

## THE HOLY SUPPER

Adapted from a sermon by Rev. Patrick A. Rose

Very near the end of the Lord's life here on earth, He gathered with His disciples in an upper room to celebrate that most holy of all Jewish festivals—the eating of the Passover. It was during this celebration of the Passover—during the last supper He would eat before His crucifixion—that the Lord established and commanded the observance of the Holy Supper. As the eating of the Passover was the most holy act of Jewish worship, so partaking of the Holy Supper would become the most holy act of worship in the Christian Church. The Lord gave bread to His disciples and told them to eat. He told them they were to do this in remembrance of Him. Then He gave them wine and told them to drink. He told them that this was the blood of the New Testament, or New Covenant.

It was clear—from the Lord's words and actions—that the Holy Supper was an act of worship of fundamental importance. Just what it really meant, though, why it was so important, was not clear. What it is that makes the Holy Supper to be holy is something the Lord did not reveal at that time. Indeed, one of the many things that the Lord was to reveal later in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church was the true meaning, the spiritual meaning, of the Holy Supper. In giving this new revelation, the Lord established a New Christian church in which people are to approach the Lord Jesus Christ directly and to worship Him “as the one only God” (*True Christian Religion* 700). And because the New Church is to enter fully into the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, so also it must enter fully into the meaning of the Holy Supper, for it is in the Holy Supper that we can enter fully into the presence of the Lord Himself.

We are taught that the bread stands for the Lord's good, and the wine stands for His truth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4735:1). Eating and drinking represent receiving this good and truth from the Lord within ourselves. So it is that when we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are not simply eating and drinking. We are doing something which represents and corresponds to the reception of Divine good and truth from the Lord Himself. But there is more to it than this. We are not simply to drink the wine, and to think within ourselves that this wine stands for Divine truth or to eat the bread and think it stands for Divine good. These correspondences are not abstract or distant. The bread and wine are symbols of the presence of the Lord Himself, the Lord who loves us, and who came down to earth so that He might be with us. They are a universal symbol of His presence, and of His conjunction with us. These symbols have the most unbelievable power to bring about the presence of the Lord within our minds.

The Lord told His followers “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). Many of the Lord's followers left Him shortly after He taught them this. They couldn't understand, or they wouldn't understand, what the Lord was really talking about. And what the Lord was talking about was the fact that within every person who follows Him, there is a deep hunger and an urgent thirst. We need the Lord. We need Him to fill our empty spirits with His presence, with His Divine good and His Divine truth.

Return in your mind once more to that upper room where the Lord celebrated the Passover. Soon the Lord would leave His disciples, or so it would seem. He would be arrested and crucified. His

disciples would, for a time, be scattered. But the Lord would never really leave them. In fact, after He rose from the sepulcher and ascended into heaven, He would be with them for ever and ever. Whosoever wished, could turn to the Lord to receive His love and be guided by His wisdom. The Lord would still be with people here on earth. This is why He talks about His flesh and His blood. When the Lord talks about His flesh and blood, He means His actual living presence. He means that He Himself, in His Divine Human, would be with His followers (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4735:1).

After He rose from the sepulcher, the Lord would be with people in a way that had not been possible before. People would have a new insight into the truth, a new understanding of the Lord. They would be able to have a new covenant and a new relationship with Him. Not only would they be able to love the Lord, but they would be able to see—see in their minds—what it was that He wanted them to do.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine in the Holy Supper, what we are doing is, on one level, a purely physical action. It is just ordinary bread and wine. It is just ordinary eating and drinking. But in our minds, we are thinking of the Lord God Jesus Christ. And, as we think of Him, He draws especially close to us. As we eat the bread, He gives us spiritual bread. As we drink the wine, He gives us at the same time spiritual wine for our spirits. Deep within we can receive a clearer, a brighter, a more living vision of the Lord Himself. His life, the life of His love and wisdom, touches our spirits, fills our spirits, and as a result, we can come to know and understand Him better. It might not be obvious to us. We might not even notice a difference. But in some way, deep within ourselves, the Lord has drawn us closer to Himself.

The Holy Supper will not save us by itself. If we do not learn from the Lord's Word, and do what it teaches, then the Holy Supper becomes an empty ceremony. But if we but make the effort to follow the Lord, and if we want to be strengthened in our desire to follow Him, then in the Holy Supper the Lord's love and wisdom can touch and fill our spirits, and He can draw us closer to Himself in heaven. He draws close to us and feeds us with heavenly bread, with His Divine love. And He shines within our minds, giving us a living vision of Himself with spiritual wine. Insofar as we approach the Holy Supper worthily, the Lord Himself is immediately present with us in His sacrament, and introduces our spirits into association with the angels of heaven. When people approach the Holy Supper, they are approaching the Lord to receive spiritual life from Him. The Holy Supper is, in this sense, an actual gateway into heaven.