

FIRST SERMON ON THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

A Sermon by Rev Philip N. Odhner
March 01, 1959

"I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink. When saw we thee...thirsty and gave thee drink? Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. 25:35, 36, 40)

When the Lord on the cross saw that all things had been accomplished that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, He said, "I thirst." (John 19:28) The Lord's thirst was a Divine Spiritual thirst. It is a thirst for the Divine Truth and Divine Good in the Church, through which there may be the salvation of the Human Race. The Lord said, "I thirst," when He knew that all things had been accomplished that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, that is, when He knew that all things of His glorification had been accomplished through which there was the Divine Human, in which the Divine was made accessible and conjoinable to men. In these words therefore we hear the longing of the Lord's Divine Love that there might be those who would receive Him in His Divine Human, His longing for a genuine Church which would acknowledge Him, His longing for the reception by the Church of the Truth and Good of His Divine Human. This was His Divine end from the beginning of creation, for this He had striven with the human race in all the former ages and Churches, for this He had come into the world and assumed the Human and glorified it. And when He had done all things to make possible the conjunction of Himself with the Human Race, His Love longed for that conjunction, for the reception of His Divine Human life in the Church.

When the Lord said, "I thirst," they gave Him vinegar to drink. And by this is signified, that the Church which came into being did not receive and acknowledge the Divine Human of the Lord, but had truth mixed with falsities, the truth of faith separated from love and charity. For this reason the Lord came again into the world to establish a New Church in which there could be the reception of the truth and good of His Divine Human. Will those who are called to the New Church feel His thirst and give Him drink?

In man, thirst signifies the affection of the true. And if this affection, in man, is genuine then there is in it that which corresponds with the Divine Spiritual thirst of the Lord. For there is in it the longing that the human of man might be reborn and saved, the longing that man's human might be formed and opened to receive the Truth and Good of the Divine Human. If this is not present in the affection of the true, at first in a latent way, and then more and more openly, it is not a real affection of the true, and not a genuine spiritual thirst.

There are affections of the true which are not genuine. There are thirsts for knowledge and understanding which are not good but evil, which do not open the mind to the Lord but close it. Between these affections we must learn to discriminate, before we can know that real affection which is the neighbor who is to be loved. Most have the love of learning, the love of knowing, from which they daily acquire knowledge of many things, some of which are for natural uses, and most of which are for no other end than the delight of knowing

them. This love can be of great use in filling the memory of man with things which are tools for his thinking. But it may exist without any affection of the true. And it is an easy prey to the love of honour, reputation, and gain.

The love of understanding, of reasoning, of coming to brilliant conclusions on the basis of what one knows, may also be mistaken for the affection of the true, and thus as a genuine spiritual thirst. There are many obvious examples of those who have such a love of reasoning and yet have no love of truth at all. Where our difficulties in telling what is a real affection of the true commence, is with those who have a love of knowing and understanding the things of the Word and of the Doctrine of the Church. Because many love to think and talk about these holy things, it appears as if they are affected with them, when yet we know from the Word that many love to think about these holy things from a merely natural love without anything of spiritual love being in it. They who are in faith alone, or in faith separate from charity, have such an appearance of the affection of the true. They love to study, think and talk about the things of religion, but in such a way as to leave untouched their life's love and its intentions and thoughts.

If you look into your own life you will observe that the things of your religion have as it were their own compartment in your mind. All the terms of theology have as it were a meaning in that compartment, but no meaning anywhere else. There are of course the common truths of moral and civil life which reach into other compartments of the life, but these are such as to be common with other churches and religions, so that there is, so to speak, no difference in the other compartments between a man of the Church and others in the world. And you will observe that you tend to think that this compartment of religion is the internal with yourself, and that the other compartments are your external, which are necessarily somehow made different from others by that internal. And when we speak of the affection of the true, our thought almost always applies this affection only to that separated religious compartment of the mind. If we want to know and understand the truths of theology, as existing in that compartment, then we think we are in the affection of the true.

It is a great mistake to think of that religious compartment as our internal. We can have a very highly developed religious compartment without having any effect on our life's love and its intentions and thoughts. All that is in that compartment is merely abstract terms that have no meaning in life for us whatsoever. In fact, it may be said that our greatest danger, at this time in the Church, is that we may mistake such a developed religious compartment as our internal, and mistake the delights of knowing and understanding in that compartment as the affection of the true. Such an understanding must indeed be developed with us, but to regard it as an end in itself, to regard it as an internal life in itself, is a grievous error. If isolated in that compartment, the things of theology become like a kind of algebra. It becomes a thing of formulas, which we can manipulate as formulas, and even solve equations, and yet the letters or symbols in themselves mean nothing at all to us, nothing more than the x and y or a and b of an algebraic equation. So we can manipulate the terms celestial, spiritual, natural; and rational, natural, sensual; good and truth; good of truth and truth of good; falsity of evil and evil of falsity; and yet they may mean nothing to us more than x and y. How can we call such a separated theological compartment our internal? Does the existence of such a complex theological algebra elevate and make new our life in some mysterious way? Can

we call the love of that theological reasoning and equationing the affection of truth? Is this the thirst that is the neighbor to be loved?

