

“Babies, stones, priests, etc.” 1Pe 2:2-10

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What do we know about Peter the apostle, this fisherman? For one, he couldn’t keep his mouth shut and often said something wrong. He was passionate in his faith. He was also a courageous man.

Remember, that was him who got into sword fight trying to protect Jesus when the soldiers came to capture him. He was the one who facing crucifixion asked to be crucified upside down, for he didn’t consider himself worthy to die the same way his Lord died.

Today, as we read the first letter of Peter we can also marvel how wonderfully the Holy Spirit has used this man to deliver the Good News to us. The verses we heard today are among the most beautiful and richest in the New Testament.

I suggest that we just go through them almost verse by verse and see how many beautiful and powerful images Peter uses. “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

He is talking about us. Newborn infants in faith. We come into this world as helpless infants. We need food, we need good food, regular food, pure and healthy food if we want to survive and grow.

The same is true about our new life in Jesus. We are born as infants. And we need to be fed. What happens with us if we don’t receive our spiritual food, that is, God’s Word and Sacrament? We can’t grow, we can’t even survive.

It is essential that we are fed. And it is essential that we are fed with pure spiritual food. People tend to be very careful when it comes to what they eat. We try to avoid anything that would endanger our health, for we understand the consequences.

Now, how careful are we with our spiritual food? Often people don't care about it. Whatever goes. Even Christians often seem not to care whether they receive anything at all, – why bother, – or whether what we receive is pure food for our benefit, or poison that weakens our faith and leads to death.

I have encouraged you before, I do it now, – be careful what your pastors teach you, ask them for pure food, ask them to feed you regularly and richly, and, also, come yourselves and receive these gifts of God.

And “as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Here Peter gets carried away with the imagery of different stones. First, he compares Jesus and you with living stones. Peter speaks about the Church. About the temple of God, build from the living stones.

See, it is heart-warming to have this imagery. We are not compared with bricks in God's building. Bricks are all the same size, all the same. Stones are different. Each one of different size, different colour and weight.

Your Father welcomes you as you are. You are precious to Him as you are. He knows you as you are and He builds you into His Church, His Temple as a living stone. Spend some time meditating about this image!

The Church as the Temple of God. You as the Temple of God. He dwells among us, He uses us to build His temple. The Church, that is, you are His dwelling place here in this age.

What a majestic picture it is. What a privilege to be a living stones in God's temple. And not for idle life. By no means, but so that we as holy priesthood would offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.

What are these spiritual sacrifices? The Holy Spirit tells us: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Ps 51:17)

Our spiritual sacrifices are when we come to our Lord humble and with repentant hearts, recognizing that before Him we all are beggars, and nothing more. When we come with empty hands to receive His wonderful gifts with thanksgiving and gratitude.

And then, once we are blessed by our God, we go and serve our neighbours with all the gifts and blessings that we have received from our gracious Lord. These are our spiritual sacrifices.

And notice what Peter says, all of this is acceptable only through Jesus. If we come to God the Father trying to bypass Jesus, who is the way and the truth and

the live, whatever we bring is only our sin, and response to it is God's wrath. You can't be acceptable to God apart from Jesus.

Then Peter goes ahead with three more stone images. In English first two are translated as 'cornerstone', in Greek there are, in fact, two different words, and each of them refer to different kind of stones.

First is the cornerstone which is laid in foundation, and then used as a point of reference building the building. You measure and adjust everything in relation to the cornerstone. If the cornerstone is not laid well, the building won't come together well.

The second stone is the one which you put on the top of the arch. You build an arch using a wooden frame, and when it is almost finished you put in the final stone, the cornerstone, which holds the whole arch together.

This is how Peter speaks about Jesus. He is your cornerstone. If you put Jesus as the foundation of your life, the building of your life will come out beautiful. If you put Jesus as your cornerstone on the top of your life, then everything will be held together by Him.

If you put another foundation, the building won't come out well, and if you remove Jesus as your cornerstone in whom everything is held together, the arch of your life will collapse.

This is what Jesus is for your life; a strong unshakable foundation, and a cornerstone which hold everything together, with His loving hands, which we can so well recognize by marks of nails.

