

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

From a Series on the Lord's Prayer
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Lessons: Exodus 16; Matthew 15:32-39; Arcana Coelestia 8478.

As we consider the various phases of the Lord's Prayer we must never forget that it is His prayer. The disciples had asked Him to teach them how to pray as John also taught his disciples to pray. In response to this request the Lord gave the Divine pattern for prayer, and every sentence in that prayer transcends human wisdom because it breathes forth the Divine Intelligence.

The prayer is universal, and because it is universal it takes in all of the great doctrines of the church, and the doctrine that is stressed in the sentence before us is the doctrine of the Divine Providence. "Give us this day our daily bread". The prayer might have read, "Give us bread", but it does not; it asks for *daily bread*. Here in the word "daily" is the key to the New Church understanding of this part of the prayer.

Let us look at our bodies for a moment; we are so created that we must feed ourselves over and over again. It is not possible for us to eat enough today to last us for a year, or a month, or a week. In fact, we do not feel perfectly comfortable unless we eat three times each day. Nor can the earth store up heat and light to last it for any great length of time; it is the law of nature that day and night must follow each other in succession making, as it were, the throb of a heartbeat for our solar system. The Writings tell us that preservation is perpetual creation. There is nothing that can remain as it is unless it is constantly being renewed. The spirit of renewal from the Lord is the "Daily Bread".

When we speak of the "spirit of renewal from the Lord" being the "daily bread" we mean far more than the material bread of this world. Of course we include the material bread, and in this connection "bread" becomes a universal symbol for all the food that nourishes our bodies; all of this we understand to be meant by "bread", but in addition, and of far more importance is the bread that the Lord spoke of when He said, "Labor not for the bread which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27).

"I am that bread of life" " I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:48, 51).

A New Churchman is always seeking to see the reality that is behind the symbol. That bread is a most vital symbol none can doubt, for at the Last

Supper the Lord took bread and broke it, and gave, to His disciples and said, "Take, eat, this is my body." In other words, natural bread corresponds to the very body of the Lord, and the Lord's body is composed of infinite goods made manifest through infinite truths. Bread, therefore, in a spiritual meaning stands for the truths and goods from the Lord by which the mind is nourished, replenished, and built up.

"Give us this day our daily truths and goods" that is our spiritual prayer. Right here we can enter into a very practical consideration. Some people think that they can learn enough spiritual truth in church on Sunday to last them through the week. They think that if they hear the minister read three lessons from the word, and then preach a sermon, and if they have been inspired by the singing of the religious music, they think that if all that has taken place on Sunday that their spirits have been fed for another week and they do not need to bother any more about spiritual food. But this is not according to the laws of God. How silly we would feel if we tried on Sunday to eat enough food to last us for the week! We know, when it comes to feeding the body, that we have to eat over and over again; we eat three times even in one day. Now if this is true of our bodies—that we have to nourish them over and over again—how much more true must it be of our minds. The mind can no more be built up into a fine strong mind by one meal than can the body; the mind must be fed again and again and again.

How do we feed the mind? The Lord said that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us". That is, the Lord is the Word, and He also is that bread that came down from heaven which if a man eat he shall never die. We all, then, can feed our minds by reading and studying the Lord's Word. If we do this, our minds will be built up by the Word, our character will be founded on the Word, and our purposes in life will be molded by the Word. Evil spirits will be put to route by the power of the Word in our minds. The Lord Himself used this means to put to shame the Devil and Satan who tempted Him in the wilderness. To every temptation the Lord answered by quoting the Word.

When the Devil wanted the Lord to turn stones into bread the Lord answered, "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone". To the Devil urging Him to cast Himself off the temple He made answer, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God". Finally when Satan showed Him the whole world and offered to make Him ruler thereof He answered, "Get thee behind me Satan, it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4). This shows the power of the Word to dispel evil.

But this power of the Word to overcome evil cannot be ours unless the Word makes part of us. It cannot make part of us just by reading a large portion of it any more than we could eat and eat and eat and expect all the food to become part of our bodies. No, the only way to build the body is to eat regularly, and

eat the right kind of food. So it is with the spirit. We must feed the spirit regularly and the right kind of food. This we can do when we make it a matter of our consciences to read a portion of the Word, and a portion of the Writings every day. "Give us this day our *daily bread*".

The purpose of daily reading is to furnish the truths which by application to life can be turned into goods and thus enter into the very structure of our spiritual man. The Lord, indeed, leads us, but there is no such thing as pure mercy apart from means, and the means which the Lord uses to lead us are the truths from His Word. If we are conscientious about our daily reading then the Lord can fasten our minds upon some particular truth which will be the very answer to the problem that is besetting us.

The necessity for "daily bread" was manifested in ancient times by the manner in which the Lord gave manna from heaven to the Children of Israel. It was a matter of daily concern. Each morning when the dew lifted from the ground behold the manna lay around. Then each individual was sent forth to gather an homer for himself. He was forbidden to gather more than an homer; he could not lay up for the morrow. Some tried it, and behold, it bred worms and stank. The internal meaning of the daily bestowal of manna was the same as the "daily bread" for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer. If the mind and the character of a man are to be built, they must be built by a continuous process.

The Lord said, "The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life." To learn these words, to draw them deeply into the mind, to meditate on them, and then to apply them in all things of life—to do that, is to become a genuine New Churchman eagerly bearing his share of the responsibility of helping the glorious vision of the New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven to become a reality. *Amen.*