

“HOW DOES YOUR BOOK OF LIFE READ?”

– A Sermon by Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

CHILDREN’S LESSON 1 – Luke 12:1-7.

1 He began to say to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.

3 Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.

4 “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.

5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!

6 “Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.

7 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

CHILDREN’S LESSON 2 – Revelation 20:11-15.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

ADULT LESSON 1 – Revelation 21:1-15.

2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband....

10 And [an angel] carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 having the glory of God....

12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel:

13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west....

25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

ADULT LESSON 2 – Arcana Coelestia 2474.

All things whatever that a person hears and sees, and by which he is affected, are, unknown to the person, insinuated as to ideas and ends into his interior memory; and they remain in it, so that not anything perishes; although the same things are obliterated in the exterior memory. Such therefore is the interior memory that there are inscribed on it all the single, nay, the most singular things that the person has ever thought, spoken, and done; nay, even those which have appeared to him as but a shade, with the minutest particulars, from his earliest infancy to the last of old age. The memory of all these things the man has with him when he comes into the other life, and he is successively brought into full recollection of them. This is his Book of Life, which is opened in the other life, and according to which he is judged. He then can scarcely believe this, but yet it is most true. All the ends, which to him have been in obscurity, and all the things he has thought; together with everything that from these he has spoken and done, down to the smallest point, are in that Book, that is, in the interior memory, and whenever the Lord grants, are made manifest before the angels as in clear day. This has several times been shown me, and has been attested by so much experience that not the least doubt remains.

“And they were judged, each one according to his works.... And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:13-15)

Following the end of Winter and entering a new season of Spring and renewal, it is a good time to turn our thoughts to whether or not we have made any progress. There are so many poignant images in the book of Revelation, but perhaps none more gripping than the one about the judgment where everyone’s books of life are opened: ***“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books”*** (Revelation 20:12).

This picture of hordes of people, standing in line, waiting for God to open their books and judge them, always terrified me as a kid (and if I’m being honest – still terrifies me a bit)! In adult states of reflection, it gets me thinking about what is “the Book of Life?” What is my book of life that will be opened one day? And perhaps most importantly, how will it read?

First, let’s look at the other book which was opened that was called “the Book of Life.” Quite simply we are told that *“by ‘the Book of Life’ is signified the Word of the Lord, and all doctrine respecting Him”* (Apocalypse Revealed 588). It makes perfect sense that the Word is the Book of Life, when you think about the beginning of the first chapter of John where it says: ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men”*** (John 1:1-4). The Word is the source of all life, and the light that shines forth from it is what gives life to our spiritual lives.

On the other hand, turning away from the Book of Life causes spiritual death, which is why we get that frightening statement that ***“anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire”*** (Revelation 20:15). We’re told that to be judged by the Book of Life simply means that we are *“judged in accordance with the Word’s truths”* and that *“no one is found written in the Book of Life but someone who has lived in accordance with the Lord’s commandments in the Word, and who believed in the Lord”* (Apocalypse Revealed 874). This is where the importance of what is written in our book of life comes into play.

So, what is our book of life? The short answer is “pretty much everything!” The Lord tells us that “*all the good a man has thought and done from infancy even to the last of his life, remains; in like manner all the evil, so that not the least of it completely perishes. Both are inscribed on his book of life (that is, on each of his memories), and on his nature (that is, his native disposition and genius)*” (Arcana Coelestia 2256:2). The two memories mentioned there, are the interior and exterior memories, and these are “*as it were two books, in which have been written all his thoughts and acts*” (Arcana Coelestia 9386:2).

Now, if you are at all like average people, these statements are somewhat frightening! When they reflect on all the evil they have previously fantasized about, all the horrible thoughts they have entertained, and all the bad things they have done, they begin to be fearful of how their book of life is going to read. In the New Church, this anxiety can become even greater, when they stumble across this teaching where the Lord warns us: “*Let no one believe, then, that there is anything that a man has ever thought in himself or done in secret that can be concealed after death; but let him believe that all things and each single thing are then laid open as clear as day*” (Heaven and Hell 463). This teaching is powerfully confirmed in the Scriptures: “***For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops***” (Luke 12:2-3).

This terrifying warning may make us wish we could do something to edit our book of life so that it reads a little bit better. Some helpful qualifications are that the things written on our interior memories which are never blotted out, are “*chiefly those which have become of the will, that is, of the love; for the things of the love are of the will*” (Arcana Coelestia 9386:2). Also, that it is only those things that a person “*thinks, says, and does from his will, whether good or evil,*” that is “*appropriated to him, and remains*” (Divine Providence 227). So our book of life, written on our interior memory, doesn’t have as its primary text the passing thoughts or momentary desires that we choose to reject. It is the things that we love and will and that we actively focus on which become the main chapters of our story.