But then Peter speaks about the last stone, and this is scary one. Jesus is the cornerstone, but He is also a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. If you are with Jesus, you won't be shaken, but if you reject Jesus, He will reject you.

This is what happens with those who close their ears when the Holy Spirit gently calls them: "Come to Jesus!" Our Father has given us this scary power to reject His grace, to reject His salvation, and so many do exactly that.

In the next verses the Holy Spirit through His servant Peter pour over us pure Gospel. Wonderful, wonderful words of encouragement and joy. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession."

This is what you are, dear brothers and sisters. "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." "A chosen race". There are only two races that ultimately matter. Only two groups of people.

Those who love God, and those who hate Him. You, by the grace of your Lord Jesus and thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit are a part of this chosen race. And "a royal priesthood" as well. There are even two pictures in this phrase.

Royal. Sure. For who is your true Father? God the Father. He has adopted you in His divine family. You are a member of God's family. This is, why you are called also heirs of God the Father and co-heirs with Jesus Christ.

You are as royal as it could possible get. But you are also priesthood. You all, each one of you, by the virtue of being children of God the Father are also priests. What does this mean? Do you know what priests do?

We could say that because priests have access to God, they serve as mediators between people and God. Maybe some of you have experienced it as well, that people being in deep problem ask you 'can you pray for me?'

Their intuition is right. You can bring to God your prayers and intercessions for all people and their needs, for you have this access thanks to Jesus, for He makes you acceptable in God's eyes.

On the other hand, because you have access to God, you can also bring His message to all people, especially to those who still dwell in darkness. You as the priests of God the Most High are sent with the Good News about Jesus.

Often even Christians don't realize how great is the reality of our new life in Christ. Often there is this misunderstanding that, yes, pastors, they are here to do God's things, and who are we, simple laypeople.

Not so, brother and sisters. You all are royal priests. You all have access to God. You all are sent by God to deliver His message. You all have received unbelievable authority from God and commanded to use it.

You all have the authority to call people to repentance. You all have authority to teach what our Lord Jesus has commanded to us. You all have the power to forgive people their sins, and when you do it, they will also be forgiven in heaven. You are not just 'laypeople', you are God's royal priests.

You are also 'a holy nation'. It doesn't mean that we are better than others. By no means. Holy doesn't describe moral qualities. It is about God's presence with you and in you.

It means that you are holy for you have been made holy by God. When you are joined with Jesus in your baptism, when you hear the Spirit filled and life giving words of Jesus, when you receive the Holy Communion, God shares with you His holiness. He dwells with you, He makes you holy, that's His gifts to you.

And you are also 'a people for His own possession'. You belong to God, to Jesus. And it the best thing. How does Luther put it his explanation of the second article of the Apostles' Creed?

Jesus "has redeemed me, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence,

and blessedness.” He has done all of this for you. So that you would have everything that He has and be with Him forever.

And, again, Peter emphasises that God gives all these wonderful gifts not only for our sake, but also “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

You, royal priests, don’t keep silent, shout from roof-tops, share in private conversations, do this in time and out of time, but do this, – proclaim the excellences of Jesus, who has called you into His marvellous light, so that through your proclamation others may be called to Jesus as well.

For as Peter reminds, “once you were not, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” These are scary, scary words and, also, the most wonderful words.

Imagine, once you were not God’s people and God wasn’t your God. This is about the first commandment, where God says: “I am your God”. He offers this incomprehensible gift, Himself, but what do we often do... ignore Him.

Just imagine for a second that instead of these comforting words of life, you would hear the opposite. “I am not your God. You are not one of my people.” These words bring death.

We are blessed, for we still live in time of God’s mercy, when He calls all people with life-giving words ‘I want to be your God.’ Our eternal fate is decided here, where we either trust Him as our God, or reject Him.

Whoever rejects Jesus now, He will be rejected by God, when we’ll all see Him in His glory. But how blessed you are, for you have received God’s mercy, He has been gracious and merciful to you.

And now your Father in heaven looks at you and says: “You are my people, you are my children, with whom I am well pleased.” How blessed we are, beyond comprehension. How blessed we are!

See, this is how Peter, simple fishermen, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the most wonderful message to us. It is now our turn, that we as God’s royal priests proclaim His excellences to the world.

And the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.