" famine, pays off, for it is by drawing on our reserves,

by remembering that we have this incredible richness in our lives

- these "treasures in heaven,"

that our focus turns to that which feeds the soul

(which is why we love recalling fond memories of our past,
 happy times, w/family, friends, loved ones)

Explains why the Lord said,

"Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to everlasting life" (John 6:27).

"For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul" (Mark 8:36, AC 794).

The struggle is worth it.

"The more we allow ourselves to be reborn, the more our remnants/remains serve their purpose..." (AC 5342)

- returning to states of innocence, states of love for parents, teachers, friends, states of charity toward the neighbor, compassion/empathy for those less fortunate than ourselves, as we read in our reading today (AC 561).

Important point: we are the inhabitants of two worlds...

Our recitation this morning: "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."

The *"mind is our true self"* (AC 5301).

"The kind of mind we have determines what kind of person we are..." (AC 5302)

The capacity to be human is *"the capacity to think what is true and to will what is good"* (AC 5302).

- brings us into the "presence" of the Divine

SEVEN YEARS OF FAMINE

*"Then the seven years of plenty...ended, **and the seven years of famine began...**and so Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians..."* (Genesis 41: 53,54,56).

When we suffer and struggle, that is, experience spiritual famine,

it's important to find something **meaningful** to focus on,

like reaching out to others

or doing something useful

or noticing the joy and beauty of the Lord's creation.

- it's the simple things,
- simple acts of kindness

*"Truth comes to be joined to good **when we find joy** in doing good to our neighbor, not for any selfish or worldly reason, but for the sake of truth and goodness itself" (AC 5340)*

What a wonderful phrase: "**find joy**"

To do so is to tap into the joys and delights of your childhood...

innocence, willingness to be led

Famine states, by definition, create a bleak, mental landscape,

7 years of famine signify desolation *"even to despair"* (AC 6144)

but even in times of suffering we have the opportunity,

the freedom,

to shift our mindset.

The Lord does this by drawing on our reserves,

drawing on our remains,

by bringing:

"some of [our] remnant out of storage and reintroducing it..."

to our present struggle, predicament (see AC 5342).

[Congregational reflection/exercise: take a moment to recall a time of "plenty" in your life. What memories come to mind? Now take a time of "famine" - maybe current or one from the past. What reserve - childhood memory - did/can you draw on?]

Many unexpected joys await...

-as we re-engage w/innocent states of our childhood & youth

In the case of Joseph, the happy, tearful reunion between himself and his estranged brothers wouldn't have happened without the famine...

Spiritual famine can reunite us with the Lord

Discover new loves, ones we experienced in childhood

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled"
(Matthew 5:6).

Amen.

Lessons: Genesis 41, AC 561, 5342