

## **Living, Joyous Worship**

by the Rev. Morley D. Rich

All worship that is genuine and living is both joyous and humble. It is an opening of the doors of a person's heart and mind to influx from the Lord, and a consequent spontaneous outpouring of his spirit in appropriate expressions, words and actions. It consists in praise and acknowledgment, in prayer and gratitude and offering, and in the free and open reception of instruction, from which comes both inspiration and humiliation; and, if it is genuine, it results in a re-creation of the person's will and understanding—another touch of the Maker's hand in molding the shapeless clay into a human form which will become the image and likeness of its Creator. It is a means by which a person may be reminded of the uncountable Divine blessings and gifts he has received, and also by which he may be made more acutely aware of his own evil loves and failings. Without genuine worship, whatever its forms and circumstances, life on earth has no real significance. Without genuine worship life tends to become a sterile struggle for mere existence on the animal level, and even natural recreation and pleasures eventually pall and become dead dust.

But what is this genuine, living and joyous worship? How does a person attain and acquire it? Every person who has some understanding and vision of what it is or can be, desires such a state of mind. Furthermore, most adults can remember some childhood experiences of sheer love, adoration and delight in the worship of "Our Father, who art in the heavens," or whatever name the religion they were brought up in called the Creator.

God is a Spirit, the Lord declares in His Word, and it is revealed to us that He is the Spirit of love itself. So the true worshiper must worship the Lord in the spirit of love—of love to Him and charity toward the neighbor—in and from the truth of His Word.

Often there is a common, though usually unconscious, perception of this, so that when people come to public worship they have a different and somewhat better feeling toward others. They are on their "best behavior," so to speak, using the words and extending the courtesies which are at least the signs of good will and of the desire to be in unity and harmony with one another in the common worship of the Lord. There is a general recognition that this is a particular time for the expression of love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor. Such states of unity, of self-restraint, and of self-compulsion to worship are invaluable to everyone, for by them the Lord can work to eventually bring a person to that heavenly state in which he is in a constant state of worship in every use he performs and in everything he does and says. This is the final end toward which the Lord endeavors to lead every individual.

In such worship, however, unguided feeling and affection are not enough. To worship the Lord as the Spirit of love and wisdom a person must also have truth. His spirit of love and charity must find expression, reason, and form in and from the truth concerning the Lord's love and wisdom. For a person cannot approach someone who is nameless and formless, invisible and unknowable; and he cannot receive the Spirit of love itself unless he has some idea what love itself is—unless he knows the truth and so knows his Lord. Furthermore, even the spirit of love and charity from which true worship springs cannot be formed in a person except through his

knowledge of the truth, his understanding and acknowledgment of it, and his effort to compel himself to live by it.

It is written that all worship which has compulsion in it is merely external and sad. This is the case if a person is compelled to worship against his will by forces outside of himself, as happens if he attends public worship only in order to earn the good will and esteem of others, or because he fears to lose the regard of those whom he wishes to cultivate. But this is different from self-compulsion. For a person is free when he compels himself from a feeling of his own need and from a sense of duty, when he disciplines his natural feelings for the sake of better things, and thus for the sake of his own improvement and eventual regeneration. Then, as with other things, his worship becomes a source of satisfaction, and finally of real pleasure and delight, similar but superior to that feeling of satisfaction which a person finds in any field of endeavor when he has compelled himself to do what is right and just. For the truth is that when a person compels himself to such things he is doing something of good, something from love, and therefore something which is a form and expression of the spirit of charity, of love to the Lord, of charity toward good and truth as the neighbor, and for the sake of the Lord's kingdom as the neighbor.

It is in and through worship of the Divine that all the best and most noble human affections and thoughts can find worthy and exalted expression, outlet, and satisfaction: joy in God's creation; gratitude for many blessings received; the thrill and inspiration which come from the exquisite truths revealed in the Word from the Lord's love for the human race; humility grounded in a deep insight into shortcomings and evils; and a heart-stopping realization of the need for all spiritual things. Any one or all of these may cause a person to sing or say within himself: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.... For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:46-47,49).

These and many other affections form the spirit of charity in a person, and the acts and words of worship are, or should be, designed to both express and provide a basis for their stimulation and formation. For if a person compels himself to regular worship of the Lord, then he has at least some beginning of love to the Lord and charity. And on the basis of this beginning, the Lord can flow in with His Holy Spirit to gift the person with further and more exalted affections and with gradually increasing delight and joy from the spirit of charity within. For the teaching is clear that if by worship a person opens the doors of his heart and mind, then the Lord flows in with His love and wisdom, His strength and inspiration, and the person feels genuine delight and joy. So his worship becomes true and living.

The genuineness and the living quality of a person's worship of the Divine, it can be seen, depend upon his regeneration, and their formation is therefore a lifelong process. For both require consistent and repeated efforts to live according to the Lord's commandments. Regeneration and the achievement of true worship both call for repeated examination of the infinite truths of the Lord's Word. Both, in their slow development, include innumerable states of affection and thought. In truth, a full state of worship comes about only when many memories of the Lord's truth, many knowledges of His life, His love and His providence, come together with many past states of love and affection in worship, and when all of these mesh in a person's mind to form one true and glorious and joyous feeling of worship. Then, indeed, the person is wide open to the Lord's coming, to His inflowing Spirit, and then, also, there is something of the spirit of worship in everything which the person is and does.

This does not diminish the equal need in worship for a person to feel humbled; to be chastened by instruction in the truth; even to come to worship at times with a grievous and desperate feeling of need, and, out of anguish, painful doubt and life's distresses to call upon the name of the Lord and pray to be led to that Rock which is higher than himself. But such states are used for one principal purpose by the Lord—as aids and stimulants to spur the person on toward the eventual goal of salvation and with it a perpetually delightful state of worship and love to Him. This is an entirely different state, beyond and eternally removed from the labors and grief of temptation and sadness, a state to which the Lord endeavors to lead all people and in which there will be no death, pain or weeping any more.

Such a person worships the Lord with joy and delight, and a spirit of love to Him and charity toward the neighbor pervades and influences everything that he is and does, in daily life as well as in public or private worship. In him are the joy and humility of worship, an openness to the Lord's truth and love, a living affection for the things of eternal as well as temporal life. The spirit of mercy and forgiveness walk with him, even when he suffers harsh things.

We know, of course, that this is picturing the ideal and the perfect. All people experience different states on various occasions of worship. A completely joyful and peaceful experience in worship is a privilege rarely attained. So many things interfere so many times. The channels between a person and his Lord are so often blocked and choked by the debris of proprial pride, personal annoyance, earthly considerations, and even feelings of anger, vengefulness and meanness. Because of this, forgetfulness of self in the worship of God is a state not easily or often achieved. But when it is, it is one of the greatest blessings and delights in a person's life. It becomes a memory which lasts a long time, and which actually lasts forever in his spirit, even though he may not be able to recall it at will.

The Lord presents to us the ideal of genuine, living and joyous worship so that we may know what it can be and desire to attain it. So it is that the Psalms of David so often and so well express the delight and joy of ideal and perfect worship.

*Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.... Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand (Psalm 95:1-2,6-7).*

*Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations (Psalm 100:4-5).*

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night... (Psalm 92:1-2).*

Amen.