

Make Disciples of all Nations

A Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss

"All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; 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 28:19,20.

Some of the disciples were doubting when the Lord spoke these final words before He was lifted up out of their sight. His words were of comfort, and exhortation. In fact, they speak of everything that He longs to give, to any human being, and to the world.

The New Church is the Lord's gift to all nations. "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth." The Writings for the New Church often quote this as a proof that He alone is God. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Visible God, is the One who has all power. The Trinity is simply three different parts of Him, of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Go and make disciples of all nations." What is meant by "all nations?" The Writings say that this term refers to those who are in some goodness. They are the ones who will worship the Lord in His Human (AC 2227, 2228; see AE 340:21; AR 667).

The nations represent those who are in goods according to the doctrinal things of their religion. Therefore the Writings teach "[Because the Lord conquered in temptations] there will be a church that will be gathered together from all parts, and it will worship Him." (PP: Ps. 22:26-30; AE 331:9,10; AE 454). All people throughout the world who have love are "the nations;" those who will be gathered into His Church, and they will receive Divine truth from Him (AC 1025:6; AE 768:13; AC 3380). In this world or in the next it will certainly happen.

All of this is accomplished by the Lord in His Visible Human, and it needs to happen today through the New Church (AC 2853:2). For this Church has received the truth that the Lord has spoken, and from it true religion will grow once again. (AC 2853; SS 110 et al).

But this text also has a deeper sense. We tend to take it at face value because it is so clear. But there is a deeper meaning. When we look at the internal sense, we find that it is a call to us to be regenerated by

means of the Word. "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth" means that regeneration is only by means of the Lord. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations:" This is speaking of how the Lord speaks to the goodness in us. For we are "the nations," people in whom there is some goodness. The Lord wants to teach that goodness. He wants to make disciples of it, giving it His new truth that will let us be His followers. (AR 325 et al.) All good things in us can be taught by the Writings. We are called to let His truth shine on those good states, and lead them to the Lord. That is to become a disciple.

"Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism represents regeneration, which is the result when we become true disciples of the Lord. And regeneration is effected by the Trinity in the Lord. "The Father" is the Lord's love, which created and warms us. "The Son" is His truth, which reaches down to us to show us the way. "The Holy Spirit" is His outgoing energy or power, saving us.

"Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you:" as we are regenerated by the Lord we come to a point at which we are willing to keep all of the Lord's laws as He has now revealed them.

"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This is more than a promise of the Lord's presence. It is certainly that, but it is much more. The Writings say that the end of the age is when a church does not follow the Lord, and then "The Lord leaves it." (AR 750; cf. AC 4535:6; 10248; AR 658 et al). In the internal sense this speaks of what happens when the Lord regenerates us. Each one of us has a false church in us, our weaknesses, our evils, our self justifications. These are not following the Lord. When the Lord leads us that false church comes to an end. It is the end of the age of what is false and evil in us that He is promising, when He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This too is meant by His promise: "the former shall not be remembered nor come to mind."(Is. 65:17); and by His promise for the Holy City: "For the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:4).

In simple summary, then, our text, which is sometimes called "the Great Commission," is a promise given to each one of us. Because we have the New Church: because the Lord now stands visible to us, the "nations" (our willing states of good) will be taught by the truth. We will observe that truth. We will be regenerated or spiritually baptized, and He will be with us as our God even through to the death of all that is false and evil in us.

This promise is why our Church exists; for the Divine Providence of the Lord has as its end a heaven from the human race, and thus He wills that the church on earth, in individuals, shall become "the Lord's heaven upon the earth" (DP 27, 30).

So the deeper sense of these words is speaking of what happens inside each of us. It is talking of what the Lord will do for everyone. It is fitting that this promise was the last thing spoken by the Lord on earth, because it is indeed the fulfillment of His Divine will.

In a lower sense these words speak of another part of the Lord's will. We know that all people who believe in God and seek to obey Him, even if their religion is most mistaken, will be accepted by the Lord and led to heaven. But we also know that they cannot be regenerated until they receive the truths of the Word. We know that true married love is really available only to those who are in the truths of the New Christianity, and who look to the Lord as the only God.

