

## First Letter of Peter . . . Catholic Scripture Study

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**Memorize:** *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct (1 Peter 1:14-15).*

### Week 2

## New Way of Life in God’s Household (1 Peter 1:13-2:10)

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The overall theme in this section is the new way of life in God’s household. As members of his household, as children of God, we have been **called, chosen, redeemed, sanctified** and **born anew** in Christ, and this requires us to live in a new way.

In this section, Peter will explain what this new way of life entails. The section is divided into three parts:

1. The call to holiness (1:13 – 21);
2. The call to love one another (1:22-25); and
3. The call to be God’s priestly people in the New Temple (2:1-10).

The background to all this is the first Passover when God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. As we shall see, Peter uses the story of the Exodus as the lens through which he will present the work of Christ and the new identity of the Christian people.

# The Call to Holiness (1 Peter 1:13-21)

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## I. INTRODUCTION (1 PETER 1: 13-16)

Israel was chosen by God from all the peoples of the earth to implement his plan of salvation.

He set the people of Israel free from the slavery of Egypt, established a covenant with them and gave them commandments about how to live. These commandments in their highest form tell them to be holy as God is holy (cf. Lev 19:2).

However, those events in the life of Israel were only an imperfect foreshadowing of what would happen when Jesus Christ came.

Christians constitute the new chosen people; by Baptism they have been set free from sin and have been called to live in a fully holy way, with God himself as their model.

Having drawn their attention to the sublime nature of the Christian calling, Saint Peter exhorts the faithful to live a holy life in keeping with their exalted calling.

He provides two reasons why they should strive for holiness, namely:

- The holiness of God (vs. 13-16), and
- The price paid for their salvation - the blood of Christ (vs. 17-21).

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:13-16

***[13] Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus***

**Christ.**

**[14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,**

**[15] but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;**

**[16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."**

### **A. Christians Are Called To Be Holy**

By using the word **therefore**, Peter signals that he is turning his attention to our response to what God has done for us. Because of our new birth in Christ, we are to **gird up our minds** and **live soberly**.

To **gird up our minds** is a metaphor for us to mentally prepare for action. In Biblical times, to “gird up” meant to tuck a long garment into a belt so that one could run or move more quickly, for example, prior to setting out on a journey or pilgrimage.

To **be sober** or to live soberly is to be spiritually awake, alert, and self controlled.

In the account of the Exodus we are told that God commanded that when the Israelites celebrated the Passover they should do so with: **“your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover”** (Ex 12:11). They were told to do this because they were about to start on the journey to the Promised Land.

Peter uses this image because Baptism, the new Exodus, marks the start of the Christian pilgrimage to heaven, our Promised Land and lasting home.

As we set out on this pilgrimage we need to conduct ourselves soberly - we need to be spiritually awake, alert, and self controlled if we are to walk with joy along the route which will take us to the new Promised Land, heaven.

**The revelation of Jesus Christ** refers above all, to his Second Coming at the end of time. The revelation of Jesus began with his Incarnation and will reach its climax at the end of this world when he returns in glory.

### B. Obedient Children (1 Pet 1:14)

By calling Christians **obedient children**, Peter introduces the Father-child image as a description of our relationship with God.

- Christians are to put this obedience into action as children of the heavenly father.

The meaning of this obedience is illustrated by means of a contrast.

On the one hand, they are no longer to **act in compliance with the desires of their former ignorance**, that is, their former way of life before Baptism.

On the other hand, they are to **be holy in every aspect of their conduct**. The term “conduct” is a key word for Peter. It implies not merely behavior but also the values, norms, and commitments that constitute an entire “way of life.”

### C. You Shall Be Holy, for I am Holy

Peter ties the call to holiness here to the covenant God made with the people of Israel. This call to holiness is a recurring mandate from Leviticus (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). See Leviticus chapters 17-26 (the Holiness Code which covers the sanctity of sex and other various rules).

