



*Easter  
Readings*

*From the Old Testament, the New Testament,  
and the Writings for the New Church*

*April 5 to 12, 2009*

## Introduction

*Easter is a time for reflecting on the Lord. We have so much to learn about our God by reflecting on the ways He interacted with people, and the things He did right at the end of His life on earth—and just after. The readings in this booklet are designed to lead you from Palm Sunday, through Good Friday, and on to Easter. Each day includes a part of the story of the Lord's life, some related passages from the Writings for the New Church, and some reflections as to the implications of these teachings for our own lives.*

### **Clothes for a King—Palm Sunday Sunday, April 5**

<sup>6</sup>...So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. <sup>8</sup>And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’

Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21)

When the disciples laid their garments on the she-ass and her colt, it represented the recognition that truths in their entirety were the foundation on which the Lord as supreme Judge and King rested; for the disciples represented the Lord's Church in respect to truths and forms of good, and their garments truths themselves. This same recognition was likewise represented when the crowd spread their garments, also the branches of trees, on the road. (*Arcana Caelestia* no. 9212:6)

Knowing truths is one thing, acknowledging truths altogether another, and having faith in truths yet another. Knowing is the first step in regeneration, acknowledging the second, and having faith the third. The difference between knowing, acknowledging, and having faith becomes clear from the fact that the worst people of all are capable of knowing and yet do not acknowledge.... People who are not true believers are able to acknowledge as well, and in certain states are able with zeal to preach, confirm, and persuade. None but true believers however can have faith.

Those who have faith know, acknowledge, and believe; they have charity, and they have conscience. This then is what being regenerate entails. Merely knowing something that belongs to faith is an activity of memory which does not involve any assent of the rational. Acknowledg-

ing that which belongs to faith is in itself a rational assent brought about by certain causes and for the sake of certain ends. But having faith is an activity of conscience, that is, of the Lord working through conscience. (Arcana Caelestia no. 896)

**Reflection:** The stories about the end of the Lord's life on earth beg the question, "Who is this?" In this regard, we can ask ourselves three questions: 1) What do we know about the Lord? The things that we read in the Word, the things that we have learned over the years—they help us to form a beginning concept of the Lord. 2) What do we acknowledge about the Lord? Is Jesus Christ the God we acknowledge? Do we acknowledge His love for us, His commandments and what He says will lead to lasting happiness, His warnings? 3) What do we truly believe about the Lord? Is He the one we depend on for all that is good in our lives? Is He the one we turn to for answers and help? Is He the Ruler of all the world, and the God who watches over every last detail of our lives? Is He the one in whom we place our faith?

## The King and His Kingdom Monday, April 6

<sup>9</sup>Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' <sup>10</sup>Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11)

"Riding upon a donkey and upon a foal of a donkey" was a sign of royalty, and therefore the Lord so rode when He entered Jerusalem, and He was therefore called King by the multitude crying aloud, and branches of palm trees and garments were strewn upon the way before Him. As the Lord thus entered Jerusalem as a King it is evident that "Zion" means heaven and the church, in which the Lord reigns by means of His Divine truth. (Apocalypse Explained no. 850:4)

Two special ways in which the Lord is characterized are as King and as Priest. As King the Lord governs every single thing in the universe from Divine Truth; but as Priest He does so from Divine Good. Divine Truth is the order itself of His kingdom existing everywhere, all the laws of which are truths, or eternal verities. Divine Good is the very essential of order, every aspect of which is an expression of mercy. Both of these—Divine Good and Divine Truth—are attributed to the Lord. (Arcana Caelestia no. 1728)

**Reflection:** *The passages for today talk about the Lord's kingdom, and His government of it. The thought for today is that there is a predictability about the Lord's kingdom. By way of analogy, we know certain things will happen in our natural world. If we hold out a ball and let go of it, we can predict that it will fall. If we cut a lily from its root source, it will start to wilt. If we see a sunset over a lake one day, we can be very sure that the sun will set in that same place the next day and the day after that, and so on. There is a predictability to the laws of nature. It is the same with the Lord's spiritual laws. There are certain things that we can count on happening in a certain way. The Lord as King will lead people to heaven who live according to His commandments; He will love and forgive us, and continue to lead us no matter what we've done; He will protect every single human being from the hells; He will allow us to experience the consequences of our actions, cause happiness and harmony among people who live according to the golden rule, grant happiness in marriage (eventually) to all who truly desire it and strive for it, and give a deep sense of peace to those who place their trust in Him. What are some other examples from your own experience about the predictability of the Lord's teachings?*

### **Causing a Stir** **Tuesday, April 7**

<sup>15</sup>When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant <sup>16</sup>and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?'" (Matthew 21)

<sup>1</sup>Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. <sup>2</sup>And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

<sup>3</sup>Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered him and said, "It is as you say."

