

Growing Up
I Peter 2: 1-10
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I remember as a little boy growing up being asked numerous times by friends of the family, people visiting us, and most of all by church members,

“Donnie, what are you going to be when you grow up? “

I hated that question. I think most kids do.

Often it was followed up with: Are you going to be a minister like you father?”

I loved and admired my Dad, and I remember him, not just on Father’s Day, but every day, his influence and presence is a constant in my life.

But as a child growing up – I was sure that I didn’t want to be a minister.

I wanted to be a baseball player, but I didn’t often say that, most often I shrugged my shoulders, shook my head and simply said, “I don’t know.”

One family friend tells the story that when he asked me when I was about 6 or 7 years old, if I was going to be a minister like my father, I emphatically said, “no!” He asked “why not?” and I without hesitation said: “too many meetings!”

What in the world, what in heaven’s name are you going to be when you grow up?

It is not just another question. It is “the question.”

No matter what we have done with our life up until this point or what we are doing now, it is still our question: I like to think that it is still a wide open question.

For God’s sake, “What are we going to **be** when we grow up?”

Most of us are not children anymore; surely we have our growing up behind us.

We have traveled many miles. We have taken on serious responsibilities, made hard decisions, weathered many a crisis.

Surely we think that the question is: “what are we doing now and how well are we doing it?”

If we are doctors, lawyers, business men or women, teachers, computer analysts, artists, ecologists, ministers you name it, or even retired; we often like to think that we have already made our mark on the world.

But we still need to ask ourselves, “What is God calling us to be?”

To answer that question we have to take time to be quiet, to be still, to listen – listen back farther than our childhood days, back to the voice of an old man dictating a letter.

Listen to Peter:

“Rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

“You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. “

What are we going to *be* when we grow up?

Not what are we going to do, not what profession or career are we going to follow or keep on following, or what are we doing to do in retirement, but

What are we going to *be* – inside ourselves and among ourselves?

That is the question that the old saint answers in his letter from Rome. Peter calls us to be “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation!”

To be *Holy* – that is what we are going to be if God gets his way with us.

Isn't that pretty unreasonable? Isn't that humanly impossible? After all holiness is next to Godliness and only God can make holiness possible and aren't we pretty unlikely candidates?

But Peter suggests that being holy is what “growing up,” in the full sense, **means**.

No matter how old we are or how much we have achieved or dream of achieving, we are not truly grown up until this extraordinary thing happens. Holiness is what is to happen.

“Out of darkness we are called into his marvelous light,”

Who knew more about darkness than Peter? The same Peter who had seen and looked into the very face of Light itself.

We are called to have faces like that – to be filled with light so that we can be bearers of the light. I have seen faces full of light in my life time and my guess is your have also.

Once a Rabbi was spending the night at a shoemaker's home and that night, the Rabbi saw the man still working by the light of a flickering, almost extinguished candle.

The Rabbi went over to the man: "Look how late it is; your candle is about to go out. Why are you still working?"

The shoemaker, undeterred by the rabbi's words, replied, "As long as the candle is burning, it is still possible to mend."

For weeks afterwards, the Rabbi was heard repeating the shoemaker's words: "As long as the candle is burning, it is still possible to mend."

As long as there is life — as long as the candle is burning — we can mend. We can reconcile with those from whom we've become estranged, help make peace within our families, give charity, aid a friend in financial straits to establish himself or herself in business, and work on learning to express our anger fairly.

— Joseph Telushkin in *The Book of Jewish Values*

What are **we** going to be as **we** are in this process of growing up – as long as our candles are burning?

We worry about whether we going to be rich or poor, a success or a failure, secure or insecure? Liked or disliked? Most of us experience all of the above, but in the long run, those things don't really matter. What matters, ----- are Peter's words to us:

“You shall be unto me a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”

You and I are to be the eyes and ears; you and I are to be the heart; it is to us that Peter's letter is addressed:

“So put away all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.”

We have always known what is wrong with us. The malice in us, the hatred and spite, even when we are at our most civilized; our insincerity, the masks we hide behind; the way we envy other people's luck and good fortune; and the slander, the gossip, the way we insult and often misrepresent each other, particularly those we love; all our childish nonsense and ugliness.

“Put it away,” “Get rid of it!” Peter says; “Grow up to salvation;” For Christ's sake grow up.

Grow up!

I am tired of hearing that, for us older people, isn't it a little too late? For young people, isn't it a little too early?

You see, I don't think so. It is never too late, never too early to grow up, to be **holy**.

“Grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

We have already tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Isn't that a haunting thought?

I believe we can see it in each others eyes sometimes. Just the way we can see something more than an animal in our dog or our cat's eyes.

I can see something more than human in human eyes, even yours and mine. I think we belong to holiness even when we cannot believe it exists anywhere let alone in ourselves.

Children that we are, we know in our hearts, not only that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but that it is also more fun – the kind of holy fun that wells up like tears in the eyes of saints, the kind of blessed fun in which we lose ourselves and at the same time begin to find ourselves, and when that happens we grow up into the persons we were created to become.

Once when Henry James was saying good-bye to his young nephew Billy, his brother William's son, he said something that the boy never forgot.

What he said was: Billy,

“There are three things that are important in human life;

1. The first is to be kind.
2. The second is to be kind and
3. The third is to be kind.”

Be kind!

Kindness is not by a long shot the same thing as holiness, kindness is one of the doors that holiness enters the world through – It can be a gentle kindness but also sometimes it can be an intense kindness.

Be kind enough to yourselves not just to play it safe with your life for your own sake, but spend at least part of your life like a drunken sailor – for God's sake.

Be kind enough to others to listen, listen beneath all the words they speak, for there you will often find an unspoken “hunger for holiness.”

As we listen for that “hunger for holiness,” as we hear it, and cherish it, maybe, just maybe, we can help bring it to birth both in that other person and in our self as well.

Be kind to this nation of ours by remembering that New Haven, New Hope, Providence, and Concord, are not just the names of some of our oldest towns but of

our holiness dreams, which most of the time are not threatened by the madness of an outside enemy as much as they are threatened by the madness within.

Peter wrote in his letter

“You have tasted the kindness of the Lord,”

Ultimately that of course is the kindness, the holiness, and the sainthood that we are all called to; so that, by God’s grace, we may “grow up to salvation.”

“Be still, and know that I am God.
I am exalted among the nations
I am exalted in the earth!”

The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our refuge. **(Psalm 46: 10 – 11)**

“Be still, and know that I am God”

Listen and be attentive in this moment, notice

- The way the light falls through the stained glass windows;
- The sound our silence makes when we come together like this;
- The sense we have of each other’s presence; and
- The feeling in the air that one way or another we are all here both to give each other our love, and to give God our love.

This kind of moment itself is a door that holiness enters through. May it enter you; may it enter me; to the world’s salvation. **Amen!**