

God's Newborn, Chosen, Priestly People

5th Sun. of Easter – 05/07/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Peter 2:2-10 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 9-10, “...**you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for [God's] own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people...**”.

Introduction

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ A newborn, nursing infant gazes at her mother's smiling face while that new mother ponders in wonder at the miracle that she cradles in her arms. She marvels at the tiny little life that the Lord has knitted together in her womb (Ps. 139:13). Her heart bursts with love for her little dependent as she contemplates with hope her baby's future; praying that it will be filled with meaning and purpose.

→ In so many ways, my beloved Christians, this little child is you, the Church of Jesus, for Peter said in the chapter before this text that you, in Baptism, have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet. 1:3).

→ Yes, today's text begins in verse two assuring us all that in this new life, God nourishes you with “pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation”. In that baptismal miracle, God has joined you to Christ. It's all His work of grace; you are chosen; you are precious to God.

✘ But you are so much more than just a cute and cuddly stuffed animal or toy for God to put on a shelf in heaven and admire into eternity. No, you are so important to Him that He has given you this new life for His specific, purposeful work as a part of His “spiritual house”; His “holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5).

→ Today, Peter helps us celebrate that the living Word of the living Savior has exalted your status to that of *God's Newborn, Chosen, Priestly People*.

I. Newborn People

✘ The first wonderful truth that Peter proclaims regarding your reality and mine as Christians is that because God's grace in our baptism joins us together with the resurrected and living Christ, you and I are a completely newborn people.

→ 2 Corinthians 5:17 agrees with Peter and says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

✘ Peter says in verse two that our Christian lives are so completely different that we are (present tense) “like newborn infants” (v 2).

→ So just as it was in our physical birth, so our spiritual life is from the moment of baptism and conversion. The very fact that we have life is 100% gift. You and I can do absolutely nothing to give ourselves either physical or spiritual life.

→ Martin Luther, in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed leads us in understanding this when he says, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (SC, pg. 205).

- Yes, God alone “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).
- ✘ But Peter is clear; God has never intended that we remain as “newborn infants” in our faith. He says we are to “long for the pure spiritual milk”. Why? so “that by it you may grow up to salvation...” (v. 2).
 - But don’t misunderstand; he’s not talking about us “growing” toward a salvation that we don’t yet possess. Instead, God has put everything into our lives so that we will “grow” every day in our understanding and our application of the salvation that He has already fully bestowed upon us in Jesus.
 - ✘ And what is the “pure spiritual milk” that God has provided for us; that nurtures us so that we grow and mature as Christians? It is His perfect Word of truth in Holy Scripture.
 - And Peter warns us to be sure that we only partake of God’s “pure” Word. We should never think that as long as there is at least some of God’s Word, even if it’s mixed in with some impurities or false teachings or a bit of personal opinion and preference that that’s “okay”. No way! God’s Law warns us against the empty calories of idolatry and worldly thinking. Isaiah 55:2 says that this kind of food “does not satisfy.”
 - In fact, 2 Timothy 4:3-4 gives a scary description of exactly what we see so much of among a growing number of Christians and Christian churches right now today. “For the time is coming,” Paul says, “when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”
 - It is only; only God’s pure Gospel truth conveyed in the unadulterated pages of Scripture that has the nourishment which God so lavishly feeds to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!
 - ✘ As verse three quotes Psalm 34:8, it’s in the Bible that we “have tasted that the Lord is good!” which includes the Holy Supper of Jesus’ body and blood, as well as the cool, refreshing water of Holy Baptism.
 - Yes, as Christians, our faith craves that Word over the empty and harmful food that the world tries to feed to us. Just like a healthy, newborn baby finds utter joy and full contentment in the food she receives from her mother, so you and I never find reading and studying and discussing God’s truths in the Bible to be boring or a chore that we despise so that we watch the time hoping it will soon end. No, we live for it! We “long” for it all the more as we grow and mature in it.
 - ✘ The more we feed on Jesus, the closer our relationship with Him becomes.
 - Did you know that newborn infants are nearsighted and cannot see very far away? But the distance from her mother’s breast to her face is just the right distance for the newborn to gaze upon and see her mother’s loving eyes and adoring smile. In a similar way, as you and I, here in Christ’s Church, are nourished by “pure spiritual milk,” we are able to look upon and cherish the loving face of God in our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

II. Chosen People

- ✘ And from that nurturing love, we “infant” children of God learn our identity as His “chosen” people (v.9).
- ✘ But, to be honest, we all know that everyone of us in Christ’s Church is not chosen or precious in the world’s eyes. Just as verse four says of Jesus when He came to earth to save us, He was “rejected by men”. Isaiah 53:3 goes even further, saying that “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces

he was despised, and we” – that’s all of mankind in our sin – “esteemed Him not”...all the way to His suffering and death upon the cross.