Therefore the essential means to the end of regeneration is that people shall come to know and acknowledge the Lord in His threefold Word - in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Writings for the New Church. The children who grow up in this organization are spiritually gentiles, for they do not have faith - the internal conviction of truth. The multitudes in the universal church of the Lord on earth who do not have the Word are spiritually in need of it before they can receive the true blessings of His heavenly kingdom.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. Remember that "all nations" means those states in others which are states of good. It is a call to offer these truths to our children, who are not yet truly in the Church, and to the world. The Lord Himself expresses this beautifully in the following passage: "Those who are outside the Church but nevertheless acknowledge one God, and in keeping with their religion lead a life of some kind of charity towards the neighbor, are in communion with those who belong to the Church. From this it is evident that the Lord's Church exists throughout the whole world, though it does so in a specific way where the Lord is acknowledged and where the Word exists." (AC 10765).

The greatest neighbor is the communion of those who are in heaven, and those who will one day be in heaven. The call of the Lord to us, who do acknowledge Him and read His Word is: First, use that Word to shun

evils and become spiritually baptized; and second, offer that Word to this greatest community, this "communion of saints." (TCR 416).

And we too may doubt when we hear this call. After all, have we not tried to share our religion and found it difficult? But we don't all have to share it in the same way. There will be some who actively promote the Church's growth. Others may make it clear that their lives are governed by a deep religious faith - that is a form of sharing the truth, inviting interest. You may teach a child in school or speak the truth to your grandchild or be a part of a community which resonates with true values. You may communicate your conviction in true marriage or in the nature of eternal life - without asking for any response - to a friend or acquaintance. We should support the Church itself in its efforts to spread the Writings, support it in spirit and in truth. There are so many ways in which we can be a part of "making disciples of all nations," touching the good states in others not yet in the Church, letting them see a truth that helps them to be a follower of the Lord.

The Lord tells us that "This New Church is the crown of all the churches which have existed upon the earth because it will worship one visible God in whom is the invisible, as the souls is in the body. In this way and in no other is a conjunction of God possible with humankind" (TCR 787). The gentiles, and indeed our own children, cannot have true conjunction with the Lord unless they have that truth. Thus the Writings speak of "the truth that even the gentiles were to be loved, taught the truths of faith, and led to correct their life." (AC 9259).

As we approach the celebration of the birth of the New Church, let us lift up our eyes and reflect on the Lord's command to all who will hear of His Word. Just before the Lord spoke these words, it is said that some of the disciples doubted His resurrection. We too will doubt that the vision of the Lord in His Divine Human can indeed grow in influence in a world gone so far astray. We may be afraid that the forces of materialism will overwhelm our children, and cause them to turn from the Writings. But He promised His almighty power would be with us. He commanded us in the internal sense to be baptized by the truth of His two advents. He commanded us to reach out to the goodness in other people with the message of His power and His commandments.

The New Church will be different in different lands. The General Church is not the New Church. The New Church is a spiritual, living entity, made alive by the Lord's presence. It is the New Church which is to

spread abroad. How it will be organized externally is not important. How it is to be organized internally is clear - by the laws of the Lord's eternal kingdom, now revealed on earth.

But the General Church has a faith which it is vital that we communicate. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth, that His Human is Divine, that the Writings are the very Word of God, and that they and the Old and New Testaments are the sole authority in the New Church. Whether there are different branches of the New Church or not is immaterial. We have a sacred duty to foster these principles, and if they are embraced, then there is a true bond, an internal bond, between us and new organizations that will grow up.

We are invited to lift our eyes to see the goodness that is in all lands, the nations who will walk in the light of the Holy City, if only they know of it. Let us reflect on those precious states of good in His universal church, let us think of the millions, no, the hundreds of millions who have His life inside of them; but it is life from their allegiance to a God whom they do not really know. They walk in the darkness, they long for the light.

And let us reflect that our small organization is to serve that great purpose. We ourselves come to the Church to find the truths that make us disciples, and lead to our regeneration or spiritual baptism. With our children and those not in the church we want to offer them the truths that, if they can acknowledge them in their hearts and minds, will be the means of their regeneration and entrance into heaven. This great purpose should unite us, as we look towards our future service to our God.

"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He promised that He will walk with us down the road to heaven. On the way our false values and evil loves will die - their age will come to an end. We may ask, "And what about the world? When will evil end in this world which knows so much evil?" The Lord causes it to happen one person by one person. It is the goal of His New Church that He will walk with each willing soul, using the truth of His final revelation to create a new heaven and a new earth in them. Then the old age will disappear; "for the wind passes over it and it is gone, and the place thereof will know it no more." It is thus that His heaven is built, one by one, "even to the end of the age." Amen

*Lessons: Psalm 22: 26 - Psalm 23:6 (PP), Ezek. 36:24-36 (PP),
Matthew 28:16-20, AC 3380.*