

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of Jesus. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “Got Milk?” and is based on the Epistle text, from the first letter of St. Peter, chapter 2. Let us pray...Amen.

This Sunday, the fifth Sunday in Easter marks the beginning of the preparation for the joy of the Holy Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost. In the Gospel, Jesus begins to speak of going to the Father to prepare a place for us. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Salvation is in Him—in good times and even in the times when we suffer for Him, as St. Stephen does in the First Reading. And in our text today, in the Epistle, we see who we are in Christ, the cornerstone. We are living stones being built into a spiritual building!¹

But how exactly does that really happen? How are we shaped, molded, and formed to fit into the body of Christ, and built firmly on Christ as the corner stone?

Well the first step is you need to die to this life, you need to die to sin, you need to die to death, and you need to die to the devil. And second, you need to be raised to new life. The hard part is you, on your own and by your own strength, determination, and effort cannot do this. It has to be done to you, accomplished for you in your place and you really had no say in the matter. This happens in Holy Baptism where you died were raised with Christ. In Holy Baptism you were taken from the darkness of being a child of Satan and destined to spend eternity in hell with him, and brought into the Light and you were made a beloved child of God. God has poured out His mercy on you through, and on account of Christ Jesus and His sacrifice for you. In Holy Baptism you share in Jesus’ death and His resurrection accomplished for you. There in Holy Baptism you were re-born, renewed, and recreated: a spiritual infant, longing for the pure spiritual milk.

For infants, milk is everything. They don’t just want milk, they crave milk! They cry for milk. They scream for milk. They do not settle down when they are hungry without milk. Why? Because milk feeds them and sustains them. Without milk infants die. There is no other food source which can be substituted for milk. Infants cannot eat steak, they cannot eat carrots or peas or beans. They need milk, and some infants more than others. Now the best milk to help an infant grow is to receive their own mother’s milk. That milk is normally 100% pure, specifically designed by God to properly nourish and grow the infant. That milk has no artificial colours, flavours, or additives.

Infants and children need good milk to grow up healthy and strong. They need milk for strong bones, muscle development, and even for proper nerve and brain function. Good milk helps an infant grow up strong and healthy. But bad milk, spoiled milk, rotten milk, well that is a whole different story. And really, milk doesn’t even have to be that much past its expiration

date, or left for too long in a warm vehicle to make an adult, never mind an infant sick, or worse. Spoiled milk turns ones stomach.

It was a few years back when I heard about a grandmother giving her not quite two year old granddaughter a cup of milk with breakfast. Grandma then put her precious granddaughter into the back seat of her van for a short 5 minute drive to visit her new little brother. They had just arrived at the hospital and were parking when the little sweetie, strapped securely in her car seat, decided to release all the milk, along with the rest of the contents of her breakfast, into the back seat, on herself, and rear area of the van. After a thorough cleaning of the backseat and bath for the girl, when asked what happened, the grandma said she didn't think the milk smelt 'that bad' when she poured it for breakfast. Sometimes we take milk for granted. But the consequences of bad milk, even a little bit of bad milk can be horrible.

So it is fitting to hear Peter say; “**Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**” (1 Peter 2:2-3) Here Peter uses an analogy. He brings you back to your baptism where through God's Word and water you were born anew. Peter encourages you to act like a newborn babe, who seek nothing else than milk. Just as they long for the breasts and milk, so you, too, should hunger for God's pure Word, strive for it, and have a liking for it, in order that you may drink the pure spiritual milk and grow in faith and trust in God.

We need the pure milk of the Gospel because there and there alone is Christ revealed for us and where His gifts earned for you and me on the cross is brought to us. It is the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel which gives us salvation.

Just like a mother's milk, or cows' milk, the pure spiritual milk of God's Word must also be kept 100% pure. Just as a mouthful of sour milk can cause physical illness, adulterated or polluted spiritual milk had even more severe and deadly consequences. To put it bluntly; False teaching kills eternally! Polluted spiritual milk can cause a person to recoil from the pure milk to seek out a different source of nourishment for salvation. Just as the little sweetie who was given a glass of milk that didn't smell 'that bad' had disastrous results later on, corrupted spiritual milk—false teaching—has even more dreadful results: people end up rejecting God's Word for the other bovine fertilizer the devil spreads. By filling up on the garbage the world proclaims as being pure, people slowly spiritually starve themselves to eternal death by separating themselves from God!

