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Homiletics: Sermon Study on 1 Peter 2:1-5 For Quasimodogeniti

Paul G. Bretscher

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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HOMILETICS

A ROYAL PRIEST — IN MY COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

The Theme for April. — Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter bring the Christian to the liturgical climax of his faith. Everything centers in Christ. The eye of faith witnesses again the awful sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. The darkness of Good Friday descends and seems for the moment to herald irretrievable tragedy, the defeat of all that is good, the crushing of every hope, in the death of the Son of God. Then suddenly the morning breaks, the tomb is empty; the resurrected Christ stands revealed in the glory of victory, proclaiming the unsearchable wisdom and love of God, who became man, "that *through death* He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." This month, then, the royal priest draws closer than ever into communion with Christ his Savior and finds in Him the glory of, and the power behind, his high calling.

Sermon Study on 1 Peter 2:1-5 For Quasimodogeniti

The Sunday after Easter. — The Easter and Resurrection theme is not directly prominent in this text. Nevertheless it is in the Good Friday and Easter message that the Christian has "tasted that the Lord is gracious" (v. 3). In v. 4 Christ is called the "living Stone," the Foundation of a living Church. Only in the power of the living Christ, only in that blessed "taste" of the grace of God, can these stirring words of Peter become effective in the life of the hearer.

Verse 2 of the text is the Antiphon of the Introit for this Sunday and sets the theme of the day.

The Context. — Chapter 1:23-25, and 2:6-10, immediately preceding and following the text, should be studied with some care

— not for the sake of added material (the text contains more than enough for a sermon of average length), but for the light they throw on certain phrases within the text itself.

EXEGETICAL NOTES

V:1: "Therefore lay aside all malice, and all dishonesty, and hypocrisies, and jealousies, and all attempts to belittle the other fellow."

"Therefore" (οὖν) goes back to 1:23, i. e., "because you are born again." Peter lists, then, five sins which newborn Christians are to put away.

Πᾶσαν κακίαν — malice, wishing someone evil, hoping that he will fail. Peter is thinking of that spirit of vengeance which dares not resort to personal violence, yet delights in the hope of another's downfall.

Πάντα δόλον — deceit, lack of perfect honesty, dealing in half-truths, getting an advantage over others by trickery, yet always within the letter of the law.

Ἰποκρίσεις — putting on an act. You are a hypocrite when your concern centers in how you *appear* to people and what they think of you, rather than in actually *being* as good as you try to appear.

Φθόνους — the desire to excel the other fellow, and thus hating him when he excels you. You do not know how to be satisfied and thankful to God when He gives you less in the way of honors and goods than He gives another.

Πάσας καταλαλιάς — talking the other fellow down, making light of his achievements, impugning his motives, exalting yourself by chopping him down to your size.

This list of sins is highly interesting. These are sins of personality. The world does not classify them as "big" sins, yet they are the cause of infinite unhappiness and strife. These are the common sins of people who pride themselves on being good, yet fail to appreciate the depth of human depravity. We readily see these sins in others; we never see them in ourselves. But it is just such "little" sins that the royal priest, in the power of the Holy Ghost, is to lay aside and root out of his heart. It is his growing awareness of the persistent power of such "little" sins still in his life, that keeps the royal priest ever repentant and humble before his God.

V.2: "[You are newborn infants. Then] like newborn infants, be desperate [for milk—only, in your case] for the honest milk of the Word—that by it you may grow in salvation [even as the infant grows in stature]."