<sup>4</sup>So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man."

<sup>5</sup>But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place." (Luke 23)

Conscience is a new will and a new understanding received from the Lord, and so is the Lord's presence with a person, a presence which becomes all the closer the more the person is stirred by the affection

for good or for truth.” (Arcana Coelestia no. 4299)

When the time comes that a person is able to be regenerated, the Lord inspires the affection for good, and through that affection arouses the things that have been joined to that affection from Himself. In the Word these things are called ‘remains.’” (Arcana Coelestia no. 3336)

**Reflection:** *The Lord was accused by the scribes and Pharisees of “stirring up the people.” That is indeed a true accusation. It is something the Lord does for us as people He is leading to heaven. The Lord is in the effort to regenerate us or create us into the kind of people who can live in heaven. He draws near whenever there is an opportunity and stirs things up within us. The presence of the Lord is through our conscience—inciting us to do what we know we should, or causing us to reflect when our actions are hurtful to others. It is also by means of what the Writings for the New Church call “remains” or remnant states—all the genuine delights we have experienced, and the times when the things of heaven have touched our lives. These “remain” with us, and are stirred up by the Lord as a force for good in our lives. Unfortunately, there are also parts of us that are represented by the scribes and Pharisees—our self-centered and worldly-oriented parts. The presence of the Lord through our conscience or through our remnant states sometimes causes a clash within us between the good and the bad. We are left in freedom in the middle to choose. Issues come up, and we need to figure out if we will do as we know the Lord calls us to do, or place ourselves first. This is part of the way the Lord leads us to heaven.*

## **Betrayal** **Wednesday, April 8**

<sup>17</sup>Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

<sup>18</sup>And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.’””

<sup>19</sup>So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

<sup>20</sup>When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. <sup>21</sup>Now as they were eating, He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”

<sup>22</sup>And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, “Lord, is it I?”

<sup>23</sup>He answered and said, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. <sup>24</sup>The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of

Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?”

He said to him, “You have said it.” (Matthew 26)

Prudence appears to a person to be his own, and he believes it to be his own as long as he keeps shut up in him the most implacable foe of God and Divine providence, namely, love of self. This love dwells in the interior qualities of every person from birth. If you do not recognize it (for it does not wish to be recognized), it dwells secure, and it guards the door to keep the person from opening it and thus the Lord from casting it out. A person opens that door by refraining from evils as sins as though of himself, with the acknowledgment that he does so from the Lord. This is the prudence with which the Divine providence acts as one. (Divine Providence no. 210)

We will now list some instances that are illustrations of permission...instances which the merely natural person uses to confirm himself on the side of human prudence in opposition to Divine providence. As for example, when he reads in the Word that the wisest of human beings, Adam and his wife, allowed themselves to be seduced by the serpent, and that God did not by His Divine providence prevent it. That their first son, Cain, killed his brother Abel, and God did not deter him at the time by speaking to him, but only after the deed by cursing him. That in the wilderness the Israelite nation worshiped the golden calf and acknowledged it as the God who had led them out of the land of Egypt, even though Jehovah saw this from Mount Sinai nearby and did not act to avert it... And finally, that that nation was permitted to crucify the Lord. In these and many other instances in the Word, the person who acknowledges nature and human prudence sees nothing but evidence against Divine providence. (Divine Providence no. 236)

**Reflection:** Prudence is the part of us that figures things out. It is the part of us that determines “what I think is best” in any given situation. The passages above demonstrate a good and a negative use of human prudence. In a positive way, it can be our choice to cooperate with the Lord, especially when it is used to “refrain from evils as sins.” It is negative when it leads a person to disregard the Lord’s input and say, in effect, “I know better.” It appears that Judas was caught in the negative manifestation of human prudence. Some have speculated that his motivation in doing what he did was to force the Lord’s hand—to make Him fight against His enemies and defeat them once and for all. Others put a darker spin on his actions, saying he was motivated by greed. In either case, the “I know better” or “What I think is best” reflex manifested itself in a destructive way. Judas therefore stands as a symbol for