→ Yes even now today, as His “chosen” people in His Church; we too endure a certain amount of rejection in this sin-steeped world. Just look at what happened to Stephen in our First Reading today (Acts 7:51–60).

✘ And let’s be honest folks, there are times that all of this rejection gets to us, doesn’t it? And that’s exactly what the devil wants. He uses it to tempt us to doubt our status as God’s chosen children.

→ But none of that; whether we are feeling down or dejected by the world; none of it changes the fact of God’s mighty work and unchanging love for us. His baptism-work does not go away because of how we feel or because of what the world tries to say about us. We always continue as chosen and precious in God’s eyes because our Lord Jesus was first “chosen and precious” “in the sight of [the Father]” (v.4). Verses 6 and 7 quote Psalm 118:22 which points us to Jesus as the “rejected” stone that now, in His resurrection, is the living cornerstone upon which God builds His Church.

✘ So as we feed on God’s pure spiritual milk, we are reassured first of all in verse eight that there is no reason to envy the world around us. Why? because in disobeying God’s Word and reveling in that disobedience they “stumble” over Jesus as the Rock of Salvation to the point that they end up “destined” to complete separation from God.

→ And second, we celebrate the unfathomable but absolutely true reality of our status in God’s eyes. Verse ten says that once we were lost in sin; identified with the label, “Not My People,” “but now [we] are God’s people”. Once, we were people unable to receive God’s “mercy” in our unbelief, “but now [we] have received mercy”; wrapped up tight and entirely filled from head to toe in the Father’s mercy, forgiveness and love; like an infant child, swaddled and held tight by her ever-doting Dad!

III. Priestly People

✘ Because that is your reality and mine, dear Christian, Jesus has honored us and equipped us and placed us here in this earthly life to share in His very special purpose; His priestly purpose.

→ Verse five says that we are joined to Jesus – the Cornerstone of the Church – as His “living stones”; that is intimate and active components of His Church on earth. The Church, friends, is not this building of brick and mortar and wood and plaster.

✘ No, it is alive; just as Jesus is alive; just as you and I are alive because of His resurrection. Peter tells us that God has built us up: 1) into a spiritual house – the very place where God Himself lives on this earth. And 2) we are a holy priesthood – meaning that God has equipped us by His grace to reach out into and serve the world in His name. Folks, we are God’s representatives to our neighbors and the entire world. 3) As priests, you and I offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

→ Now, make no mistake, the “spiritual sacrifices” we make are in no way sacrifices that atone for our sins or earn us special favor from God; that work belongs only and forever to Jesus. He meant it when He said from the cross, “it is finished” (Jn. 19:30). Nothing more needed to be done for our salvation, and Jesus’ resurrection confirmed – that will never change.

→ Rather, we in Christ’s Church are blessed to share in His priestly work of glorifying the Father through our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise (v. 9); in the godly work we now perform in serving those in need and praying for others – including our enemies as we see Stephen did

even as he was stoned to death for his faith. He cried out with his last breath, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60).

→ Yes, as God’s chosen, priestly people He saved us so that we might now be the connecting point for those who still are “not [His] people”; so that they will see God’s love in us and prayerfully be embraced just as we are in the arms of God’s saving mercy.

Conclusion

✘ Though the world may not ever come to see us and the rest of Christ’s Church with this new reality that God has chosen and made us to be, this is, dear Christian what and who you are!

→ So don’t be embarrassed by it. Don’t shy away from it. But rejoice in it, and embrace it with confidence. You are joined by baptismal grace to your resurrected Lord in this, His Church. You are now His newborn, chosen, priestly people; called and gifted with the joy His ministry of inviting the entire world to become with you His newborn, chosen, priestly people as well.

→ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*