

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter

+ If you're ever confused by something Jesus says, you're in good company. The Apostles were sometimes confused, and Jesus even seems to give Philip a hard time about it. Because John knew we might be confused too, he recorded this conversation in his Gospel account. Here Jesus is explaining to his disciples the way to Heaven and with that, how we come to know and see the Father. We of course know that it's through Christ, but Philip didn't grasp that and asks Jesus to show him the Father. Then our Lord asks him reply, do you still not know me Philip? Obviously Jesus is implying that to know and see him is to know and see the Father. It's why Jesus says that He is the way, the truth and the life.

But more than just following in Christ's footsteps, we have to be transformed along the way into the likeness of Christ. No one just enters Heaven, come as you are...no, we must be fitted for Heaven. Jesus is eternal life, life with the Father, and so it is necessary for us to be molded into greater likeness with Christ if we're going to enjoy the same happiness. It's why sanctification is a process, why we speak of growing in holiness. And that's all to say, growing in love.

Christ demonstrated perfect and infinite love by offering Himself as a sacrifice for us. That's what love does...it inspires one to give of one's self...not just when it's easy but when it demands something, like suffering. That's the degree of charity we're called to because that's the love of Christ...which is fulfillment of Heaven. This is what St. Peter is getting at in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading. After referencing Christ as the chosen, precious, stone rejected by man, the corner stone mentioned in Scripture, Peter goes on and implores us to "let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

There's a lot in that one sentence. He mentions a present tense, an ongoing reality...let yourselves be built. So you see, it's not a matter of simply getting baptized, or doing any one thing...instead, we're called to change. When a house is being built, it looks much different after the framers leave than how looked after the concrete was poured. And it looks much nicer after the painters than after the sheet rockers.

We must be built up too and look different than we did last year or 10 years ago. Not physically but as Peter says, a spiritual house, spiritual sacrifices. And that's why he then says, 'a holy priesthood.' That's key. What does a priest do...offers something to God. Christ, the eternal high priest, offered Himself. And through priests like me, Christ continues to offer Himself to the Father at every Mass in a spiritual manner. So why does Peter mention a holy priesthood when addressing all of us.

Divine authority has bestowed a priesthood on us all. By our baptism we share in the priesthood of Christ, the ability to offer something to God. Remember, that's why priests exist...to offer something. It's why you exist. So what is it that you offer? Well, in Romans 12 Paul says "I appeal to you, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice," or offering. Paul is calling upon your priestly status...the priesthood of all baptized Christians. When Paul says to offer your body as a sacrifice, clearly he's not speaking literalistically...instead think of your heart being the altar, and on that altar...in our hearts, give God what is pleasing to Him...your mind and will...yourself.

"Each of us is called to be both a sacrifice to God and his priest."<sup>1</sup> Only ordained priests can offer the Mass, but it's by your baptismal priesthood that you actually and truly participate in

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<sup>1</sup> St. Peter Chrysologus

the sacrifice of the Mass. In that participation, physically present and mentally placing your offering on the altar with the bread and wine, you offer yourself to God. That's what He desires, *who* He desires, because you are pleasing to Him. As Peter said, living, chosen, precious stones being built into God's temple.

Do you believe that you are precious in the eyes of God? If we did, we'd also see and acknowledge that our neighbor is precious too in the eyes God. So when we mistreat our neighbor...it might reveal that we don't even see ourselves as precious. Today's readings remind us that we are. Besides Peter's words, our Lord speaks of preparing a place for us in Heaven. He wouldn't do that unless God desires our presence.

He is preparing the mansions of Heaven by preparing their future inhabitants. That is the house of God, of which the Paul says, 'The temple of God is holy, which temple you are.' It is still being built, it is still being prepared. Jesus speaks of going away to prepare right, because we must be prepared. By our priesthood in Christ, we offer to God ourselves...we can do that by our baptism and God's grace...give ourselves to God. And that's how God renders us worthy of Heaven.

There's an ancient hymn for the dedication of a church, it references the heavenly temple. Each stone that went into the Temple was uniquely fit, it had to be chiseled and sanded so that it would fit in the intended spot. That's us now, we have to be chiseled so as to fit and well placed in the new temple that Christ is preparing for us. Which is to say, He's preparing us. But that can only happen when we freely offer ourselves to God. And that self-offering is what transforms us more and more into the likeness of Christ. So that when it's complete, we can say as Christ did, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." That's God's desire and what Christ has promised.