*betrayal—a lesson in what NOT to do. It is interesting that Easter is one of those times where people can usefully feel a call to examine themselves for things that need to change. It is also a time that we can be reminded of the Lord and the way He works with us. He didn't stop Judas from doing what he intended to do, but He definitely gave him food for thought before he did it. In the same way, He doesn't stop us from unwise ways of acting, but He does call us to see the wisdom in choosing His way.*

## **Newness of Life** **Thursday, April 9**

<sup>27</sup>Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup>For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. <sup>29</sup>But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” (Matthew 26)

<sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13)

<sup>1</sup>Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. <sup>2</sup>Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.... <sup>5</sup>Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” (Revelation 21)

When the end of the church is at hand, it is then provided by the Lord that a new church shall succeed. The establishment of a new church by the in-breathing of new life, or by regeneration, is described [in the Word] by the spirit which enters into people from which they live. (*Apocalypse Explained* no. 665)

[The words] ‘and the spirit of Jacob their father revived’ means newness of life. This is clear from the meaning of ‘the spirit revived’ as newness of life... Newness of life occurs when what is spiritual flows in from the internal and acts from within on what is in the natural. (*Arcana Coelestia* no. 5972)

This also explains why after the Resurrection, when the Lord spoke to the disciples, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit,’ (*John 20:22*). ‘Breathing on (or into)’ was a sign that represented the imparting of life through faith and love, as also in Genesis, ‘Jehovah breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul’ Gen. 2:7. (*Arcana Coelestia* no. 9229:3)

**Reflection:** *Everything living needs new life from the Lord: human beings, the Church, flowers, animals, etc. There is a teaching which says “sustaining is perpetual creation” (Apocalypse Explained no. 1215). This teaching implies that the Lord is in the act of continual creation. He breathes new life into all living things to the greatest extent possible. Therefore a child is not the same year by year, the life of angels in heaven is not static, but constantly developing, a friendship is an evolving thing, and so on. The same is true with a church. Unless it has life breathed into it by the Lord, it will not be able to continue. In the broadest sense, then, the Lord’s life on earth was His means to breathe new life into the Church, and by means of His work on earth, be able to breathe new life into all of us, as He leads us through life. In the New Church we believe the Lord has come again, as He predicted He would in the Book of Revelation, to breathe new life into His Church, and “make all things new” by means of it. Often times we associate Easter with newness. While true, we can also associate it with life—the Lord’s life available to us in new ways.*

## **Good Friday** **Friday, April 10**

<sup>32</sup>There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. <sup>33</sup>And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

And they divided His garments and cast lots. <sup>35</sup>And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.”

<sup>36</sup>The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, <sup>37</sup>and saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.”

<sup>38</sup>And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>39</sup>Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”

<sup>40</sup>But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? <sup>41</sup>And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup>Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

<sup>43</sup>And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

<sup>44</sup>Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup>Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup>And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’” Hav-

ing said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23)

The Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every human being, and is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. (*Heaven and Hell* no. 522)

The Divine Providence does all that it does out of pure mercy because the Divine essence itself is pure love, and it is this which operates through Divine wisdom, whose operation is what we call Divine Providence. This pure love is pure mercy for the following reasons:

1. Because it operates with all people throughout the whole world, who are so formed that they cannot do anything of themselves.
2. It operates with the evil and unjust as much as with the good and just.
3. It leads the evil and unjust in hell and rescues them from it.
4. It forever struggles with them there and battles for them against the devil, that is, against the evils of hell.
5. Therefore the lord came into the world and underwent temptations or trials even to the last of them, which was His suffering on the cross.
6. He acts continually with the unclean to make them clean, and with the irrational to make them rational. Thus He labors continually out of pure mercy. (*Divine Providence* no. 337)

