

SHEM AND JAPHETH

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Lessons: Genesis 9:18-29, Luke 23:24-34, Arcana Coelestia 1083

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”. In one of the most cruel and agonizing modes of death imaginable, the Lord had been nailed with spikes to a cross of wood, to hang there in mortal pain until life drained out of Him. But the very first words that He spoke from the cross, He who has given us an example that we should do even as He has done, were a prayer for the forgiveness of the very men who had perpetrated this outrage against Him. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”.

No, they did not fully realize the enormity of their crime. They did not realize, as we do, that it was the God of heaven and earth they were hammering onto a cross. But they knew enough. Because He had come to earth as Divine Truth, the Writings say, the Jews treated Him exactly as they treated Divine Truth. They know enough to be guilty of their sin. And what did He say, He, who has given us an example that we should do even as He has done? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”.

How different this was from the action of Ham, son of Noah, who saw his father’s drunkenness and nakedness, and immediately went and told his brothers. How different from the actions of our own propriums, which love to find only what is evil in other people, and then to talk about it; or, if they see anything good in another, to belittle it and put a bad interpretation upon it.

But Noah had also two other sons, Shem and Japheth, who stretched a garment between them and walked backward into their father’s tent to cover his shame. And the spiritual world has more inhabitants than the Hamites, the devils of hell. It also is peopled with angels, men who have conscientiously tried to follow their Lord’s example, forgiving even their enemies.

Concerning those who are meant by Shem and Japheth we read in the Arcana:

They observe what is good (in another), and if they see anything evil and false, they excuse it, and if they can, try to amend it in him.... They scarcely see the evil of another, but observe all his goods and truths, and put a good interpretation on what is evil and false.... They interpret for good, and excuse, with all their might.... They do not attend to errors and perversions.... They avert the eyes and do not see.... And so it ought to be done.... Those who are in charity think nothing but good of others and speak only well of them, and this, not for their own sake or for the other’s

favor, but from the Lord... Like the angels, they excite nothing but what is good and true, and excuse what is evil and false” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1079-1088).

Imagine what it would be like if we all lived like that, honestly trying to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. Bending over backwards to keep from seeing the evils and perversions and faults of our fellows. Refusing at all times to talk of what’s wrong with others, except to try to excuse them. Not refusing to admit that evil is evil (for that would be silly), but refusing even for a moment to condemn those who are doing the evil, and putting a good interpretation on their lives instead. Actually making an effort to find *something* good in our fellows to think and talk about even though it’s a hard job to find it.

We might not have much to talk about, at least at first, but, to use a cliché, the silence might be golden. The Writings pretty thoroughly indicate that the celestial angels don’t have to chatter incessantly all day long. It might be worth a try.

“I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”. In the very agony of death itself, He prayed for those who were putting Him to death. Why do we, instead, murder the reputations even of those who have done us no harm at all? Why can’t we ignore the faults of others, keep our mouths shut about them, or open our mouths only to excuse, uphold, and defend? It is not an impossible task. I have given you an example. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:24-34).

Amen

Arcana Coelestia 1083: (2) The internals of the Ancient Church were all the things of charity and of the derivative faith all humiliation, all adoration of the Lord from charity, all good affection toward the neighbor, and other such things. The externals of the Ancient Church were sacrifices, libations, and many other things, all of which by representation had reference to the Lord and regarded Him. Hence there were internals in the externals, and they made one church. The internals of the Christian Church are exactly like the internals of the Ancient Church, but other externals have succeeded in their place, namely, in place of sacrifices and the like, the sacraments (symbolica), from which in like manner the Lord is regarded; and thus, again, internals and externals make a one. (3) The Ancient Church did not differ one whit from the Christian Church as to internals, but only as to externals. Worship of the Lord from charity can never differ, howsoever externals are varied. And since, as has been said, there cannot be a church unless there are both what is internal, and what is external, the internal without an external would be something

interminate, unless it were terminated in some external. For man for the most part is such that he does not know what the internal man is, and what belongs to the internal man; and therefore unless there were external worship, he would know nothing whatever of what is holy. When such men have charity and the derivative conscience, they have internal worship within themselves in the external worship; for in them the Lord works, in charity and in conscience, and causes all their worship to partake of what is internal.