This is part of the mercy of the Lord. He allows us through repentance to edit, as it were, the story of our lives, so that we don't have to continually reread about all our faults and evils. We're told that *"goods are never so commingled with evils, nor evils with goods, that they cannot be separated"* for when a person *"comes into the other life, if he has lived in the good of love and of charity, the Lord then separates his evils, and by what is good with him elevates him into heaven"* (Arcana Coelestia 2256:2). Certainly, this provides some comfort to know that the Lord is on our side and is constantly striving to raise us into heaven if we will let Him. **E.G. Holy Supper**

Nevertheless, while those evils by sincere repentance are no longer part of our main story, we are wise to remember that *"sins can by no means be wiped away from anyone, but that when the person is kept in good by the Lord they are separated or rejected to the sides so as not to rise up"* (Arcana Coelestia 5398). Notice, they are not erased or completely wiped away, but are removed to the sides where they are out of sight and not the focus or center of our life-story anymore. The Lord reminds us that everything we have *"spoken and done, down to the smallest point,"* are inscribed on our interior memories, or our book of life, and that *"whenever the Lord grants"* can be *"made manifest before the angels as in clear day"* (Arcana Coelestia 2474).

So why would this be the case? Why can't we permanently erase something? One reason is that it makes our choices really matter. When we do something purposefully evil to hurt someone, it makes an indelible print on us, and yes, we can repent of it and have the Lord move it to the sides and out of focus, but it still happened and still did damage. We can't have a magic eraser that just makes all our bad choices vanish, so it encourages us to choose wisely.

The second reason the indelible record is kept is so that in our evening states as angels in heaven, if we are beginning to delude ourselves into thinking we are really good as of ourselves, and not from the Lord, and forget that He is constantly withholding us from our former evils, then He can open those parts of our book to remind us of what a miserable state we were in when we chose to act against what He teaches in His Word. The purpose is not to shame us, and constantly parade our past evils before our eyes, but rather to keep us humble when we might start becoming too arrogant.

However, rather than becoming obsessed with our previous poor choices, the real importance of reflecting on our book of life, is to realize that with the Lord's help we can write new chapters that are much better than the previous ones. Notice what it said about those coming to have their book of life read: They were each ***“judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books”*** (Revelation 20:12).

If you're worried about how your book will read, then start shunning evils as sins against the Lord, and do the good things He teaches, and your book will have a happy ending! For *“everyone is allotted a life after death in accordance with his deeds”* (Divine Providence 128). And those people who find their names written in the Book of Life and received into the New Church are *“those who believe in the Lord and live in accordance with His commandments in the Word”* (Apocalypse Revealed 925).

These teachings about the Book of Life and our books of life are critical for us to understand. We are not judged on the amount we know, or the mere correctness of our faith and belief, we are judged by what we do with what we know. We are judged by our works which come forth from what we love. Essentially our book of life is opened and measured against the Book of Life or the Word of the Lord. Did we shun evils as sins as the Lord urges us? Did we abide by His Commandments? Did we practice genuine charity? Did we love our neighbor by doing good deeds when opportunity presented itself? Did we honor our marriage vows? Did we love the Lord and demonstrate that by the actions of our lives?

Our book of life is a permanent record of all the things we have chosen to do with full freedom and rationality. Thus, our Book of Life is a complete record of our choices: whether we chose to love the Lord and our neighbor or chose to primarily love ourselves and the things of this world. These choices determine our eternal fate. So in reality we are not judged by the Lord, but we are judged by our own decisions that we made throughout our life.

So if you have parts of your book that you are not proud of, then repent of those things, and it can become a footnote buried at the back that nobody needs to read. The Lord gave you the power to be the author of your own story, and with His help you can write new chapters whose story will read similarly to the angels of heaven.

All these teachings about our books of life and how they relate to the Book of Life, are also critical in helping the Lord to establish His New Church upon the earth. We're told that those people who are said to be written in the Lamb's Book of Life are those who will be received into the New Church, and who will *"believe in the Lord and live in accordance with His commandments in the Word."* (Apocalypse Revealed 925). Notice again, the focus on the life in accordance with the Word, which is leading concept at the start of the book the Doctrine of Life: *"All religion is of the life, and the life of religion is to do that which is good. Every person who has religion knows and acknowledges that he who leads a good life is saved, and that he who leads an evil life is condemned"* (Life 1).

This is why in our books of life, it says that we will be judged according to our works – by what we actually DID during our lives! A striking passage makes it even more pointed: *"Those who are truly Christians both know and do, thus they believe in God; but those who are not truly Christians know, and do not"* (Arcana Coelestia 9239). So as we say goodbye to Winter and look with hope to the renewal of Springtime, let's take the time to reflect on our book of life and rededicate ourselves to not just knowing the wonderful teachings of our faith, but actually doing the things the Lord teaches us. For He urges us to be ready to have our books opened, saying, ***"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."*** (Revelation 22:12). **Amen.**