- One of the reasons we should strive to be holy is because God is holy.

God often demanded holiness from Israel; that is, he bid the people to draw close to him and to shun the vile practices of the Gentiles.

Peter’s readers are likewise surrounded by pagans, yet they are urged to serve God in holiness of life.

- God is to be their model.

## II. RANSOMED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST (1 PET 1:17-21)

From all eternity, it was God’s plan to save his beloved sons and daughters through the blood of Christ.

This plan was made manifest at “the end of the times,” when our Lord offered himself as an expiation (atonement) for the sins of men, and then rose from the dead and was glorified.

This is the second reason we should strive to be holy, Peter says, because of the price paid for our salvation - the blood of Christ.

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:17-21

***[17] And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.***

***[18] You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,***

***[19] but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.***

***[20] He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.***

***[21] Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.***

## A. Reverential Fear towards God

Peter warns us that the God we rightly address **as Father (Abba)** in prayer is the same one who also **judges impartially according to each one’s works**.

God judges us **impartially**, that is, with absolute fairness. Because God is perfectly just, he cannot be bribed to show favoritism towards some and not others.

Because they will be judged **according to their deeds** they must conduct themselves with reverential fear towards God during the time of their exile (their time on earth).

- This is not the servile fear of a slave but the filial reverence that a child has for his or her father.

## B. Ransomed in Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19)

Note: The word “ransom” or “redemption” is a term used in the marketplace, where goods or slaves were “bought back” for a monetary price.

The Old Testament often depicts God’s deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt in terms of ransom or redemption (see Ex 6:6):

*“I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment (Ex 6:6).*

Peter addresses two related questions in verses 18 and 19:

- What were they ransomed **from**, and
- What were they ransomed **by**?

They were ransomed **from** the futile way of life handed down by their pagan ancestors - a way of life that has no purpose, even worthless from the point of view of the Gospel.

- Christians are called to renounce their former way of life and live according to their new birth in Christ.

What were they ransomed by? What was the price of redemption?

It was not by human means, with **perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**

### C. A Lamb without Blemish

This text depicts Jesus as a Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). Exodus stipulates that lambs chosen for Passover must be free from all physical defects (Ex 12:5).

- The point here is that Jesus is free from every blemish of sin.

## Love One Another (1Pet 1:22-25)

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As part of this new way of life in God’s household we are called to love our brothers and sisters.

- Brotherly love is one of the main signs of holiness.

Jesus said that this love would be the distinguishing mark of Christians, and the apostles often repeat this in their teaching.

**Read:** 1 Peter 1:22-25

***[22]Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart.***

**[23] You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, [25] but the word of the Lord abides forever." That word is the good news which was preached to you.**

### **A. Purified Your Souls**

When Peter says, **you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth**, he is probably referring to the process of conversion completed in the sacrament of baptism.

When Christians commit themselves to Christ through faith, repentance, and baptism, they are purifying themselves by their obedience to the truth of the Gospel.

- Here, they have purified themselves for sincere mutual love.

### **B. Born Anew**

The phrase **you have been born anew** recalls verse 3 above. This new birth is **not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and abiding word of God.**

The contrast here is between natural human generation on the one hand and spiritual generation on the other.

- The imperishable seed of grace and new life come through the Gospel.
- It begets children of God destined to live forever.

### C. The Living and Abiding Word of God

This “seed” that has produced our new birth in Christ is not perishable, as human seed is.

- Rather, the seed that is the word of God is **living** – it possesses life and gives life.
- This living word is also **abiding** – it will never lose its power or fade.

In John’s Gospel, Peter says to Jesus, “you have the words of eternal life.” It is the same word, **living and abiding** that gives us a new birth in Christ.

### D. Reflection and Application (1:22-25)

## A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation (2:1-10)

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**Memorize:** *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

### I. OVERVIEW

This is the climax of the first major part of the letter.

