

THANKSGIVING FOR HARVEST

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Lessons: Psalm 136, John 6:1-14, Arcana Coelestia 5957.

Every day we ask the Lord for our food. We pray that He will “give us this day our daily bread”. And in our New Church homes we do not forget to thank the Lord for His unfailing answer to this prayer every time we sit down to begin a meal. In most of our homes the words used are those which we find in the Psalms: O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy is forever.” (Psalm 118:29) And we unite in this thanksgiving because we know that it is really the Lord who gives us our food, day by day, and that He does so because He loves us and is always kind.

If we live in cities, and see food only as it comes from the stores, it is not easy always to remember that it is really the Lord who leads us. Yet that is the simple truth. In another Psalm we are told that “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). What is the ‘fullness’ of the earth? It is all the precious things which are stored up in the bosom of the earth, and all the growing and living things which are found on it. Just think of all the orchards, their trees laden with ripe fruit; of vegetable gardens filled with growing produce; of farms rich in fields of waving corn and wheat and barley and rye; and of green pasture land stocked with fat cattle and sleek horses and sheep heavy with wool. Think of all the flower gardens, bright with beautiful blooms in all the colors of the rainbow and shaded by stately trees. Think of all the rivers and streams. And then think of all the wonderful things that are found in the mountains and beneath the surface of the earth: coal, iron, stone, precious gems, and metals, to be used in the works of men. All these things are what is meant by the fullness of the earth.

And all these things are the Lord’s! He makes them, and only He can do so. Let us think about the plants that sprout in the fields. The Lord makes the seeds from which they grow and puts life within them. He makes all the wonderful things in the soil, which nourish the seeds and the growing plants. He causes the seasons, and sends on the growing grain the heat and light of the sun, and the rain out of the sky, which bring life to all things that grow. No one else can do any of these things. So the fullness of the earth is truly the Lord’s. And we should never fail to give thanks to Him for the precious things of the earth, because it is from them that we get everything we need for food and clothing, shelter and warmth, health and strength, and for being of use to the Lord and His kingdom by being of service to other people. Whenever we see these things we should remember that they are His, and should say from the heart; “O

LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions” (Psalm 104:24).

But there is one time in the year especially when we should give thanks to the Lord for the precious things in and on the earth. In yet another Psalm it is said to the Lord; “You crown the year with Your goodness” (Psalm 65: 11). When is it that He crowns the year with His goodness? It is at the time of harvest, when the ripe fruits in gardens and in orchards have been picked, and the crops which have been slowly ripening in the fields throughout the summer have been gathered in and stored up to provide food for the coming winter. Then we can see, year by year, in the ripe fruits of the earth, a proof of the Lord’s loving and merciful care for us in the provision of our daily bread. And it is right that at the time of harvest we should come into the house of the Lord to give thanks to Him from the heart for that love and care.

Day by day, meal by meal, we can thank the Lord as we sit round the family table for the food He gives us in answer to our daily prayer for our daily bread. And we should never forget to do this, or to think of the meaning of what we are saying as we do so. But harvest, the time when the Lord has given a sure supply of food for all the people in our country, calls for something more than this. We go to church and sing our harvest hymns, to praise the Lord for the precious gifts He has again given us by means of the earth, the sun, and the skies.

Yet there are other things as well, for which we should give thanks to the Lord, and especially at the time of harvest because the yearly harvest of the earth should remind us of them. These are the even more precious things of heaven. In their Word the angels do not have the word “earth”. Instead they have the word “church”. There is a reason for that. Everything we need to keep our bodies alive, protect them, and make them healthy and strong, and everything we need to be useful and happy, the Lord gives us through the earth. And it is through His church that the Lord gives us everything we need to give life to our minds, to protect them from harm, and to make them strong and healthy, useful and happy.

So in time of harvest we should think as well of these spiritual things. In seeing the love and care of the Lord in providing our natural food, we should think also of His love in providing spiritual food for our minds. We should indeed thank Him from the heart for all the precious things that live and grow on the earth and are stored up within it; should thank Him for the things from which come our daily bread. But we should thank Him also for the precious things of heaven; entering into His courts with thanksgiving, into His gates with praise, because of His mercy in sending us the bread which comes down from heaven and gives eternal life and happiness to those who eat of it. *Amen.*