

Easter 5 / May 3, 2026

Text: 1 Peter 2:5

*“You yourselves, like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

A Spiritual House. A Royal Priesthood.

Living stones, spiritual houses, a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ Jesus. Peter’s imagery in these verses draws upon the richness of God’s revelation in the Old Testament, His presence with His people through tent, temple and sacrifice. His purpose to make Himself known in the world through them. Israel was to be to God a nation of priests offering spiritual sacrifices of praise, prayer and thanksgiving. Israel continues to be to God, a nation of priests, offering the same spiritual sacrifices, now through Jesus Christ, who offered the perfect and final sacrifice of atonement in the blood of His cross. God drew near to us through the temple of Jesus’ physical body during His time on earth. God now draws near to us in Christ’s spiritual body, the holy Christian Church, which proclaims the gospel of forgiveness by which we draw near to God through faith in Christ Jesus.

God expressed His presence among the children of Israel through the tabernacle, an elaborate tent and later through the temple in Jerusalem. In the tent and temple God dwelt among His people and provided sacrifices to atone for their sins, so they could dwell in His presence. God gave the fullest expression of His presence with the children of Israel through the temple of Jesus’ body in which He became incarnate, enfleshed as a human being. In the temple of His body, Jesus fulfilled the work of the Levitical Priests, who offered sacrifices for the sins of the people. In His body Jesus offered the sacrifice that ended all sacrifices and fully and forever atoned for human sin. In the temple of His body Jesus reached out to men, children and women with the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Him as their God and Saviour. Jesus continues to reach out with the gospel of forgiveness through His spiritual body, the holy Christian Church, which proclaims and offers Him as Saviour for all people to believe.

With Jesus’ death and resurrection, the work of the stone temple as a place of sacrifice, was fulfilled. He sacrificed once for all, forever. However, the work of His spiritual temple was reaching a new stage of outreach. Even as Israel of the Old

Covenant was to be a spiritual temple embodying God's presence in the world and shining the light of His salvation to the nations, so the Israel of the New Covenant is to embody the presence of Christ in the world and call the nations to receive the blessing of salvation through faith in Him. This is the work of believers, of all who are members of the holy Christian Church through faith and baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. To offer sacrifices of praise, prayer and thanksgiving. To proclaim the gospel of salvation and to call people to faith in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

The tent, the tabernacle, was cumbersome. It must have been a lot of work to set it up and take it down each time Israel made and broke camp. Nevertheless, unlike the later temple in Jerusalem it was portable. It went with the children of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness. It was moved from place to place when Israel took possession of the promised land. However, once constructed the temple of stone was locked in one place. The children of Israel through the words of Moses, the psalmists and the prophets were the ones who were to go from place to place in the world to make the Lord known as the only God and the world's only Saviour. The temple was the physical embodiment of the presence of God among Israel. Israel was and is the spiritual embodiment of God's presence in the world; in the Old Testament era with the words of Moses and the prophets; in the New Testament era with the gospel of Jesus as Saviour.

The true temple of God is not made of stone locked in one place, or tent packed from place to place. The true temple of God is Christ's body. First His physical body, which after His resurrection and ascension, is on high at the right hand of the Father. The true temple of God is secondly the body of believers, Israel of the Old Covenant, now the church of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. Through the body of believers Christ makes Himself present in the world and offers Himself as the Saviour of all people through the gospel of forgiveness in His blood. The holy church may gather in buildings made of stone or other building materials, but it is not made of stones, drywall or concrete. It is not locked in one place or bound together by mortar or any earthly binding. The temple of God, the body of Christ is made of living members, living stones, believers in Christ as their God and Saviour, bound together by the Holy Spirit who dwells within and among us. People whose stoney hearts have been broken by the law and tenderized through the gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus. In this temple, made holy by the precious blood of Jesus, believers offer God the spiritual sacrifices of praise, prayer and thanksgiving. Serving God as priests, by make Jesus known in the world as the Saviour of all

people, calling all people to believe, for He is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

The most important physical structure in the Old Testament was first the tabernacle and then the temple. In the tent and temple, the Lord dwelt among His people. The temple was the place where sacrifices were offered, not by all the people but only by the priests of the tribe of Levi. The sacrifices of the temple were of a wide variety. The most important were for the forgiveness of sin. The most important was for the forgiveness of the nation's sin on the Day of Atonement. The sacrifices of the temple found their fulfillment in the sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross in the temple of His body to atone for the sin of the world. Sacrifices of blood are no longer required. Christ sacrificed Himself once for all and forever. In fact, a sacrifice of blood would be an offense to God who fulfilled all sacrifice through the sacrifice of His Son for human sin. Beyond the offering of sacrifices the importance of the temple was as a place of prayer. A place to which prayer was directed by those far away. A place to gather for prayer for those who lived in Jerusalem and in its vicinity. When the temple was dedicated Solomon spoke of it as a place of prayer for all nations. Whether near the temple or far away, the faithful in Israel as a holy priesthood, offered the spiritual sacrifice of prayer, praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

The temple was a beacon by which God announced His presence in Israel to all nations. The temple was a beacon by which God made Himself known to the nations and called them to Himself as their only God and Saviour. The temple was a beacon that called, but being made of stone it could not go out to the nations. That was the work of the body of believers, the faithful in Israel who carried the word of the Lord in their hearts and on their lips. The stone temple is gone forever, but the temple of God remains in the body of believers and in the bodies of believers. This spiritual temple is constructed of a different material than a stone temple, living stones as Peter calls them. Living stones are the bodies and souls of those who know God as their only Saviour through faith in Jesus. Living stones are believers like you and I, in whom the Spirit of God makes His dwelling. In the first letter to the Corinthians Paul asks Rhetorically, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"* The holy Christian Church is now the beacon through which God announces His presence in the world and through which He offers forgiveness, salvation and life for all to receive through the gospel of forgiveness and faith in Jesus as the only God and the world's only Saviour.

The work of the Christian Church on earth is to offer spiritual sacrifices. The first spiritual sacrifice believers offer is ourselves in service to God in obedience to His will. In the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* We present our bodies as living sacrifices by using them not in service of self and sin, but in service to God and others, expressing God’s will in Christ Jesus in our interactions with others. We serve as a holy priesthood by sacrificing our sinfulness on the altar of Christ’s sacrifice, asking God to guide us by His Spirit so we may submit our wills to His will in Christ Jesus, thinking not the thoughts of the world, but the thoughts of God in Christ; seeking His will and finding His guidance in the sacred scriptures, which are a light to our feet and a lamp to our path, leading us to the fulness of the knowledge of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The spiritual sacrifice believers offer after offering ourselves in service to God in obedience to His will is the sacrifice of our prayers, praises and thanksgivings; making His salvation in Christ known in the world, in our communities, among our coworkers, neighbours, families and friends. In the words of St. Peter our spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God, is to proclaim ‘the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.’ Our greatest spiritual service as a holy priesthood is to share with others the good news of Jesus the Saviour, calling others out of the darkness of sin, despair and death to join us in the light of the knowledge of Jesus through faith in Him as their God and only Saviour. God who has blessed us with faith in Christ as our Saviour, bless us with His grace to share Jesus as Saviour with others. In Jesus’ Name. Amen