

Saturday of Easter Week, 2019 A.✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

To us, “living” and “stone” are opposites. We don’t consider stones to be alive. In fact, we employ stones to mark death. Look into any graveyard. Holy Scripture uses stone to describe the spiritually dead – they have hearts of stone – cold, hard, unreceptive to the Truth. To us, “living” and “stone” are opposites.

But to us, “living” and “dead” are also opposites. Once one dies, he is dead, and there is no more life. But in Christ, the opposites are reconciled. He reconciles man and God. He puts death to death and gives the dead life.

And He brings life even to stone. “If these were silent, even the stones would cry out” said the Lord at His Triumphant Entry, as the multitudes cried “Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Stone is strong, firm, immovable, unchangeable, and provides a reliable foundation. When stone is made living, it makes an unshakable, steadfast, enduring dwelling. So the Apostle describes the Holy Church – a spiritual house, a holy priesthood.

But the house must have a cornerstone, the one Stone on which everything else is built. Christ is the cornerstone, rejected by men, but upon whom He falls and crushes them. The truth of the central Article of all Scripture, the Fourth Article of the *Augustana*, salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, causes sinful men to stumble. As they go through life focused

on themselves, eyes fixed on themselves, hearts turned inward, they stumble over the Cornerstone of salvation, Jesus Christ. They stumble, being disobedient to His Word.

They stumble who believe that by their own works they can achieve heaven. And if they press on after hearing of Christ, believing they can be saved apart from Him, they are crushed. Thus it is with the heart of stone.

So the malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking of which the Apostle writes are bricks in a wall of sin that prevents one from being saved. It is a wall without foundation, a wall that crumbles when the wind and the waves beat against it, but it is a wall that sinners prefer.

In it they find false comfort. But it cannot truly protect, nor is it a lasting wall, because while they build their wall upon a foundation of sin, they lack the True Cornerstone.

Still the wall of sin stands between man and God, keeping man prisoner, waiting for judgment. And sinful men are happy to be walled in, making the wall taller with every sin. And all of us, each of us, must plead guilty to deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking.

But for you the Apostle speaks Words of hope: God, in His mercy, called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. He did it by giving the Cornerstone to be crucified. He did it by giving His elect, precious Son over to death. And then He rose again from the dead, proving by His resurrection that He is the Living Cornerstone worthy of your trust. Whoever believes in Him shall not be put to shame.

So dead in sin, you are washed in the water of Holy Baptism. You sink in the font and are drowned, and emerge a living stone, being built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to the One who sacrificed Himself for you, the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. And to you who believe, He is precious.

In Christ you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. Once you were not a people, but you are now the people of God, having obtained His mercy.

Being born from above, being new creatures in Christ, you hunger as a child for milk. So God exhorts you to desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby. And Baptismal faith desires the Eucharist, that you may eat and drink Christ, that you may taste that the Lord is gracious.

Forgiven, washed, fed, you live out your lives as God's people, offering your lives as living sacrifices to Him. This you do not to please Him, but as a response to His love for you in Christ.

And each time you draw near to God, He blesses you all the more, as He does this day, at this altar. He gives you the gifts of Word and Sacrament. He forgives you anew, and makes your faith strong, that you come to Him as a living stone, chosen by God.

The tomb is empty. The Lord Christ is risen! A blessed Easter.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.