In the following section of the letter Peter announces more fully *who we are* in Christ. This section is divided into three parts, each having its own dominant theme:

1. Verses 1-3: Growth (infants, spiritual milk, growing up to salvation).
2. Verses 4-8: Building a temple or house; (Christ as the chosen stone, Christians as living stones built into God’s house).
3. Verses 9-10: God’s chosen people, priesthood, and nation.

**Read:** 1 Peter 2:1-3

## I. GROWTH – ATTAINING TO SALVATION

***[1] So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander.***

***[2] Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation;***

***[3] for you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.***

### A. Obstacles to Truth and Brotherly Love

Peter begins by naming five things that newly baptized converts, and, in fact, all Christians need to remove from their lives: ***Malice, deceit, insincerity, envy and slander.***

All are related to practical life among the people of God and largely concern matters of speech.

The threefold repetition of ***all*** underlines how zealous we must be in ridding ourselves of these traits. There is no room for compromise.

- The five traits stand as opposites to the qualities of ***truth*** and ***brotherly love*** that Peter has just commended above in 1:22.

“Deceit” and “insincerity” are opposed to truth. “Malice,” “envy,” and “slander” are opposed to brotherly love.

If obedience to the truth and sincere brotherly love are going to mark our lives in the household of God, all of these sinful patterns of conduct must be put away.

### B. Newborn Infants - Growing Spiritually

Peter now moves from the topic of new birth (1:23-25) to that of spiritual growth. New converts are likened to **newborn infants** who **long for pure spiritual milk** needed for growth in faith.

What does Peter mean by “pure spiritual milk?”

The milk here is essentially the spiritual nourishment from the Word of God and the sacraments that is needed for growth. But “milk” also means more broadly all the grace of Christ available to us for our salvation.

Salvation refers especially to the endpoint of this growth that will culminate in eternal life when Christ returns.

## II. BUILDING A TEMPLE (1 PETER 2:4-8)

### A. Overview

The Church is pictured as a spiritual temple made of stones and under construction. Believers are like living stones built up securely on Christ, who is the cornerstone of the entire structure.

Since Temples are not only dwelling places for God but also houses of worship and sacrifice, Peter can also describe Christians as a priestly people who offer **spiritual sacrifices** which are **acceptable to God through Christ**.

In 2:6-8 three Old Testament texts make reference to a stone which Peter interprets as an image of the Messiah. Similar use of these

passages is made by Jesus (Luke 20:17-18), Paul (Romans 9:33), and Peter (Acts 4:10-11).

**Read:** 1 Peter 2:4-8

***[4] Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious;***

***[5] and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

***[6] For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in him will not be put to shame."***

***[7] To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner,"***

***[8] and "A stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall";***

***for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.***

### **B. The Living Stone (1Peter 2:4)**

Peter calls us to ***come to him***, to Jesus himself, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God.

Jesus is the “stone” that the Father has given to serve as the foundation of God’s own house. Though rejected by the Jewish leaders of his day, he is raised up and put in place as the foundation of the Church.

He is a “living” stone because, though rejected and cut off in death, he had been raised from the dead and now lives.

The key issue is faith. For those **who have faith**, the stone established by the Father is “precious,” but to those **without faith**, this stone becomes a cause of stumbling and falling.

What does it mean to stumble in this context? **They stumble because they disobey the word**, that is, they do not believe and obey the Gospel.

### C. Were They Destined to Stumble?

What does Peter mean when he says that the Jews were destined to stumble over the stone in unbelief? Does this mean that they had no choice?

- Were the Jews predestined by God to disbelieve and disobey the gospel of Christ, and thus risk damnation?

No! God wants all men to be saved. Here, Peter is showing that the Scriptures predicted ahead of time that Jesus, the stone established by the Father, would be a cause of division and that some would not believe and obey his word.

- The Biblical prediction does not rob any one of free will.

