

SERMON ON PSALM 118:8,9
Lessons: Ps.118:8-29;
Luke 18:1-14; A.E. 355:36.

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"It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes." (Psalm 118:8,9.)

Confidence in man in our text signifies, the confidence in man's own goodness, and ability to do what is good; and confidence, in princes signifies, a trust in ones own truth and the ability to do what is true out of ones own prudence.

The world preaches self confidence, and the worlds idea of self confidence and its importance tends to creep into the Church.

We read: "There are two things which are put off by all who enter into heaven, namely their proprium and consequent confidence, and self merit, or their own justice, and they put on a celestial proprium which is from the Lord's merit and justice." (A.C. 4007:4.)

Again: "The sensual man is in self confidence and in faith that he is wiser than anybody else ... and when he has persuaded himself of this in all things which he says there is that confidence and faith, hence his speech being resonant with these things, fascinates and infatuates the mind of others, for the sound of confidence and faith produces such an effect ... From this it can be seen why their teeth were as those of lions signifies that sensual men seem to themselves to have understanding, and thereby power over all things." (A.E. 556.)

In the world it is realized that self confidence has such apparent power, as described above and therefore it is encouraged, and teachers try to instill it, and this is so even in the Church.

A man in order to live and be a useful citizen must have a certain confidence, otherwise he hangs down his hands in despair and does nothing. In childhood and youth, and with every one before regeneration, there is as yet little perception and therefore little confidence in the Lord. In place of this well disposed children have confidence in their parents, who are representative of the Lord and the Church to them. It is right to encourage young people who lack confidence, to have confidence that they have the ability to accomplish things, and as long as there is a certain innocence this does no harm, but is useful. But as innocence recedes, the danger of self confidence increases; and even with the young great care should be taken not to encourage a kind of self confidence, which is of such a quality, that it can with the greatest difficulty be overcome in later life. If there is not some beginnings of humiliation with the young, it is with the very greatest difficulty acquired in later life.

Humility, on the part of man and confidence in the Lord and His Church, are the opposites of self confidence.

We read: "Humiliation is the essential of all adoration and worship; for without humiliation the Lord cannot be worshipped and adored, because the Divine of the Lord cannot inflow into a proud heart, that is into a heart full of the love of self, for such a heart is hard; and is called in the Word 'a heart of stone'. But the Divine of the Lord can inflow into a humble heart, because this is soft, and is called in the Word 'A heart of flesh.' That 'afar off' denotes from the heart, is because those in humiliation remove themselves from the Lord, for the reason that they regard themselves as unworthy to

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approach the most holy Divine, because, while they are in humiliation, they are in the self-acknowledgment that of themselves they are nothing but evil, nay, profane. When they acknowledge this from the heart, they are in true humiliation" (A.C.9377.)

We must however note that there is a true humiliation and a false humiliation.

We read: "There were some who, spoke with me and said that during their life they had been most humble; I heard further, that they, who during their life humble themselves greatly, with the end to be the greatest in heaven, and also humble themselves before men, in like manner, with the same end, ... in their interiors (they) seek after the world and love themselves above others, (and) are therefore hypocrits." (Mem.2374.)

Every one is humiliated when he is shown to have thought and acted foolishly, and comes into the consequence of his own folly. Men are also brought to an external humility, in cases of disaster, as in the case of losing a war. The Jews above others could be in such humiliation, and this is also especially true of those in the Church.

Concerning the Jews we read: "The people of Israel were not in humiliation (from the heart,) ... and only represented it by external gesture, ... When they humbled themselves they prostrated themselves to the earth, and also rolled themselves in dust, and cried out with a loud voice, and this for whole days. One who does not know what true humiliation is, could believe that this was humiliation of heart; but it was not the humiliation of a heart that looks to God from God, but of one that looks to God from self; and the heart that looks from self, looks from evil." (A.C.6377.) How easy it is to imagine we are in genuine humiliation, when our humiliation is from looking to the Lord from self!

The most dangerous form of self confidence in the Church, is a confidence in ourselves because we have the Word of the Third Testament, or because we have the genuine Doctrine of the Church, and have an apparent understanding of these. Such a self confidence is the essence of faith alone.

We read: "As there is never any faith, except with those who are in the good of love, so is there nothing of confidence and trust. The trust and confidence, which is called faith, with others than those who are in love and charity, is either spurious, or is such that it may exist with diabolical spirits, when in a state of fear or suffering or in a state of persuasion from the loves of self and the world." (A.C.4352.) Those in the pride of their intelligence, especially in the pride of their understanding of the Word and the Doctrine, are in faith alone. Others, tend to look down on those in doctrine, and are in pride about their loves and affections, and about the things of their daily life, and interiorly feel that they are meriting heaven by their life; no matter how much they may hide this under appearances of modesty. Every one in the Church in so far as he has not been regenerated by the Lord, belongs to one or the other of these two classes. The one puts all the emphasis on doctrine, the other on life, yet in so far as one has not been born again from the Lord, neither their doctrine nor their apparent good of life are genuine, no matter how true the doctrinals in their memory are, or how good the acts of their life are, regarded by themselves.

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In many places in the Word it is said that man of himself is infernal and profane. In self examination this may not appear so obvious to us. When we speak of being infernal we are apt to think of criminality, and as we do not see much tendency in ourselves to commit crimes, we see little if any tendency to the infernal in ourselves. The essence of hell is to love ourselves more than God, and the world more than the things of heaven. If we regard ourselves from this point of view it is obvious that our tendency is to center our thoughts and feelings in ourself rather than in God, and look to our own ends, rather than to the ends of His Providence. It is also evident that it is our natural tendency to center our interest in the things of this world rather than in the Word of the Lord. In times of controversy or when something strikingly new comes into the Church, those in the Church may for a time center their attention on the Word, but this is often out of a natural curiosity, and is entirely different from the internal significance of the words of the Psalm: "But his delight is in the Law of Jehovah; and in His Law doth he meditate day and night." (1:2.)

To meditate day and night is to meditate in all states, both in states of enlightenment and in states of obscurity. The meditation should be as to how we may live according to the law of the Lord, which is in His Word, and this more and more interiorly as we go forward. The laws of the Lord are external and internal, our meditation day and night should be as to how we are to remove external and internal evils in our lives, so that we may come into celestial and spiritual loves. The internal laws which manifest internal evils, are only shown to us little by little as we progress, for there can be no genuinely internal understanding of the Word, beyond the state of reformation or regeneration that we have arrived at. The Word has guards in its letter represented by cherubim, which prevent us from coming into the interior truths of faith which are of the heart, beyond the states we are prepared for. No man can pass these guards, which are cherubim and the sword of a flame turning itself to keep the way of the tree of life, out of self confidence. It is only, as self confidence is shunned, and we come to an internal trust in the Lord that we are allowed to enter the Holy City Nova Hierosolyma, and approach the Tree of life in its midst.

AMEN