

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

1 Peter 2:2-10

Blueprints make it possible for more than one person to build on something and plan ahead. Having a blueprint, helps them to be able to build something that is both beautiful and useful.

Our reading today from First Peter is a blueprint for the spiritual structure of the church. It shows us how we are to be built into the Church and how the Church should operate. The problem is, that too often we have our own ideas about the spiritual structure of the church. The end result of using our own plans, instead of God's is disastrous.

The first thing we learn from God's blueprint in First Peter is, that Jesus is the cornerstone of the church. He is a living stone that was rejected by people, but precious to God, and has been chosen as the cornerstone. In other words, Jesus is central to the church. The cornerstone in a building is laid first; it is primary to the rest of the structure. All of the rest of the building, its walls and its structures refer back to him for their placement.

You don't set a cornerstone and then start building walls without attaching them to the cornerstone. In the same way the walls of the church, spiritually speaking, have to be connected to Christ.

If you start laying bricks without reference to Christ, the wall will not meet up with him, and the structure of the house will be unsound. In other words, we don't go about doing things in the church without looking to Christ as the source and purpose of those actions.

Too often we try to be the church without reference to Christ.

We listen to what the world has to say, or what we think, and get our bearings from that. We don't intend to exclude Christ from our considerations, we simply lose sight of Him. That is why we need to constantly refocus our bearings on Christ to make him the cornerstone of our lives, as individuals, and the cornerstone of all we do as a church. Jesus should be the reason for all that we do as Christians, and as a congregation.

This is the opposite of what the world says. To the worldly, personal gain, or fulfillment of desires, should be the cornerstone of our lives. The worldly argue that orienting our lives by some guy who lived in Galilee 2,000 years ago, is ridiculous. But take a look at their lives. Often times they are like fallen houses, lost in selfishness, greed and desire. Not that Christians don't fall off the wall from time to time, but at least we have a reference point to get back in place.

So if Jesus is the living cornerstone, then we are to be living stones in the building. But what kind of building. Peter calls it a "spiritual house" or a "holy priesthood". The image is that of a temple. We are to be a spiritual structure that is dedicated to serving God. Peter also says that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen race. It is the purpose of our lives to serve God. Our lives, and our life as a congregation, should be a holy space for serving and praising God.

The problem is that, too often, we follow the world's models to structure the church. Some people think of the church as a club, a place for people to socialize. In that model of the church, the structures for outreach and worship get neglected. But worse yet, as with many clubs, walls are built to keep people out. Not that fellowship is bad, it is important to the life of the church, but there is more to the church than fellowship.

Some people think of the church as a school. There is a lot of merit to this model. We are commanded to teach people to be disciples for Christ. But there is the danger that people will think they can graduate, or in other words arrive. They will grow to a certain point and then stop. Unfortunately, over the last few generations, Confirmation has come to be the graduation ceremony from the church. Growing as a Christian is a life long endeavor, and should never stop. You can't graduate from church.

Some people think of the church as a social agency. There is a lot of merit here too. We are commanded to help those in need. But without community and nurture and worship, we become spiritually bankrupt, and what then do we have to offer a world hungry for the love of God?

Some think of the church as just a sanctuary. To them it is a place to escape the darkness of the world outside. Times of sanctuary are important, but that is not all the church is. The end result of this model is a church that just hides from the world's problems, instead of trying to address them.

This is why the image of a holy nation is so important. In Christ we are a community. But we are also a relief agency, a continuing education center, a sanctuary, and so on. This plan of God's for the church, is a blueprint that is different from the world's blueprints. Because it's so different, it's difficult to explain. Maybe that is why Peter used so many images to describe it.

But the emphasis of all of this talk of cornerstones, holy nations and royal priesthoods is this: We need to allow ourselves to be built into it. That is what that business of "spiritual milk" is all about. Just as milk feeds a baby, and gives it what it needs, God's grace and the Holy Spirit give us what we need. We

simply need to submit to God, and allow him to help us grow into what God calls us to be. We must submit to the master builder, and let him put us in place. We should stop trying to be the master builder, and let God tell us where to put the next stone.

This is a personal, as well as a congregational, and denominational thing. Yes, we have to work at building the church. We need to lead people to Christ. We need to seek new ways to address the needs of people around us. But we have to first submit to God, to let him build us into place. A piece of board doesn't tell the carpenter where to cut it, and the brick doesn't tell the mason where to place the mortar, so we shouldn't try to second guess or overrule God's plans. God wrote the blueprint for the church, so He should be the one to show us our place in it.

AMEN.