

EPISTLE: 1 PETER

2



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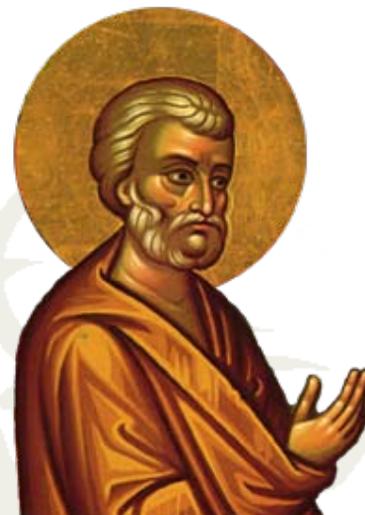
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PRACTICE QUIZ

Take a quiz to test your knowledge of 1 Peter chapter 2.

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Continuing from his statement that Christians have been born again “through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1:23), the Holy Apostle Peter begins chapter two by encouraging his readers to lay aside all sinful attitudes and behaviors and instead desire “the pure milk of the word” (2:1-2). I like how St. Hilary of Arles describes this “pure milk:”

Milk has three forms which can be compared to doctrine, that is, the liquid, cheese and butter. Liquid milk is the literal sense of Scripture, cheese is the moral sense, and butter is the spiritual sense. Find a good teacher and you will soon learn these three things.

Of course, tasting that the Lord is gracious (2:3) involves more than reading Holy Scripture; St. Basil the Great points out that it also directly includes Holy Communion (as well, of course, as receiving the other Mysteries of the Church).

Using the Temple in Jerusalem as an illustration, St. Peter goes on to say that God is forming us in holiness into “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God

through Jesus Christ” (2:5). Just as the Temple was constructed of many stones, and contained a priesthood that offered sacrifices to God, so each of us is a “living stone”—with Christ as the “chief cornerstone” (2:6, quoting Isaiah 28:16)—and a member of a holy priesthood that offers to God spiritual sacrifices that Fr. Lawrence Farley describes as “praise, the doxological thanksgiving and memorial of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.” All of this, of course, applies only to those who believe; to those who do not believe Christ instead becomes a stumbling block—or thing that causes difficulty and hesitation—to those who do not believe (2:7-8).

Pay special attention to what the apostle says in verse nine: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.” See how St. Ignatius of Antioch puts it: “Blessed, then, are you who are God-bearers, spirit-bearers, temple-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ, being ‘a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.’” This means, Clement of Alexandria explains, “We are a royal people because we have been called to share Christ’s kingdom and we belong to Him. We are a priesthood because of the offering which is made in prayers and in the teachings by which souls which are offered to God are won.”

All this must be kept within the context of our reliance upon God: we only have this exalted position because

God has shown us mercy (2:10)—we are in fact bondservants (or slaves) of God (2:16). This means we are representatives of God to the world around us, and therefore must “do good works” which people will observe, and will inspire them to glorify God (2:12). Because God put the governmental authorities in place to both punish evildoers and reward those who benefit the nation, He wants us to do work that is obedient, respectful and beneficial to others in part because doing so will overcome the objections raised by critics of Christianity (2:14-15). In the end, we must “honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King” (2:17).

St. Peter extends this point to servants (meaning house-slaves), telling them to patiently submit to the people for whom they worked even when the slave-master is unjust (2:18); such patient endurance when they were doing good was commendable before God (2:20). The ultimate example of the Suffering Servant is Christ Himself, Who although righteous suffered on the Cross so that we might be healed and guided by “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (2:21-25).

LIFE TIP

St. Gregory the Dialogist explains why we should taste that the Lord is gracious: “Spiritual pleasures...when unattained, produce a certain aversion; but once we taste them, the taste awakens desire, and our hunger for them increases the more we taste them...So we see that, if we do not taste these delights, we cannot desire them, because their flavor is unknown to us...so that the psalmist says, ‘Taste and see that the Lord is sweet’ (Psalm 33:9).”