The phrase τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα is difficult. The interpretation hinges on the word λογικόν. Since it occurs so rarely in the New Testament (otherwise only in Rom. 12:1), its meaning must be determined by its structure and by the context in which it stands. The adjectival suffix—ικός has two general meanings. 1) "pertaining to," as in βασιλικός. 2) "fit for," "capable of." From this second sense, λογικός derives its Aristotelian significance, "capable of understanding," therefore, "rational," or "logical." Yet in our text this meaning gives no sense, for λογικός modifies γάλα, and "milk" is not rational, or capable of understanding. Thayer then seizes on the meaning "fit for," "milk fit for the understanding," and the translation he offers is "the milk which nourishes the soul." (So also Weymouth.) This I consider unsatisfactory, for the meaning of λόγος is thereby changed from the *process* of understanding or reasoning to that in us which *does* the reasoning, namely, the soul. Unsatisfactory on the same ground is the similar translation, "spiritual milk," i.e., milk, "fit for" the spirit. (So Goodspeed, Phillips, R. S. V.) If all Peter had meant was "spiritual," he would have said πνευματικός. This throws us back on the first sense of the—ικός suffix, namely, "pertaining to"; and to λόγος in its first sense, "Word." Thus we arrive at the A. V. translation, "the milk of the Word." (So also the N. T. in Basic English.) There is precedent for this approach to λογικός in Plutarch, who uses it in the sense "pertaining to speech." This translation is supported by Peter's emphasis on the Word of God in 1:23-25; particularly in v. 23, where the λόγος is defined as the means by which we are born again.

In the light of the above interpretation of λογικός, ἄδολος appears to me to be used as a deliberate and well-chosen "pun," modifying both the *figure* "milk," and the *figured* "Word." Thus, "the pure milk of the pure Word." Referring to milk it takes its derived meaning, "pure, unadulterated." Referring to the Word, and this is the major reference, it holds to its original sense, "without guile, honest." The word of men is deceitful and untrust-

worthy; often it deliberately misleads; often also the profoundest worldly wisdom is completely mistaken. The Word of God never deceives. It has only one purpose, that men may know the mind of God in truth and be saved.

Εἰς σωτηρίαν (omitted in the *textus receptus*, and therefore in the A. V.). In 1:5 Peter uses this very phrase to signify "unto the final salvation." In 1:9 σωτηρία appears at first glance also to mean the final salvation, though in view of verse 10 this is not decisive. It may be that the use of εἰς σωτηρίαν in 1:5 would compel us to assume that Peter has the final salvation also in mind in our text. Nevertheless, in view of the present context, I would suggest the possibility at least, that εἰς here is the equivalent of ἐν (as often in the Koine; cf. 1 Peter 5:12, εἰς ἣν στήτε). Thus σωτηρία would include all of Christian faith, hope, and life, in which we are to grow through the Word.

Notice that there is a double simile in this verse, which is hard to catch in English. 1) The Christians to whom Peter is writing are "newborn babes" in Christ. So are we. No Christian ought to be insulted at being called a spiritual infant (though many in their self-conceit are). Nor ought any man, within or without the Church, be offended that Christians so often fail to live up to their profession. We must recognize that the Church is full of spiritual babies. The miracle is that they have been born, and are alive, at all. A mother is not offended that her baby does not talk, or walk, or help with the dishes, but is only a burden to her. She only rejoices that her baby is alive.

2) The second simile is that of growth. Though Christians are newborn babes, they are not to remain babes forever. They are to grow up, through the Word. A baby who does not grow physically or mentally is not a joy, but a burden and a grief to the parents. Hence the mother is much concerned that her child should drink its milk, for unless the baby eats, it will neither grow nor even live. So in the Church, the tragedy is not that so many Christians are babes. The tragedy is that they will not eat, they are satisfied to remain babes, they do not hunger for the Word by which to grow. They think they are wise and know it all, that they have nothing to learn; but they are fools and know nothing. They think they are a help to the Church and to Christ, but they are only a hindrance and a burden.

V. 3: "[You really will long for that milk] if [as the Psalmist puts it] you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

The quotation is Ps. 34:8, and the words are those of the LXX. Here is the fundamental prerequisite, the great *if* on which all in this text turns. There is no sense talking about putting away sins (v. 1), or growing (v. 2), or being a living stone or a sacred priesthood (vv. 4 and 5), unless you first have personally experienced, not in word only, but in the Spirit-moved response of your heart, the power of the Holy Week and Easter message; that *you* are a lost sinner, and that God in Christ has loved and redeemed *you*. This is what Peter means by "being born again" (1:23).

