

Spiritual Hunger

by the Rev. Ragnar Boyesen

The multitudes saw them departing...and ran there on foot from all the cities... And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat."

And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?" But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish." Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they all ate and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men (Mark 6:33-44).

In this story, we are struck by the determination of the people to follow the Lord; indeed, they would not let Him escape into the wilderness to take His rest. They pursued the Lord and the disciples in order to be close to Him, to hear Him, and to be healed by Him. The whole scene is a graphic illustration of spiritual hunger. People wanted to learn from the Lord. They yearned to be filled with truth and goodness, to be released from false ideas and merciless conditions. Perceiving the heavenly spheres of love and mercy flowing from the Lord as He had compassion on them, their shriveled minds received spiritual nourishment.

Hunger, we are told, represents the longing for good. Similarly, thirst is the longing for truth (see *Apocalypse Explained* 750:10,11). In order to be truly nourished, the spiritual body in each of us must have both good and truth taken into it. If we are not nourished, but are subject to spiritual famine, the evils of life and the falsities of faith will rob us of spiritual power. Any famine of the mind is synonymous with the deprivation of the good of love through falsity.

The multiplication of the small amount of food in our story represents a foretaste of heaven, where the Lord can multiply even small acts of good or small insights of truth into a great quantity of spiritual strength and understanding. Let us reflect on our own minds. Do we find healthy spiritual hunger or unhealthy famine there? Do we find a longing for good, or a longing for pleasures of our self-seeking? What determines the outcome of our eternal lives is our

spiritual hunger. If we truly look to the Lord and long for His mercy and wisdom, He will abundantly satisfy us.

Just as the five loaves made of barley stand for goodness on the natural plane of the mind, so fish stand for the affection of natural knowledge. However, even if these are at first natural affections, there is a representation here of a focus of these affections upon use. Whatever we do from an earnest willingness to serve, by means of the best insight and understanding we have, will be blessed by the Lord. So much is this the case, that there will be evidence of an abundance of spiritual food, just as the disciples took up twelve baskets full of fragments. The Lord will give us so much more than we can use all at once. However, whenever our hunger yearns for a new opening, the spiritual food is there, given to us to meet our every need. This is pictured in the twelve baskets full of food.

When the Lord feeds us, there has to be ample time for assimilation. Just as the crowd was seated in companies of hundreds and fifties, we are to pay attention to the orderly consideration of what the Lord has given us. While sitting on the grass, representative of natural states in the world, we will see that our reception of spiritual states depends upon the ordering of our own minds.*

Between the multitude and the Lord, the disciples did the serving. Similarly, between our lower mind, filled with a jumbled assortment of thoughts and feelings as we hurry through life in the natural world, and the life flowing in from the Lord, there are the superior capabilities of the spiritual mind. Because the spiritual mind is more receptive to the Lord, it serves Him in ministering to the lower, natural mind.

The heavenly secret we can learn about our spiritual hunger while in the natural world is that even if we feel we are in a state of famine—in a state of temptation—the Lord is still inmosty feeding our minds. Through the Divine nourishment, the miracle of redemption occurs as often as we long for the Lord, seek Him and rejoice in His presence.

This eternal truth was beautifully spoken by Moses at the border of Canaan. It can also be spoken by each of us in the natural world, as we look toward the spiritual Canaan of eternal life. "Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

*A beautiful example of this is seen in the Heavenly Doctrine in the work *Apocalypse Revealed*, where the servant of the Lord, Emanuel Swedenborg, sees someone sitting under a laurel eating figs. Being hungry, he asked for some figs, which turn to grapes in his hands. He was told, "The figs have become grapes in your hand because figs, from correspondence, are the good of charity and of the derivative faith in the natural or external man, but grapes the goods of charity in the spiritual or internal man; and because you love spiritual things, it so happened to you" (875:9).