

Spiritual Nourishment For The Risen Life.

Text: 1 pet 2:2, Psa 81:8, 1

Suggested Hymns:

102, 95, 265, 284, 99

1) The spiritual nourishment of God's grace

2) We are not as eager as we should be

3) We are to thrive and grow

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

Today our sermon is based on the texts used for the Introit:

1 Peter 2:2, ²As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word,

Psalms 81:8, 1, ⁸“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you!

O Israel, if you will listen to Me!

¹ Sing aloud to God our strength;

Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Easter season is the season of the risen Life. Glad hallelujahs ring in our ears again. We have a Risen Lord, risen victorious over the prostrate bodies of our mortal enemies, sin, death, and Satan.

Christ's risen life is ours to share, and in this we rejoice today. In Holy Baptism we shared in His death and resurrection to life. We read in Romans 6:4, ***⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.***

Our worship today finds its meaning in the newness of life that is ours in Christ. We prayed together in the Collect that we may bring forth in our life and conduct the fruits of Christ's resurrection. The Epistle states this testimony, ***“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.”¹*** St. John tells us in the Gospel why God includes the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, ***“that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”²***

God's Word also speaks to us today through the Introit, showing how eager God is to keep this new life going in all of us who are reborn. It almost shouts at

us, “*Quasi modo geniti!*” which is the Latin name for this Sunday and means “*Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk!*”

Let us therefore consider how necessary it is for us to have, and how eager God is to provide for us Spiritual nourishment for the risen life. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Spiritual Nourishment Of God’s Grace Is Fittingly Compared To Milk, The Finest Source Of Physical Nourishment

Some years ago two men named Crumbine and Tobey wrote a book about milk. They called it *The Most Nearly Perfect Food*. And so it is. Milk is indeed an astounding gift of God for physical nourishment. Scientists point out that milk contains all the essentials of a human diet. It has in it fat, proteins, salts, a form of sugar, and all the known vitamins. What is more, these ingredients are in the proportions as needed by the human body.

Milk is the one article in nature that seems to have been intended specifically for human food, and there is no entirely satisfactory substitute for it. Experts say that milk is the most nearly perfect food for people of all ages, young and old. More than any other item of food, milk contributes to the well-being, health, and efficiency of adults as well as children. How very fitting, then, that the apostle should choose milk as the symbol for the perfect spiritual food, the grace of God, which we need daily to nourish us in the risen life.

As a matter of fact, the Christian church in early centuries made use of milk in Baptismal ceremonies. Perhaps it was because of New Testament passages such as the one before us, connecting milk with babes in the faith. Perhaps it was because the Promised Land is described some twenty times in the Old Testament as a “*land flowing with milk and honey.*”

Whatever the reason, a mixture of milk and honey was given to new converts at the time of their Baptism. This practice lasted from the second to the ninth century. It has meaning for us today because Easter was the time for Baptism of converts. For a week they walked about in white robes, and on this First Sunday after Easter laid them aside to live the new life of faith in their everyday clothes.

So the Easter season reminds us, as in today’s Collect, that our risen life is lived out in our everyday life and conduct. But, consider again, a spoonful of

milk and honey in the Baptism ceremony. What a fitting symbol! After all, were these people not entering the Promised Land of God's Kingdom of Grace in Christ?

What could be more fitting than a taste of sweet milk and honey on the tongue — a very physical sign of the sweet milk of God's grace as they were reborn into eternal life as babes in the faith of Jesus Christ!

Milk has therefore been regarded as an ideal symbol of spiritual food. In some of the catacombs — the underground tunnels in which early Christians often met — paintings have been found on the walls depicting Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

We are familiar with such paintings today, of course, but there was one unusual detail in these early works of Christian art. Near the figure of the Good Shepherd can be seen a pail of milk. How meaningful! The shepherd provides a pail of milk for the little sheep, who have been weaned, or perhaps have lost their mother. So the Lord, our Shepherd, provides spiritual milk for us little sheep of His flock.

