

5 Easter – Year A – May 25, 2011 - Homily
Acts 7:55-60; Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16; 1 Peter 2:2-10; John 14:1-14
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One of the biggest hits with teenagers over the last few years have been the *Twilight Saga* books and movies, featuring the story of a growing romance between Bella, a regular American teen, and Edward, a vampire from the adoptive Cullen clan. The Cullen vampires are depicted with a certain dignity and a kind of morality, refusing to attack human victims, their bloody diet consists of feeding on animals instead. Hence, despite his hunger for Bella, Edward maintains a steadfast resistance to the more usual vampiric behavior. The myth of the vampire is often perpetuated in the Goth subculture that you can find in any high school in America. There's a lot of hunger out there: emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Tonight's reading from 1 Peter focuses on a very different kind of hunger. Peter speaks of a Christian's hunger for spiritual milk that helps us to grow into maturity in Christ adding, "If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." It seems to be a kind of throwaway comment, but it's highly significant in describing the challenges of living a Christian life when surrounded by a hostile culture. Our society, in its own way is somewhat akin to a vampiric way of life, sucking the life out of us with all kinds of worldly idols and distractions. It's hard to maintain our integrity or even our faith in the face of so many competing influences that drain our time and resources, and draw us away from God and community.

According to Peter, the Christian confession is "The Lord is Christ" and "The Lord is good." In the Greek, the words for 'Christ' and 'good' actually sound the same, even though they are spelled differently. In the first century, when the Roman Emperor ruled the known world, the cultural creed or code was "The Lord is Caesar". To proclaim that the Lord is Christ was tantamount to treason, the same charge under which Jesus was sent to death on the cross. Peter is emphasizing the new and potentially dangerous identity of a Christian. He goes on to explain that as a part of the new community of faith, we become living stones, the new temple where spiritual sacrifices are offered to God alone, not to some Roman god with a small "g", or to Caesar himself.

In the same vein, the social structure for first century Christians is one of striving for honor amongst the people and avoiding shame at all costs. Honor for a Christian is a complete reversal of the popular cultural understanding, since it's not about status within society. Our new status in Christ is quite irrelevant to the world's way of being. Our new security in Christ is not visible or empirical, nor is it about striving for self-worth, or feeling good about ourselves. Rather it's turning away from self, finding meaning in God, and in worshipping and serving the Lord in a community of faith.

Biblical scholar, Eugene Boring, describes this portion of Peter's letter as "a plethora of metaphors that evoke a kaleidoscope of images portraying the readers' new identity". It actually encompasses the climax of Peter's developing theology of what it means to grow as a Christian and live into our Christian identity. The entire text is soaked in references to the Hebrew Scriptures including several psalms, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. For Peter there is a clear continuity in God's history of salvation and the lives of the people of God from the chosen nation of Israel to modern day Christians. For example, as Israel was chosen by God, but rejected by other nations, so Jesus is God's beloved and rejected by His own people, just as the witness and testimony of Christians even today is often rejected by the world.

God vindicated Christ through the resurrection, making our Lord the cornerstone of the new temple that is the Body of Christ, and also church. What God has already accomplished in Christ's resurrection becomes for us the hope and promise of eternal life in Him for all believers. The people of God, me, you, and the whole church in the world are called into being for God's purpose, for God's mission to reconcile the whole world to God's self. Our spiritual sacrifices are prayer, praise, studying the Word, repentance, and righteous living. This is our faith in action, our living testimony to God in Christ Jesus in and to our little piece of the world. Our identity in Christ reveals the way we orient our lives towards God in worship, and how we live in hope, holiness, and love towards God and others. Who we *are* is basic to what we *do* with our lives. Who we are defines where we seek our nourishment.

Unlike the mythical vampires, the undead who roam the earth with an eternal hunger for blood, we are always hungry for God. Just like the mythical vampires, our hunger can never be satisfied in this life. We yearn for God, because we have tasted God's goodness. Experientially, we see His goodness revealed in the life of Christ. We know the mystical experience of God's goodness and love present with us every day of our lives. In concrete terms, we taste God's goodness in the mystical experience of prayer. In and through our prayers, God transforms us in the depths of our souls, helping us to grow in relationship with Him, helping us to mature in our identity as Christ's own, the priesthood of all believers, God's chosen and beloved children. In turn, as we are strengthened in Him, through our worship and participation in Holy Communion, our faith is translated into deeds that reflect our identity.

We are what we eat, and what we most hunger for is the Body and Blood of Christ, a deeper relationship with Him, and to love and serve God in Christ Jesus. The Eucharistic feast is where we truly taste and see that the Lord is good. We are not human doings! We are essentially spiritual beings, hungry for spiritual food. As Alexander Schmemmann tells us, God has given us the world, not to satisfy our hunger with earthly things, but so that we will turn from the world to God in thanks, and seek to satisfy ourselves in Him. Peter tells us that together, we are living stones built into the household of God, a holy and royal priesthood, a chosen race, a holy nation, God's own people, and those who have received mercy. We are called out of darkness – out of twilight – into His marvelous light. Our work and our challenge, is to share our hunger for God in Christ Jesus, and to help alleviate the hunger of the world by sharing the Good News in word and deed. May the Lord strengthen us this night and always as we share a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and celebrate the Great Thanksgiving.

Amen.