Vv. 4-5 a: "[By such eating] you draw ever closer to your Lord. [Picture Him, as Isaiah does, as] a living Stone, rejected, it is true, by men; yet, as far as God is concerned, 'elect,' 'precious.' [In relation to Him] you also, living stones in your own right, are being built up as a house in which the Spirit rules. . . ."

The reference is to Is. 28:16, quoted from the LXX (with omissions) in verse 6.

Λίθον ζῶντα. This is a new metaphor. Christ is a stone in the sense of Isaiah, a sure Foundation, a Cornerstone, upon which is built a building that cannot be shaken, neither by decay within, nor by all the winds and storms of time. But Christ is a *living* Stone, and Peter's addition of ζῶντα is supremely significant. He is risen from the dead, a real active, thinking, ruling Person. Hence Christianity does not rest on a dead record of historical events, on dead theory held by a few opinionated people, but on a *living God*. And the Christian is not a member of a futile organization, struggling by the efforts of a few to overcome the lethargy of the many and to do something worth while in the world. He is a member of the body of Christ, a living stone resting securely on *the* living Stone, and in communion with the living Christ, adding his own life and activity toward the blessed task of building on this ruined earth the spiritual house which will survive the wreckage of this world and endure to all eternity.

Ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον. — Christ, the living Stone, is rejected, repudiated; not only by the Jews who stumbled, nor only by those today who boldly deny Him, but by many also within the Church who are dead, who fail to see the implications

of the resurrected Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father, *alive and ruling*. Thus they fail to enter into real communion with Him (cf. the April theme).

Ἐλεκτὸν ἔντιμον. — Here is God's view of the Christ whom men regard so lightly. He is "elect, precious." Beside Him all the values of this world sink into dust and ashes. Even though we, in our frailty, fail to appreciate the full glory of the living Stone, is it not wisdom to accept this judgment of God and to take Him seriously? But if we live on in indifference to Christ, we are guilty of despising that which God exalts, of enthroning our human judgment over the wisdom of the all-wise God.

Οἶκος πνευματικός. — The — ιός suffix again in the sense of "pertaining to" or "belonging to." This house, then, belongs to and is ruled by the Spirit. He is the Architect. He executes His own master plan, using each living stone for its peculiar purpose. The stones themselves cannot see the total effect of the building. But each by faith is satisfied to do that and to be that which the Spirit day by day, and in his whole life, destines for him. From the point of view of the stone, the building is greater than the stone. Yet from the point of view of the Spirit it is not. Each stone is all-important, each serves a definite purpose; and as long as one stone is lacking, the building cannot be complete.

Here is the antidote for bickerings, jealousies, indifferentism. Christians must grow up in order to play a full role as living stones. The "adult" Christian will neither, in jealousy, seek a higher place than that which the Spirit gives him; nor will he in indifference withhold his services and refuse to take his proper place by claiming "I have no time for church work," etc. The Christian who has grown sufficiently in the Spirit and through the Word, will, as a living stone, submerge his whole personality, his whole life, in the interest of the Kingdom. For him there is no greater glory than his union in the living Christ and with his fellow Christians. For the building of which he is both a member and a builder will endure forever.

V.5b: "... for the purpose that you, as a sacred priesthood, should offer up Spirit-moved sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Εἰς ἱεράτευμα . . . ἀνενέγκαι . . . θυσίας. — The εἰς is omitted

in the *textus receptus*, and therefore also in the A. V. I would regard this as a split infinitive construction, the *εἰς* (τό omitted) being attached to *ἀνενέγκαι* to express purpose; *ἱεράτευμα* is not the object of *εἰς*, but the appositive to the second person subject of the infinitive; τό is omitted because of the insertion of the appositive. Thus the above translation. This is grammatically awkward, but no more so than to take *ἱεράτευμα* as the object of *εἰς*; and it makes clearer sense.

