

COMING EARLY TO THE SEPULCHER

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Lessons: Mark 16, Arcana Coelestia 2405:7

“Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2).

When the Lord was crucified, even His disciples did not know that He would rise again. The Lord had indeed told them many times, but they did not understand. They knew nothing about the other world, and they supposed that everything that the Lord promised was to be fulfilled on earth. They saw His mighty power. They witnessed His miracles: the healing of diseases, the casting out of devils, and the raising of the dead to life. He commanded the wind and the waves, and they were still. Surely one who could do all these things was able to protect Himself against His enemies. Nothing could possibly do Him harm. When the mob had sought to throw Him over the cliff at Nazareth, had He not passed through the midst of them? When the Pharisees had tried to catch Him in His words, that they might bring some accusation against Him, had He not reduced them to silence by the wisdom of His words? When, therefore, He spoke of His approaching death, they could not believe that He would really die. They looked for some hidden meaning in His words.

And then suddenly it all happened before they had time to realize what was taking place. He was betrayed by Judas, arrested, tried before Caiaphas and Pilate, and condemned to death. To their immense astonishment, He offered no resistance, performed no miracle, and brought no punishment upon those who had sought to take His life. He permitted that to happen which they had thought was impossible. They saw Him die upon the cross. Surely, after all, they must have been mistaken. This could not have been the promised Messiah. Sadness and despair laid hold of them, and they did not know what to do, or what to think.

So the disciples return to their homes, weeping and mourning during the Sabbath day, when the body of the Lord lay in the tomb. But when the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, having bought sweet spices, that they might anoint His body in token of their love, “came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun” on “the first day of the week”. They knew that a great stone had been placed at the mouth of the cave in which the Lord was buried, and they wondered how they would roll it away. But when they looked, they saw that the stone had already been rolled away. And when they entered into the cave, they found that the body of the Lord was not there. But they saw in vision an angel, clothed in a shining white garment,

who said unto them, “Do not be afraid: You seek JESUS of Nazareth who was crucified: He is risen. He is not here. See the place where they laid Him!” (Mark 16:6) In fear and amazement they fled from the sepulcher.

And presently they saw the Lord Himself. He was alive. His enemies had not done Him any harm. He had not gone far away. He was with them still, able to teach and lead, to heal and protect, even as He had been when on earth. Now for the first time they began to understand, remembering what He had said, namely, that He must suffer and be crucified, and the third day rise again. Now they began to realize that the “kingdom of heaven” of which He had spoken was not of this world, but that it referred to the life after death. The Lord had allowed Himself to be put to death, because He knew there was no other way to make them understand. In no other way could they be brought to know Him, not as a man, as a great prophet, but as the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

All this followed because, when He had been taken from them, when they thought that all was lost, when in their despair they felt like little children far from home, lost in the darkness of night, filled with fear, and not knowing where to turn, they had still clung to their deep love in Him. They discovered that He had not died. They saw His face, and heard His voice, and knew that He was with them still. And then the fears passed like a terrible dream from which they had awakened. They felt like children who had been brought back to their home, with its warmth and its comfort—back into the protecting care of a wise and loving Father, in whom they felt perfect trust and confidence. Their joy was great. Happiness filled their hearts, a happiness which was felt by all who came to know Him, a happiness which filled their lives ever afterward with hope and courage and peace. For now they knew that the Lord was with them always. He did not have to be present in a material body. His was a presence more intimate and real than any they had while He remained on earth.

This is the joy and gladness that the Lord wished to impart to them, and for the sake of which, because He loved them, He was willing to pass through all the sufferings of His crucifixion. This is the joy, which He wished to impart to all people, and to which we return each year at Easter time, when we recall His resurrection. For then do we also come to realize that the Lord is present today even as He was so long ago. This joy is especially possible to those who belong to the New Church. For the Lord has come again. He has opened His Word, and through it as through a window we may look into the other world, to see Him there, as the disciples saw Him after His resurrection—see Him in the glory of His Divine Human, as He is seen by the angels of heaven.

We cannot find Him there unless we learn, even as little children, to love Him, and because of that love to seek Him in the Word. When we grow up to be men and women; when we must leave our home; when we can no longer look to our parents to guide and protect us, but must face life for ourselves; then we may

feel as if we were alone. It will appear as if we were lost in the midst of night, not knowing where to go, or what to do. It will appear as if the Lord, about whom we have been taught so much, had been taken from us. But if we will then go to the Word, in faith and simple trust, “early in the morning, the first day of the week”, that is, at the very beginning of our life, seeking the Lord there; then, in His mercy, we will find Him, even as the disciples found Him. We will be given to see that He is present with us, that He has not gone away, that He is very near, ready to teach us what to do, ready to guide our steps in the way of peace. Then a great joy will fill our hearts, a sense of peace and safety under the governing Divine Providence of Him who alone is our merciful Heavenly Father, and our God.

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