

A PRECIOUS HERITAGE: READING THE WORD

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rev. Daniel W. Heinrichs

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

Many people believe that spiritual things are beyond our comprehension. In fact, they are often taught this by their religious leaders. “You don’t have to understand this,” they are told; “it is a mystery of faith.” According to this belief, people are not saved by knowing and understanding the laws of spiritual life and by living according to them, but by believing that Jesus Christ died for their sins and by observing certain religious rituals and ceremonies.

What does the Lord say about this?

I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I did not say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain’; I, the Lord, speak righteousness; I declare things that are right.... Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.... The word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return” (Isaiah 45:19,22-23).

This passage clearly states that spiritual things are not incomprehensible mysteries. The Lord does not ask us to seek Him in vain. The Word has gone out of His mouth so that we may be saved by reading it and living according to its Divine teaching.

In another place the Lord says, “Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you” (Isaiah 55:3). He says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me...and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). Also in this Gospel, He said, “If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (8:31-32).

Could anything be clearer than these statements asserting that knowing and living the truth of the Word is the basis of salvation? So the New Church teaches that a person’s salvation is dependent on his faith in the Lord and a life according to His Word. A person is assured of salvation only if he diligently lives according to his understanding of the Lord’s Word. Becoming an angel is a life-long work.

The Lord has given us the Word in order that we may read it, reflect on its teachings, apply them to our lives, and so be prepared for eternal life in heaven. The Word is the source of eternal life. There is no other! This is what the Lord meant when He said to the woman of Samaria, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

If we desire spiritual life we must drink deeply from the fountain of living waters. We must go to the Word regularly—to the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church—and fill our minds with its life-giving truths. We have been blessed with an abundant fountain of spiritual truths—“living water” given for our salvation. We have been blessed with the opportunity to refresh our souls from it. If we do not do so, we are cutting ourselves off from the source of everlasting life.

The Lord assures us that if we approach the Word with a desire to see truths so that we may live according to them, then we will be gifted with understanding and spiritual life. If we allow ourselves to be deterred from reading the Word by its style, then we are regarding the Word from a purely natural point of view. And we are depriving ourselves of a precious heritage. Consider this: If a person were to offer you a great fortune if you were to read a book and master its contents, would you not make every effort to do so, no matter how difficult the style and vocabulary? How much more then should we make the effort to master the style and vocabulary of those books which are the source of eternal life!

Reading the Word is not always a pleasure. This is to be expected. When someone is just beginning to read the Word, he encounters many words, phrases and ideas that are not familiar. Generally speaking, we do not enjoy what is unfamiliar. But a person who, from conscience and a sense of duty, reads a small portion of the Word every day will gradually build up a storehouse of truths into which the Lord can flow with love, and then a miracle will take place. Gradually, unbeknownst to that person, the power and beauty of Divine truth will create in him a love for the Divine truth of the Word. Then that which was done in the beginning from conscience and duty will become a never-ending source of delight and refreshment.

The Lord issues this urgent invitation to humankind:

*“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live...” (Isaiah 55:1-3).*