Instead, it gives confidence to believers that the ongoing rejection of Jesus by some was foreknown and foretold by God and so falls within his plan and purpose for the salvation of the world.

### D. Chosen Race; Royal Priesthood, Holy Nation (1 Pet 2:9-10)

**[9]But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**

**[10] Once you were no people but now you are God's people;**

**once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.**

Peter starts this section with “**But you**” which refers to believers (2:9). This verse contrasts believers with those who reject the Messiah (2:8).

Believers now form the true Israel, the true people of God. The titles and privileges in the Old Testament (**chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation**), once applied to Israel exclusively, now find their full meaning in those who believe in Christ.

These titles are now extended to the whole messianic people.

- All believers in Christ have come to share in the blessings of a covenant relationship with God (Rom 11:17-24; 15:27).
- One responsibility of this relationship is a missionary vocation to announce God’s goodness and salvation to the world.

### **E. The Priesthood of All Believers**

Peter calls us a royal priesthood? It is here that we learn of the “priesthood of all believers”, the doctrine that through Baptism every member of the Church shares in the priesthood of Christ (CCC 1268, 1546).

A priest is one ordained to serve in God’s temple. He offers sacrifices and brings the prayers and needs of the people before the Lord. He is a mediator between God and man.

What then does Peter mean by calling the Church “a holy priesthood” called **to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?** (2:4).

Here, Peter is not referring specifically to the ordained priesthood. Rather, it is the entire Christian people by virtue of their Baptism

into Christ who have entered into the inheritance given to the people of Israel to be “a royal priesthood” (v. 9; Ex. 19:6).

We are all called to stand before the Lord as priests, offering our lives as **living** sacrifices. “Spiritual” does not mean immaterial or unreal. Rather, “spiritual” refers to the divine life and activity of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

- We are now in the house where God’s Spirit dwells and we offer our lives as **living** sacrifices in the power of the Spirit.

The Priesthood of all Believers or The Common Priesthood of the Faithful *differs in kind* and not merely *degree* from the grace of the ministerial (ordained) priesthood possessed by bishops and priests.

It enables every Christian to minister to the spiritual needs of others and to offer sacrifices of love and praise to God in his daily life.

- Moreover, our royal priesthood obliges us to evangelize.
- We are to announce the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

As the people of God, we are called to announce God’s great deeds by giving testimony to what he has done for us. The contrast between light and darkness depicts the conversion that ought to accompany baptism: we come out of the darkness of our former way of life into the light of Christ.

#### **F. The People of God**

Peter concludes with a comment on our identity as the “people of God:” ***Once you were “no people” but now you are God’s people; once you “had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.”***

The above words from the prophet Hosea (2:23), were originally addressed to the unfaithful tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel (c. 750 BC), who were soon to be conquered and sent into exile, never to return.

Hosea is speaking about the future restoration of Israel, specifically the northern tribes (the “lost tribes”), who had rejected the Lord’s covenant and have thereby reduced themselves to the status of the nations (“no people”).

Peter now applies these words of Hosea mainly to the Gentiles who had never been “God’s people” as Israel was. Before conversion to Christ they were “no people.” Through faith and Baptism they are now **God’s people** and **have received mercy**.

### III. REFLECTION AND APPLICATION (1 PETER 2: 1-10)

If it is true that each of us has been called to be a member of a “royal priesthood” and a “holy nation,” then each of us is also called to participate in the *mission* of this priesthood and nation to the whole world.

We are God’s own possession not simply for our own sakes. We are called to **“announce the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.”**

This is why the church today has called for a New Evangelization.

Each of us needs to **know** and **experience** the freshness of the Gospel and to experience wonder at being called into God’s marvelous light.

## Preparation for Week 3 (1 Peter 2:11-3-12)

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1. Read: First Peter, Chapters 2 and 3.
  2. Review all Study Questions on Chapter 2, pg 39 in ICSD
  3. Look up Scripture references.
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