A general rule of nature is that the best milk for a little one is from the mother who gave birth to it. We might see a comparison in the spiritual realm. It was God who gave us our life as Christians, and therefore we ought to look to the same source for continued nourishment. In the first chapter of Peter, he reminds us of our birth — and notice the Easter Gospel in it, ***³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***³

If it is the great mercy of God that is responsible for our rebirth, then it is this same mercy to which we must look for sustenance. And we are not disappointed. In His holy Word and blessed Sacrament God provides a wholesome diet of grace, corresponding perfectly to our spiritual needs. If physical milk is marvellous because of its origin and life-sustaining powers, how much more marvellous is the spiritual milk of grace!

How strange that we should be nourished on words! Yet it is by hearing that faith comes and is upheld. So God urges us, *"Listen to Me!"* How strange that we should be nourished by a wafer and a sip of wine! But Jesus says, *"Take, eat.*

Take, drink. This is My body and blood.” And is it any less strange that by means of a handful of water and a short sentence God deigns to work a mighty act of grace and make us His own children?

May God open our eyes and startle us with the wonders of His love! How He condescends to supply us with forgiving grace through these simple means, as He condescended to bring us new life through a simple wooden cross and a slab of stone in a tomb. He has not called us to faith only to leave us as stranded, hungry orphans in this world. But He daily provides us with food sufficient for all our needs, temporal and spiritual.

2. But We Are Not As Eager As We Should Be For This Spiritual Nourishment

God has told us to drink of His grace. *“Desire it!”* God says. ***O Israel, if you will listen to Me!*** We know that the words of the Introit are a shortened form of an entire psalm. Here it is Psalm 81, which was originally chanted in its entirety. So we must examine the whole Psalm to receive the full benefit and meaning that the church saw in it when it was chosen as our Introit.

Psalm 81 is a festival psalm, probably used on the Feast of Tabernacles by the Old Testament people of God. On this day, every seven years, all Israel was to assemble, and the Law given through Moses was to be read *“in their hearing.”*

The command was given in Deuteronomy 31:12-13, ¹² *“Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law,* ¹³ *“and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”*

At this time Psalm 81 was used in these ceremonies, because it shows how concerned their God was that they hear His words for their spiritual health and well-being.

It begins with a note of rejoicing and the blowing of trumpets, ***Sing aloud to God our strength; Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob.*** The memory of their deliverance from Egypt should prompt their praises. The Lord God had

taken from their shoulders the burden of being slaves. He had taken from their weary, callused hands the basket, filled with bricks and clay. He broke the chains of slavery, so that they could now eat the bread and breathe the air of free people.

Now they were free, under God and by His grace! They had literally been given new life. God had saved them by a mighty act of deliverance, by a mighty demonstration of grace, just as He has now freed us by a mighty act of grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like the Israelites of old, we have been brought into God's kingdom. He has freed us from the anxious life, the troubled life, the haunted life, of slavery to sin.

But perversity is always a trait of the sinful human heart. It was not long before God's people grew weary in their new life, and their devotion cooled. Before we condemn them, let us look within our own hearts; let us expose and examine our own lives for signs of unfaithfulness; and let us take our place beside Israel of old as perverse sinners.

We join them at the place called Meribah, where unbelief and ingratitude took over their hearts, as so often happens with us. They murmured and rebelled against God's grace. But the heart of their Saviour-God had not changed. He still yearned for their love and obedience, as a father yearns for a wayward son. He still pleads with them to receive His grace for their good. Listen to Him!

“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you! O Israel, if you will listen to Me! ... “Oh, that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! ... He would have fed them also with the finest of wheat; And with honey from the rock I would have satisfied you.” ... Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. ... But all to no avail! God must turn away sadly: “But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me.”⁴

How often must God say that of us — ***“But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me?*** Like Israel, we, too, lose our eagerness for the continued grace of God. Like perverse children we do not want what is good for us. Perhaps we fall into a dull routine of church membership and activity, and our ears grow insensitive to the calling of God.

Or worse, perhaps we lose our appetite for the things of God. Maybe we think we are old and established Christians, that we are “*over the hill*” and can coast the rest of the way to eternity.

