

## Simeon: Just and Devout, Waiting

Excerpts from a sermon by the Rev. Michael D. Gladish

*And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Luke 2:25-26).*

Today let us look at who this Simeon is within each one of us? What does he represent and what is he doing in Jerusalem?

Deep within every person, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us, there is a remnant of things good and true that come from the Lord and that are never taken away from us, no matter how difficult or disorderly our lives may become. Simeon evidently represents this remnant. At the darkest time in the history of Israel, when its religious life was dominated by hypocrisy and greed, here was a man who not only was just and circumspect, but he eagerly anticipated the coming of the Lord. In his life we see an image of the part of ourselves that knows what is right and loves what is good, no matter how shameful other aspects of our lives may be. This part longs for the freedom to speak and hear the truth, and to live according to the order that will bring peace and blessing into the life of our spirits. It is affirmative, optimistic, confident, *eagerly expecting* the help and comfort of the Lord, and in fact being guided by the Spirit of Truth or the Holy Spirit to receive Him as He is presented in the sanctuary of our minds.

Remember, Jerusalem represents the church, and especially the doctrine of the church. The fact that Simeon was in Jerusalem shows us that this wonderful affirmative spirit lives within us in the principles and precepts of religion that make sense to us and which we have stored away in the rational part of our minds. This part of us knows that it will not die as long as it continues to hope and prepare for the coming of the Lord. Indeed, if it remains faithful to the Word it will *never* die, for it will not be limited by time or space or any of the tribulations of this world.

Still, it must wait a while before the Lord comes. So what is this waiting within us? Again, as noted, it is not a passive state. It is an active state of preparation. Psychologists tell us that if we give up on something, we are much less likely to get it than if we continue to hope for it and to believe it will come. The Lord spoke of this also when He said, "All things whatever you ask in prayer believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22).

In the Simeon story it seems clear that his "waiting" for the Consolation of Israel corresponds to our state of affirmative spiritual preparation for the Help and Comfort that can come only as we complete this work. And it *is* work! In fact, this "waiting" is the spiritual basis for the whole concept of work—that is, the conscientious and disciplined effort to do what we know is right, because it is right.

As an illustration, think of the challenge we face as we try to understand what the Lord's Word says to us, His particular direction for our lives. Think of any difficult situation. What shall we do? What is best? What will be the most fulfilling? What will serve the highest use? What will bring the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people? Answers to such questions do not

come automatically; the Spirit of Truth cannot flow into us apart from our effort to live justly and wisely and to see the truth when it is presented to us. But if we are willing to learn, willing to grow, willing to receive the truth and acknowledge the faults it exposes in us, then we will indeed find the answers we seek, and we will know the way in which we should go.

It is the same with any other spiritual challenge, whether it be in thought, affection, or relationships. If we are just and circumspect, eagerly anticipating the Lord's instruction, it will come. Then we, too, will be led by the Spirit into the temple, that is, into the acknowledgment of truth in our heart and our life. Then we will see the innocence and tenderness of His love and will be able to say with Simeon, "*Master! Now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word.*" This does not mean that we will always get what we want—or what we think we want. The Lord is not nearly so interested in what we want as He is in what will truly make us happy, which often involves a long, circuitous process and a great deal of interaction with people who may not agree with us or with how we think things should be done. Remember, He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; *not as the world gives* do I give to you" (John 14:27, emphasis added). He also said, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

This is the key to our spiritual success and the fulfillment of the Simeon story. For when Simeon blessed Mary, it was not *all* good news! "Behold," he said, "this Child is destined for *the fall* and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken *against* (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be *exposed*" (Luke 2:35). Again, the Lord did not come to bring peace as we ordinarily think of it, but a real *sword*, that we in our spirits might cut through the self-pity and misconceptions of our own lives and gain the deeper blessing that comes with victory over all such things. Let's face it; we will not always enjoy having the thoughts of our hearts revealed. Still, if we are to grow in spirit and with the Lord's help "overcome the world in us," we must recognize that this is part of the process.

In the Word, Mary represents the affection for truth. It is easy to understand the fear and dread Mary must have felt when she heard these words of Simeon, but now think of the Mary within each one of us hearing the same words, knowing that something awesome and frightening must take place in our own lives if we are to fulfill the prophecy. Our affection for truth is not a carefree affection! It cannot expect to have an easy time. On the other hand, it serves a vital role in carrying and nurturing the Spirit of Truth, so that it may live and grow within us and eventually lead us through the work of transformation.

What burdens must this love bear! What pain must it endure as it suffers through the persecution of the truth it has labored to bring forth—truth that will not settle or conform to ordinary expectations; truth that seems to wander all over our spiritual world, attracting the attention of the poor and lame as well as the rich and healthy attitudes within us; truth that draws the criticism of the proud, arrogant, and deceitful elements of our imagination; and truths that finally suffer the greatest humiliation of all, a total rejection by the worldly conceits we have not been able to overcome! What grief the affection for the truth must accept, until one day it sees—and feels—the truth transformed, alive, radiant and powerful! It has overcome all the forces of darkness, yet without having hurt or condemned anyone. This is the Consolation of Israel,

indeed, the Light of the world, “the true Light which gives light to everyone who comes into the world” (John 1:9).

The story of Simeon, his praise of God and his prophetic blessing of Mary, all represent for us the story of our faithful obedience to the Lord in His Word. It is at once a beginning and an end, for in it we see both what the Lord requires of us and what He promises if we persevere in that work. It won't be easy; that's not the point. But it will be tremendously rewarding as we anticipate and then finally receive the simple gift of His salvation, the innocence of Divine love in Human form, the Word accommodated to us so that we can reach out and take it up and bless God because of it, and at last depart in peace.

Amen.

Lessons: Luke 2:21-35; *Arcana Coelestia* 3869:1,2