**Reflection:** *On this day each year, millions of Christians focus anew on the awful events of Good Friday—the day the Lord was crucified—and ask themselves, why did it have to happen? Why did the Lord have to suffer in the way He did? Why did they have to twist a crown of thorns on His head, or beat Him, or nail Him to the cross, or taunt Him? Truly it is a horrific story, when we consider the cruelty exhibited by human beings. Yet even then, most people see within, whether they understand all that happened or not, one of the most powerful acts of mercy ever performed. Today we pause to reflect on that very cruelty as a manifestation of the depths of human depravity, and on the Lord's response to it as an expression of His mercy. We read in the Writings for the New Church, "Out of pure love, thus out of pure mercy, the Lord assumed the Human, and underwent the severest temptations, finally the passion on the Cross, that He might save the human race" (*Arcana Caelestia*, paragraph no. 9528). A willingness to undergo the severest of temptations—not just physical pain, but attacks on the thing the Lord cares about most, namely the salvation of the human race, and this out of "pure mercy"—this is what the crucifixion is all about. It is exhibited in two of His exclamations on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," and "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." It begs the question of whether we could strive for a greater level of mercy in our dealings with others...*

## An Unstoppable Force

Saturday, April 11

<sup>1</sup>Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. <sup>4</sup>And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

<sup>5</sup>But the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. <sup>7</sup>And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you."...

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

<sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth..." (Matthew 28)

If anyone knows the nature of hell, and how high it rose to flood the whole of the world of spirits at the time of the Lord's coming, as well as the power the Lord used to cast it down and scatter it, and afterwards to reduce it, together with heaven, to order, it must make that person cry out in wonder that that deed was entirely Divine. A possible comparison might be with a battle against the armies of all the nations of the whole world equipped with spears, shields, swords, muskets and cannon, and led by skilled and cunning generals and officers....The Lord's battle against hell can also be compared, though very imperfectly, with a battle against the wild beasts of the whole earth, in which they are killed or subdued, until not a single one dares to venture out and attack anyone under the Lord's protection....It can also be compared with stemming the whole ocean, when it bursts the dykes and breaks into fields and towns with its waves. The Lord employs similar Divine power to-day to fight against hell in every person who is undergoing re-birth. (*True Christian Religion* no. 123)

**Reflection:** *Imagine for a moment trying to stop the sun from rising. Who would be foolish enough to try? How would you even go about it? We might easily conclude, then, that it is impossible. But can a person stop a flower from growing? Sure, we might say. All you need to do is shut out the light of the sun, step on it, or rip it out of the ground. But imagine if there were a group of people who wanted to stop all flowers from growing the world over. Do you think*

*they could do it? The answer is “No way,” because growth is an unstoppable force. Flowers will pop up here or there no matter how hard someone might try to squash them. With these thoughts in mind, we can consider the Lord Himself. His love is an unstoppable force. There is no way the hells could have stopped Him from rising, and there is no way they can stop Him from doing what He does, namely breathing life into us, and leading us toward heaven. Of course we have the choice to follow Him or not, but there simply is no force powerful enough to make it impossible for Him to reach out to us and care for us. His love is an unstoppable force.*

### **“I am with you always...”**

**Sunday, April 12**

<sup>16</sup>“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”

<sup>17</sup>Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father?’”

<sup>18</sup>They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

<sup>19</sup>Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? <sup>20</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. <sup>21</sup>A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup>Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.” (John 16)

<sup>19</sup>“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28)

Before the Lord came into the world, He was certainly present with the people of the church, but through the mediation of angels as His representatives; however, since His coming He is present with the people of the church without any intermediary.... The difference between the state of the church before and after the Lord’s coming can be compared to a person who reads a book at night by the light of the moon

and stars, and one who does so in sunlight. It is crystal clear that in the former light, which is only white, the eye strays; but it does not in the latter light. (*True Christian Religion* no. 109)

**Reflection:** *The beauty of Easter is that all of the sadness and confusion brought about by the Lord's capture and crucifixion has a truly happy ending. The Lord did not leave His disciples and others of His followers in a state of utter depression and grief. He returned to them, taking away their bewilderment, and helping them make sense of what had happened. Confusion and deep sadness, turning into joy, peace, and satisfaction. What is it that changes these affections? The knowledge of the Lord's presence. When He is thought to be absent, there is bewilderment, weakness, fear, distress. But when He is clearly present, there is assurance, strength, a sense of mission. The Easter story speaks to our need for the Lord's presence—our confidence that He is making us strong and giving us direction.*

**Happy Easter!**

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