

YOU CAN HEAL SPIRITUAL SUFFERING

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And the leaves of the tree were for the Healing of the Nations.(Rev. 22:2b)

What good is the New Church? We are taught in the New Church that, no matter what religion anyone is a part of, whoever looks to God and shuns evils can go to heaven. So what is it the New Church is good for? What good comes from being a part of it, if salvation is not on the line?

Well here is one answer: happiness. Or, to put it another way that is perhaps a little more directly to the point: relief from suffering.

We all suffer. There is a husband who suffers, who struggles with adulterous thoughts, who loves his wife dearly to the depths of his soul, and who is in anguish over the terrible things that come into his heart. There is a young woman who suffers, who lost her innocence, or perhaps had her innocence taken away, who is in agony over what she believes she can never get back. There is a child who suffers, who misses her mother painfully, and wonders if she will ever see her again now that she is dead.

In this room with us today, someone is feeling real pain. If, personally, you are not truly suffering now, you still might have suffered in the past, and it is very likely you will suffer in the future. It is a part of life, a consequence of our flawed sense of self, or just the fact that we live in a world of space and time. Some suffering is small, and some is great indeed.

However, do not get down. There is good news. The Lord in His infinite mercy has provided a means of healing. That means is in this room today. It comes in two forms that you can see with your eyes right now.

Look at the Word of God. This book is full of healing power. It is the Lord's presence with us. Now look at each other. Look at the person on your left, at the person on your right. Each

person in this room, each one of you, is an agent of the Lord's mercy. You have the power to heal.

Where does that power come from? How can we all be healers? How does the Word give us relief from our suffering? "The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." The truths the Lord has lovingly given us, the truths we have learned, are medicine for anyone afflicted by falsity or evil. The healing power is in the rational truths of the New Church.

This is what the Lord is saying to us in His Word. In two separate visions, one to Ezekiel in the Old Testament and one to John in the New Testament, we hear of a tree whose leaves have the power to heal. Now, in the new revelation given to the New Church, the spiritual meaning hidden within these two wondrous visions is open for us to understand. According to our reading from *Apocalypse Revealed*, those healing leaves are a symbol for rational truths. Throughout the Word, when we read about leaves, it is the Lord talking to us about a certain way of using truths.

First, what is a leaf?

Just thinking naturally, what do we know about leaves? First, they are often green. In the Word, green things generally mean those things that bring life to our intellect. They make the understanding part of our mind alive; our faith is a verdant, living faith, by means of truths. More to the point, though, we should ask, what is the function of a leaf? What is its use?

Well, leaves grow on plants. They are a very important part of all vegetation. Without leaves, a plant cannot breathe, it cannot drink, and it cannot get energy. Essentially, if a plant's leaves die, it dies. In a process of 'transpiration,' tiny pores in a plant's leaves serve as means to draw up water through its roots, up its stem, and out via its leaves. Again, through those tiny pores, a plant takes up needed oxygen through 'respiration.' Finally, in 'photosynthesis,' miniscule green cells throughout the leaf use carbon dioxide and water to convert sunlight into storable

energy.

What does that tell us about the nature of rational truths? To begin with, we can see that spiritual life is impossible without them. The rest of our spiritual makeup—the flowers that make up our more spiritual truths, the fruits that are our good works—it is all impossible without the green rational truths of our faith.

So does this mean that we are trees? Most definitely. Trees in the Word are symbols of three things. First, when we read about a tree, it is the Lord's way of telling us something important about Himself. The Tree of Life is a symbol of the Lord as we consider His Divine Love. Secondly, a tree is a symbol of the Lord's Church. Finally, whenever we read about a tree in the Word, it is also a symbol for a person in the Lord's Church. This is the nature of the Word. Everything in it has three levels of meaning having to do with (1) the Lord and His Word, (2) His Kingdom in Heaven and on Earth, and (3) the minds and lives of the human beings that make up His kingdom.

Therefore, the tree is the Lord. The tree is the Church. In addition, the tree is the individual member of the church. And "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations."

Who are the nations? Remember from our reading that "the nations" are any people who are suffering under false beliefs or evil loves. If that is the case, then who among us isn't among the nations? We all fall prey to evil desires. False beliefs poison us all at times. This is true of you, and this is true of me, and it is also true of everyone else out there whom you will ever meet.

Now, here is the question: whether we are looking at the Lord as the tree or at ourselves as trees, how do we use truth to heal ourselves spiritually, and heal those around us? What can we do about spiritual suffering?

