

May 7, 2023 - Easter 5

Pastor Ventura

God's Chosen, Kingly and Priestly People

1 Peter 2:2–10

Dear Friends in Christ

May the grace and peace from our Risen Lord be with you, you who by his death and resurrection, has made you, in the words of our Epistle reading for this morning, his “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, [to] proclaim the excellencies of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

You then today stand as precious, holy, and kingly priests. You stand as a chosen family.

Know that you are who he says you are. Not because who you are in the flesh, but because he has purchased you to be, precious, holy and kingly priests, with his holy blood and innocent suffering and death. His Word defines who you are. His Word proclaims who you are. After all even when the “Grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever” (1 Pet 1:24–25). His pronouncement of forgiveness then endures forever, what he says you are, remains forever.

But it wasn't always like that. You were not always his people. He was not always your God. There was a time in which you hadn't received mercy, but now, now, because of the death and resurrection of your Lord Jesus Christ, you are his people. You are the people belonging to God. You have the Lord as your God.

And mercy? You have mercy upon mercy through Christ. Today, Peter calls Christ the living stone that men rejected then and even now. But that same Christ, was shown no mercy by God when he died in your place. For you, the wrath of God fell upon him as it should've fallen upon you. For you, he suffered and died. That's how God showed you his mercy!

But thanks be to God, Jesus Christ is not a dead stone. He is in fact the living stone, raised from the dead on that first Easter day. And even though he was the Stone the builders rejected has become the first-laid stone of the Church's foundation. The stone on which the whole building depends, he is the cornerstone in fact!

He is the chosen and precious one with whom God is pleased, and is pleased that through him you are chosen and precious in the sight of God too. Through him, you, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house. A house not made of bricks or stone, but of living stones. A Church made of a holy priesthood, and what does that priesthood do? that priesthood is offering up sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, as we talk about living stones, there is nothing in nature that we can compare those living stones with. The only place where living stones are found is in the Church of Jesus. There they are living from their connection to Jesus, they too are living stones because of the life Jesus infuses into them, as God builds the church up into a beautiful temple. Peter says that we are being built as a “spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices.”

I wonder why Peter describes the church not as a Temple but a house. Perhaps because of these two reasons, the first, in the temple made of dead stones, back in the Old Testament, is where people went to offer continual sacrifices, there was the place where sacrifices were made. But Christ is the perfect sacrifice offered once and for all. There is no need for those sacrifices to continue. And second, a house, a house is a dwelling place, not the place we go rather the place where we live, and there, Peter says, we are priests and a holy nation.

Sure, sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving continue (Heb 13:15; Rom 12:1) and endure through all eternity. But now they take place in the “spiritual houses” made from living stones. There is where Christ lives! There, in us, in you!

That’s good news that is indeed comforting, because as you know, life doesn’t always fit into that beautiful picture of all of us being built together into the Church, does it? There is suffering and pain. Real pain. Real loss.

And the other stones around you? They are no help. Isn’t this true, that there are times when it feels like they try to tear you down more than they are building you up? They should be supporting you, not hurting you. Why the friendly fire? Sticks and stones may break my bones, but their words still hurt. Each one manages to land for maximum effect from the very people who shouldn’t be throwing stones at you.

Now, if you were honest with yourself, though, you hit people with stones too, don't you? They hurt you; you hurt them back. You are hit with stones, so you hit others with them. Do unto others, stone others, before they stone you.

And Pastor? Pastor tells you that you should be the one who puts down your stone first! You need to be the bigger person first. You need to apologize first. You need to be the Christian when no one else is being one. You need to offer up your life for them, priest them, as Christ offered his life for you. Really? We have to do all of that?

Amidst our being built into spiritual houses, bad stuff still happens. Really bad, unfair stuff is going on all around you. Loved ones get sick. We get sick. And it's easy to think, believing in Jesus should count for something. It should get me something . . . something more than the other guy who doesn't believe. It should get me a pass, a get-out-of-suffering-free card. The people around me should be better. God should be better to me. Things should be better than this!

Chosen? Unlikely. Kingly? We aren't even ruling our little corner of our lives, let alone anything in heaven. Holy? A people of his own possession? Really? Because there are times when it seems that there are more stones crushing us than building us up! And then, if all of that wasn't enough, we feel the stones the world throws at us too, and they hurt they bruise our faith, our spirits. So, a people of his own possession? Priests and kings? That's nonsense, all this talk is just utter unbelief! At least that's what the enemy and the flesh whisper in our ears and our hearts.

But what God tells us is that those things are indeed real. What he says we are is true. They aren't made true by things working out for you or made untrue by things not working for you, but it is true because God says they are.

You aren't kingly priests because you look like kingly priests. You aren't a chosen family because you act like a chosen family. You know God loves you not because events in your life turn out your way. You know you are his own possession not because you have done something special, or things work out for you the way you want it to work out.

You are who the Father says you are, because of the risen Christ. Through him he bought you, you are worth his life on the cross. It's not a matter of whether you

measure up or things turn out the way you plan. Christ did what he did for you, and that makes and defines who you are and what you are worth. He is the chosen and living Stone! The corner Stone of our spiritual houses!

So as we gather today, remember this, that you find your identity in him. Peter begins our text this morning reminding us that we start as “newborn infants” (2:2). Born again, made anew, through baptism. And there in your baptism, you are given a new identity. You are God’s and God is yours. And as we grow in faith and spirit, Peter says we are his building. His people. He is the Way, the Truth, the Life. And you are the ones receiving the Way, the Truth, the Life. But apart from him, you are just dead rocks. Not God’s people. Unholy priests who deserve no mercy. Just people stumbling around, disobeying his Word.

But in him—through the sacrifice of Christ—God considers you precious. His death for your sins. His resurrection your resurrection. And you are made alive, living stones, built together into his Holy Church. Not just stones, tossed around or hurled like missiles at others.

No, he is working among you. He is building you together. His holiness has become your holiness. His kingliness is now your kingliness. His priesthood, your priesthood. His mercy showered upon you in his gifts.

All so that you might proclaim the glorious deeds of the one who brought you out of darkness into his glorious light. In order that you might praise and sing to him. To let all know that the stone the builders rejected has become the foundation. A cornerstone holding the whole building together. You, I, all living stone connected to him building a great big giant building that praises and magnifies the Father.

Rejoice then not on the things and affection of this world, but in the gracious God to whom his royal priesthood has been given access. Therefore, Peter councils us: “like newborn infants” who readily enjoy nourishment from their mother’s breast with pure nourishing milk, so we too are encouraged to put our total dependence for spiritual health on God’s gracious revelation in Christ. “Long for” Peter says, as though to say, “long *only* for this pure milk.” God indeed offers his people real nourishment, not “that which does not satisfy” (Is 55:2).

And in return, in him, you offer up praises and thanksgiving. In him, you offer up your bodies as living sacrifices for those around you. No longer living in your sins, your despair, your evil, your deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander, or whatever other stones you toss at one another. But loving others, for others, for the sake of others, he takes the stones that fall around you. He builds you all together. He makes you a building, his spiritual building, his Church.

His Word is the final word on who you are and who you will be. And like newborn infants, you long for the pure true milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good (vv 2–3).

Therefore, as God's kingly, priestly and holy nation, come! Come to his Table today. Taste and see the Lord is good. Believe again who you are, and live from it. You are like living stones being built into his spiritual building. "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 marvelous light" (v 9)

This is who you are. This is who you will be on the Last Day. This is who you are now. In the name of Jesus. Amen.