Ἱεράτευμα ἁγίων.—This is a new metaphor. Here compare v. 9. Two thoughts suggest themselves in connection with this priesthood. 1) Each Christian lives in independent communion with God. All barriers are removed. No intermediary other than Christ is either needed or desirable. Just as it is an offense to a human father who loves his son, to overhear the son say to the mother, "Mother, *you* ask Daddy for me," so it is an offense to God when His children so distrust His love that they think more is to be gained by approaching Him through saints, etc., than by personal confident intercession in prayer. 2) Each Christian as a priest carries within himself the spark of divine initiative to undertake the Lord's work. The royal priest can stand for Christ alone. If he does not need a saint or a pastor to commune with God for him, he does not need a pastor either to urge him to go to church, to read his Bible, to be liberal in his giving, to cast out the compromises of his life, to put away sin, to be a witness for Christ. The royal priest will not need to be begged to serve in the Sunday school or choir, or on a canvass, or as an officer. He is capable of independent vision and leadership. He will keep his own eyes open, see and create his own opportunities to do the work of God, and, with no pressure other than the Spirit within him, do that work. It is this aspect of the priesthood that is particularly emphasized in the infinitive and its object—

Ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας.—These are not the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament which have been forever done away in the all-atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Nor are they sacrifices in the perverted sense in which people talk of "making sacrifices" giving up pleasures etc. for some person or some cause. This is "putting the hand to the plow and looking back." Here the offering of sacrifices is the picture of a total life dedicated to the

service of God. Πνευματικός, again, is not "spiritual" in the empty sense of "non-physical"; rather "Spirit-moved." The Holy Ghost in the heart is the power behind the priestly life.

Εὐπροσδέκτους θεῷ. — This life of free service, motivated by no force other than the Spirit within, living for no purpose other than the will of God, and resting in intimate, trusting communion with God, this is well-pleasing to God. For this is God's goal in each life, and when it begins to be attained, it brings to God the joy of victory. This is the image of God restored in fallen man.

Διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. — It is impossible to determine for certain whether this phrase is meant to attach to εὐπροσδέκτους, indicating that only in Christ are even our best good works free from all impurity and therefore acceptable to God, or to ἀνεγκύαι, indicating the source and power behind our priesthood. I would personally lean toward the latter. In any case, it is fitting that the text should close with the name of the Savior, for all that is said in the text proceeds from, and returns to, Jesus Christ. To leave the name of Jesus Christ out of this verse (as Masonry does in the opening charge of the Mark Master's degree — cf. A. G. Mackey, *Masonic Ritualist*, p. 271) is blasphemy. Without Christ the entire text is lofty theory, but in the end, empty words.

SUGGESTED OUTLINES

Theme: The Hunger of Spiritual Priests

1. The Hunger Drives Us to Eat.
 - A. The origin of the hunger: a sign of life, reflecting the fact that the new birth has taken place.
 - B. The necessity of the hunger: no growth and no continued life possible without it.
 - C. The food for which we hunger: the Word of God.
2. Eating Produces Growth.
 - A. We put away more and more of the personality of the flesh.
 - B. We become living stones, taking our part in the Spirit-built house, and able to labor in harmony with the whole.
 - C. We become a sacred priesthood, with self-contained spiritual initiative, able to stand alone.

Or:

Theme: Are You a Grown-up Christian?

1. Spiritual Maturity (like social maturity) is Reflected in:

- A. Regenerated personality. (Petty, childish sins are put away.)
- B. Selfless co-operation (You are a living stone, united with other living stones, resting on the living Stone; all together members of and builders of one house, through the Spirit.)
- C. Independent initiative (As a priest before God you need not be driven to do God's will. You see and create your own opportunities.)

Test yourself! Are you an adult or an infant?

2. Spiritual Maturity (like physical maturity) is Attained by:

- A. Being born. (Tasting God's grace in Christ. You must be alive first.)
- B. Eating. (No insult to be a helpless baby. Tragedy only if you don't eat.)
- C. Eating the right food, the Word. (Not the uncertain word of human wisdom, but the life-giving, never-deceiving Word of God.)

Then eat, and grow!

PAUL G. BRETSCHER
New Orleans, La.