Maybe the idea of spiritual milk suggests that we have these needs only when young in years or young in faith. (Elsewhere in the New Testament, milk is compared to food for inexperienced Christians, in contrast to solid food for the mature, but that is not the case here.) In spiritual matters, too, “*we never outgrow our need for milk.*”

These words, “*like newborn babes,*” lay stress, NOT on the recent birth of the babes, but on the strong desire for milk that babies show. St. Peter is saying, “*This is how you should act when it comes to the grace of God; you should go after it as a baby goes after his bottle at feeding time.*”

How parents will worry when baby doesn’t want his bottle! What is wrong? they ask. They are concerned. They are anxious. The baby must be sick! Not all is well with the little one!

God is just as concerned and anxious when we lack spiritual appetite. It is a clear sign that something is wrong with our new life. He would be relieved and pleased to see His children all eagerly drinking in the milk of His grace — regular in church attendance, regularly at the Lord’s Supper, regular in devotions and Bible studies.

Picture, if you will, how a hungry baby is restless and discontent until his bottle comes in sight. Then see his tiny hands reach out to clasp it, his mouth searching for the nipple. See how vigorously, how greedily, he sucks into his little body, the warm, satisfying milk!

This is exactly the living picture the apostle would have us see. This is exactly what he means when he says, “*Desire the pure spiritual milk.*” This is the eagerness with which we should feed upon God’s grace in our new, risen life. Whether we are baptised and reborn as Christians for a week, a year, or a lifetime, this strong and vigorous desire for nourishment should always be ours.

3. That We May Thrive And Grow In The Risen Life, God Continues Urging Us To Drink The Milk Of His Grace In Word And Sacrament

There is simply no other way to stay spiritually alive than to live on the constant mercy of God. That is why these words are so strong, “*Desire this milk!*” This is a command, not a suggestion.

God does not say, “*It would be nice if you desire it,*” or, “*Won’t you please consider it?*” No — He bluntly, yet lovingly, looks us in the eye and says, “*Desire it!*” “*Get busy and drink! It is for your own good!*” This command is not Law, but Gospel, the strongest possible invitation of love.

God knows that without His grace we cannot stay alive, but will only grow weak and faint and fall by the wayside. No father wants to see his children die of malnutrition, and our heavenly Father no less. So He speaks out to us with redoubled urgency. He calls to remembrance the rich satisfaction we once enjoyed, *you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*⁵ Well, God has not changed. We read in Psalm 34:8, ⁸ *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good.*

Our life is in the grace of God in Christ. We depend entirely on Him who died for us and rose again. The cross of Jesus Christ and His empty tomb are and shall always be the foundation of our eternal hope. Easter reminds us that God has done great things for us. He has granted us, here and now, a new and risen life with our risen Saviour. This Gospel of the resurrection is the central fact of grace for us today and every day.

It is only a week since the glorious Easter Festival. The special music, the lilies, the glad sounds of Alleluia are refreshing to our ears and heart. It is the Feast of the risen life in Christ. We are risen with Christ — let us remind ourselves of this often — risen to a newness of life.

For some their new life is only a week old. For others, this festival season reminds us of the rebirth into a life of grace which God granted us in our Baptism. But for all of us, the Introit today is both a warning and an invitation. It warns us against complacency in the risen life, against taking our faith for granted, against taking the mercies of God for granted.

We must live out this risen life in our daily conduct and conversation. But the Introit also invites us, so strongly, to partake of God’s constant grace and stay alive spiritually. The same grace that brought our new life into being in Holy Baptism is now extended to us continually in God’s Word and the Sacrament of the Altar.

Oh, how God yearns to see us thrive and grow in faith unto our final salvation! How He wants us to listen diligently to His voice, passing wholesome judgment upon all our life, to correct, to instruct, to train us in the righteousness of the risen life. If we will but listen in faith! He will feed us with the blessed Sacrament, assuring us of our pardon.

Listen to God's anxious plea! Hear in it His great-hearted love and concern for our eternal welfare. He means it for our good. In His Son Jesus He went to great lengths to make our new life possible. God who in Holy Baptism raised us up together with Christ to newness of life, and first granted us a taste of the sweetness of His grace, is now in a loving voice, urging us, inviting us, to desire, to eat, and to live. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 John 5:11

² John 20:31

³ 1 Peter 1:3

⁴ Psa 81 v 8, 13, 16, 10b, 11

⁵ 1 Peter 2:3