Consider the person plagued by adulterous thoughts, although he loves his spouse and loves his marriage. Why is he suffering? Where are these thoughts coming from? The Lord taught in the

Sermon on the Mount that to look at someone with lustful thoughts was in effect to commit adultery with her in your heart. Is this person an adulterer? Assuming that this poor person really does love his marriage, and truly wishes such thoughts never came into his head, you can imagine that such thoughts cause him extreme anguish. He may believe that he is a terrible person for having such thoughts.

But here is a leaf: We are not responsible for the thoughts that come into our heads, but are only responsible for how we react to them. The book *Divine Providence* teaches this beautiful and rational idea quite plainly. Here is what it says:

If a person were to believe, as is the truth that all goodness and truth originate with the Lord, and all evil and falsity from hell he would not assign goodness to himself and make it deserving of merit, nor assign evil to himself and make himself guilty of it (320).

Can you see how this is healing? Evil comes from hell, not from ourselves. We are only responsible for those evil thoughts that we welcome, that we willingly take delight in, and on which we decide to act.

What about the person who has lost her innocence? Perhaps she made some bad choices in life, or perhaps someone treated her brutally. It may have happened recently, or it may have happened a long time ago. Whatever the case, she is now suffering because she knows the importance of innocence, and believes that, once lost, it can never be regained. Is the damage permanent, irreparable? Will she never fully appreciate the heavenly joys that the Lord teaches us we can attain only through innocence? Imagine her suffering.

Well, here is a leaf to salve her suffering: True innocence is not a state we are born into, but one we achieve with spiritual maturity. Think about that. No, it does not undo the past, nor does it retroactively erase the past pain. However, the ongoing suffering, the terrible, false conviction that she is permanently

tainted and forever less of a human being—this falsity is replaced by the healing truth that is taught plainly in the book, *Heaven and Hell*:

... [T]he innocence of angels in heaven...is a willingness to be led by the Lord and not by oneself....But the innocence of little children is not genuine innocence, because as yet it is without wisdom. Genuine innocence is wisdom. For so far as anyone is wise he loves to be led by the Lord, or what is the same, so far as anyone is led by the Lord he is wise (341).

Yes, the innocence we are born with is precious, and we really should safeguard it in ourselves and in our children. However, it is only a template for true innocence. Losing it can be tragic and painful, but gaining the more full and wonderful innocence that every angel has, this is never out of our reach.

Finally, there is the child who has lost a parent. If they have no understanding of the life after death, they may be terrified to think that perhaps they will never see their loved one again. When it comes to truths about death and what comes after death, the New Church is fully supplied—and then some. The natural pain of loss and grief is not erased from the child's mind. However, when that child is given the beautiful truths about heaven, about how real life there is, and about how we can be reunited with lost loved ones when we ourselves go on to that life—well, the sting can be blunted. Over time, healing can happen in a way that it could not otherwise, without the truths.

Now remember, the tree is the Lord. He is the source of these truths. In addition, the beginning of the twenty-second chapter of Revelation that we read is a description of the Lord's New Christian Church. The Lord is in the midst of this Church, and always will be. It would cease to be His Church otherwise.

However, the tree is also someone other than the Lord. The tree is a man or a woman of the Church. You are the tree, if you are part of the Church.

John's vision of the New Jerusalem, with its throne and its

river and its trees, is a promise of the future of the Church. We are all part of this future. We would probably be making a mistake, however, if we passively just waited around for this promise. The Lord builds His Church out of people, and He does it by means of people. You are the means. Everyone here serves as means.

Therefore, this is not just about how we can turn to the Lord's truths when we are suffering. It is also an explanation of what a member of the Church does. If you are a member of the Church, if you are a tree planted by the waters in the New Jerusalem, then that means that your leaves are for the healing of the nations. You are a source of healing. The leaves still come from the Lord, ultimately, but they are put to use through your own actions. That is what it means to be a member of the Church: not merely that you are healed by the Lord and His Church, but that as a part of that Church you go out and provide healing for the world around you.

This brings us to one more critical point. The Lord taught His disciples that a tree with leaves but no fruit is no good. Likewise, we are no good if we have plenty of truths, but perform no good works. The whole point of a tree's leaves is to provide air, water and energy so that fruit may be produced. The whole point of the healing truths we are given in the New Church is so that we may go out into the world and do good to others.

So go to the Lord when you are spiritually suffering. Turn to His truths, when you need healing. Go out into the world, fulfill the Lord's promise to the world about His New Church, bear fruit, and provide leaves for the healing of the nations. That is what the New Church "is good for." *Amen.*

Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-3, Revelation 22:1-5, *Apocalypse Revealed* 936