

Sermon: 5th Sunday of Easter

Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10 (vv. 2,3)

Theme: To be fed, to grow and to serve

Goal: God feeds us and gives us conditions to grow and to serve in the church

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Have you ever tasted that the Lord is good? To taste not only in the sense “to have an experience”, but also “to taste with your mouth”? Did you like it? Did you want more of it? Or are you full and don’t wish it anymore?

We’ve recently come back from our children’s home, where two grandchildren are nursing; the one month old is breastfeeding, and the other month old drinks the milk from the bottle. When they are hungry, they just cry loud! It’s the way to say: I need to be fed! It’s time to get food! – Those who have or had little ones at home know what I’m talking about.

Peter uses this image in our text when he says: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” – Do you crave for spiritual food? Or are you full and don’t desire it anymore? The spiritual food is God’s Word and the Holy sacraments, through which God feeds us and nurtures us to grow as healthy children in His kingdom.

I – Living stones

Peter now changes the metaphor from mothers and babies to living stones from v. 5 on (ABC p. 1519). The two metaphors are related when we talk about the church. Like a family is built up by its members, the

church is also built up by her members. And we always imagine a church as a building, as the Bible does as well. But not just the building of cold bricks, but the building built by living stones, we. *Each believer is part of a spiritual structure, which is not a dead building but a living edifice made up by people. The community of believers come into being through individual believers* (ABC 1519). Strong members form a strong family. Strong members form a strong church. Good and strong living stones build up a strong church!

To begin the construction of a building it is necessary to have a plan. And when the foundations are being prepared, everything must be in the line, straight, especially the corners. If the corners are not set on 90 grades, the walls will grow up twisted, crooked.

God made a good and perfect plan to build His church. The cornerstone is His Son Jesus. The holy prophets and the apostles form the foundation, - this means, their teachings and doctrines based on Christ. We as living stones have been built upon Him.

The church is a very precious building for God because it is God's house on earth. Peter records: "As you come to Him, the Living Stone (Jesus), - chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house." The dwelling place of God on earth is in the church, - not this or other buildings that remain closed six days a week, but in us, His spiritual church, the living stones. God's presence and God's light can be seen in the Christian behaviour. And this is the way we witness to the world that God abides in us like in His temple. We confess every Sunday, *"I believe...in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints."*

But we can even say that the churches built by bricks are witnesses of God's presence in the world as well, because they have been built for centuries by Christians as witnesses of the Christian faith.

II – The goal of the church

What's the reason for you to build a house? You want a shelter, you want security, you want a place to raise your children, you want a home where love can be developed...

What's the reason for God to build His church? Peter answers: “You, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house **to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**” We have to have in mind the worship of the Old Testament at the tabernacle or at the temple, with the priests and sacrifices. God built the church of the New Testament to serve him and we are His priests to offer Him spiritual sacrifices; not goats and sheep anymore, because Jesus offered His body as sacrifice once for all. But to offer our lives, our time, our skills, our money, our praises, our good deeds... We also reflect the holiness of God in this world and we intercede for the others, as the Old Testament priests used to intercede for the people.

Peter has a high regard for the corporate nature of the people of God, the church. Salvation is not simply an individual matter but involves participation in a community of believers... The church is to offer worship to God and to witness to humanity. (ABC 1519,1520). I cannot be a Christian alone, by myself, isolated. I'm part of a church, part of a fellowship. This corporate nature of the church is strong when the members are strong. The church is made by the community of all individual believers. The church is not the building, it is not the pastor, it is not the Elders, and it is not just one or another family. From the little ones to the elderly, we all received the same grace of God in our Baptism and have been nurtured by His Word and the Holy Sacrament to grow as a living spiritual house. Each of us, as a living stone, is important in the building of God's

church. No one can despise the other; no one can feel him or herself less than the others.

III – Precious to God

God values us a lot as His beloved living stones. Peter affirms: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” This lifts us up when we are down! We are not like broken stones scattered around the building, but we are living stones of God’s house, playing an important role in His plan to witness to all His grace and His salvation. The transformation that happened to us by God’s grace can happen to anyone. The fact that we were chosen by God and were made His beloved people to build His church doesn’t isolate us from others. As a stone in a wall has its inside, it has also its outside. The inside looks to God; the outside looks to the neighbour. And as the stones in a wall are joined to each other by cement, we are joined together as members by God’s love, giving strength to each other in the fellowship of the church.

Conclusion: The hymns we are singing today show how beloved to the Christian Church is this image of the Living and Precious Stone, Jesus, and we as living stones built on Him. It was a precious image for Peter as well, as he received from Jesus the nickname Peter (Petra) which means rock, stone. Each hymn has a special message and emphasis on this theme. God wants to strengthen our fellowship as His church and to use us to witness about His love and His plan to all. Amen.