This first happened in the Garden when Eve was tempted by Satan's question, “**Did God really say...?**” You are no better. Forget blaming the devil, your own sinful nature works hard enough to try to separate you from Christ. By nature you are a sinner. By nature you disobey God. By nature you are destined to hell because of your own guiltiness, because of your own

sinfulness, because of your own outright rejection of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and all God has done for us! How important is it for you to hear the pure Gospel? Your eternal life depends on it! You need to be reminded of your Saviour Christ Jesus Himself who gave up His life for you. You need to hear the pure Good News that He came for each and every one of you. You need to drink the pure spiritual milk which tells you Jesus did not come to be an example for you, rather Christ Jesus came and took all your guilt and sin upon Himself. Jesus died for all the times you reject Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by your words, actions, and choice of polluted spiritual milk instead. And He rose again on the third day. Jesus washed Himself in the blood of your guilt and sins in His Baptism in order that at in your Baptism you were washed clean of your guilt and sins in His blood.

You have new life in Christ. In Holy Baptism you were reborn as a spiritual infant in the faith. As newborn infants crave milk you too should absolutely crave God’s Word. Through hearing you are able to grow in your faith and understanding. Did you notice how Peter explained your growth in faith, because it is the same as how you physically grow. You have, or had, very little to do with your physical growth. You didn’t choose how tall you are. You didn’t choose your shoe size. You didn’t choose how your eyes would work, or change over time. Even your weight, if it was simply a matter of your choice, why is it as a country we spend billions of dollars annually to diet products and services. You may try, but even your growth is not fully under your control. All you can choose is to eat and drink in any quantity, or you can choose to starve yourself. The same works with faith. You can drink the pure spiritual milk of the Gospel, or you can starve yourself. One keeps you in Christ and the eternal life He gave you in your Baptism, or the other you starve yourself to spiritual and eternal death. In the first you are fed the pure spiritual milk which encourages you grow in faith, trust, and understanding of God, His Word, and His gift for you in Christ. In the second there is only death, it kills it.

This is why the Holy Spirit wants every Christian to see what kind of milk he drinks; he himself must learn what to think of all teachings. We need to learn to discern what we are spiritually drinking. Christ wants us to “**taste that the Lord is good**” so “**you may grow up into salvation.**”

Growth requires repeated nourishment. It is not enough to hear the Gospel once; as it is not enough to just give an infant a bottle once; one must study it constantly, in order that you may grow up. At the very center of the growth must be Christ. He is the cornerstone. Jesus is the solid foundation. He supports the whole building. As living stones we are built upon Him. In Christ we are part of the Universal Church.

Together we are part of “**a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**”(1 Peter 2:5) As baptized children of God, this is the true priesthood. It embraces these three things: to offer spiritual sacrifices, to pray for the congregation, and to

proclaim God's Word. All Christians are encouraged to share God's Word, to pray for the congregation, and to sacrifice themselves before God.

On account of Christ and His Sacrifice for you, you are declared as a member of His **“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.”**¹⁰ **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.”**(1 Peter 2:9-10) On account of the Holy Spirit's work in you through your hearing and drinking the spiritual milk of the Gospel, you have been given the gift of faith, forgiveness, and salvation. Though each person is at a different point in their life, each is still able to grow further in faith if fed. You have been called out of darkness into the Light and salvation of Christ Jesus. You have been made a part of His church, a people set apart to proclaim Christ, His grace, and His mercy. The author of the Book of Hebrews presents what our spiritual sacrifice looks like **“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”**(Hebrews 13:15) Because your lips have tasted the pure milk, because of what Christ has done in you and does through you, by His Word. Rejoice as you are His. Drink up and enjoy the pure Gospel, for it is your salvation. Amen.

¹ From CPR, 24:2:A, p.36. Rev. George F. Boughardt, liturgical setting of the fifth Sunday in Easter.

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