Everyone can clearly see that regeneration is not the manipulation of a set of terms, no matter how much those terms may seem to put on life by reason of their juxtaposition one to another. Regeneration is to be in the things, and in the order of the things, which the terms represent and signify. And the affection of the truth is the affection of seeing the things in life which are true, and it is not the affection of the terms which represent and signify those things. If we deceive ourselves into thinking that the terms are truths, then we will never come into an affection of truth. We will then never know that we do not have the truth, that the truth is not in us, and we will never thirst for it. It is a kind of spiritual drunkenness, and the thirst for that kind of term-truth is like the thirst of a drunkard. It is fantastic and purely imaginative. In it we think we see all kinds of things which we do not see at all. It is divorced from reality.

Just ask yourself what you actually see in yourself when you read or think or speak of some truth. Do you really see something, or is it merely a term? For example, you know many things about the spiritual world, about the laws of heaven and of hell. Do you really see these things in your life, so that you know what they are, or are they just terms which have no meaning in your life? We know that the marriage of conjugal love descends out of the marriage of the good and true. Do we see this good and true in our marriages, or is it all just a kind of vague shadowy terminology, which we acknowledge in the abstract and reject in the reality? The thirst for the true is the thirst to see the true in reality, to see the actual forms of the good of life. If we will cease getting drunk on the terms of religion, and lead the understanding to see the actual good and true, and the actual evil and false in our human things, we will receive a thirst for the true that will open our minds to receive the Divine True of the Lord. Pay attention to your own mind. Look at your loves. Examine them in your thought. Analyse them. See what they really are. See if you can see the truth of the Word there. If a man does this, he will find that he knows very little and that he understands hardly anything at all. And he will realize that in his human things he is in need, and lacks all things. Then can the thirst start with him, a longing for truth that will burn in him, and cause his mind to open and imbibe with love what is given to him from the Lord. So it is said in the Apocalypse, "To him that is athirst will I give of the fountain of the water of life freely." And by this is meant that to those who desire truth out of any spiritual use, there will be given to them all the truth that is conducive to that use. To desire truth out of spiritual use, is to desire it for the sake of that new human life which can receive the life of the Divine Human of the Lord.

Sometimes those, who wish to deride the usefulness of the Church, will ask, in a sarcastic manner, where the differences in the life of the Church and the life of the world can be seen. They will ask to be shown in so many words where the new plane of the life of the Church is. If this were asked out of the great longing for that life and that plane, if it were asked out of the desperate need of it, then it would indicate a real thirst for the true. But if it is asked in derision, then it is asked out of faith alone and out of a complacent satisfaction with the old life and the old human. All of us may at times feel that derision. But only they who are being regenerated feel the actual despair of seeing the truth in their life, and only these feel the

thirst for it which may be satisfied from the fountain of the water of life.

The affection of the true is sometimes called in the Word the love of the true for the sake of the true. This could be mistaken to mean the love of knowing the true for the sake of knowing it, thus that the abstract true is an end in itself. But what is meant is, that that understanding of the true, which is given to us, if in an abstract compartment of the mind, is for the sake of seeing the actual truth in life.

It would be good for us if, at the end of each day, we should reflect as to whether or not we have come to see anything of actual truth in that day. Not just to have learned a new term, or to have learned to manipulate some term, but to have seen it in our own life, in such a way that we know what it is. If we did this, we would come to thirst, and many times we would experience a despair that we have seen nothing, and perhaps even been cast into doubt about what we had previously seen. And yet in this, we would come to understand in a real way, what it is that the Lord thirsts for in us, and our hearts would be prepared to receive His Truth. And then too we would begin to know the signs of this thirst in other men, and to love them for it, knowing that they have with them an affection which is of the Lord. To see the true in the human things, in the life, is to see it in a form which does not appear immediately or directly to be of the Word. It is therefore likened to a thirsting and a giving to drink to others, to the least of the Lord's brethren. And yet in so doing we would indeed be making possible that for which the Lord longs for out of His Divine Love.

AMEN

Lessons: Exodus 17, John 19: 13-30, Apocalypse Revealed 889.

Apocalypse Revealed

889. I will give unto him that thirsteth of the fountain of the water of life freely, signifies that to those who desire truths from any spiritual use, the Lord will give from Himself through the Word all things that are conducive to that use. By "him that thirsteth," is signified he who desires truth from any spiritual use, will be seen presently; by "the fountain of the water of life," is signified the Lord and the Word (n. 384) ; by "giving freely," is signified from the Lord, and not from man's own intelligence. The reason why by "thirsting" is signified to desire for the sake of some spiritual use, is because there is given a thirst or desire for the knowledges of truth from the Word, from natural use, and also from spiritual use, from natural use with those who have learning for their end, and by learning, fame, honor, and gain, thus self and the world; but from spiritual use with those whose end is to serve the neighbor from love to him, to consult the god of their souls, and that of their own, thus on account of the Lord, the neighbor, and salvation; truth is given to these so far as it conduces to that use, "from the fountain of the water of life," that is, from the Lord through the Word; to the rest truth is not given from thence; they read the Word, and every doctrinal truth therein they either do not see, or if they do see it they turn it into falsity, not so much in speech when it is uttered from the Word, but in the idea of their thought concerning it. That "to hunger" signifies to desire good, and "to thirst" to desire truth, may be seen (n. 323,

381).