

Deuteronomy 32:1–9
Corpus Christi conference
Holy Trinity Cathedral
Liepaja [Libau], Latvia
July 26, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Moses was many things: a husband and father, a leader of God’s people, miracle worker, prophet, judge, historian, liturgiologist, Lawgiver, intercessor, and perhaps least appreciated, a poet and songwriter. Of course, you know King David wrote most of the Psalms. But did you know Moses has a Psalm as well? Check out Psalm 90: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” Moses wrote that! And if you’ve ever been to an Easter Vigil service, you’ve probably heard some rendition of *Cantemnus Domino*, the song of Moses and Israel after crossing the Red Sea (LSB 925). This evening, we consider Moses’s final song, a “Rock Song,” *Audite, coeli*, “Hear, O heavens,” a song given by God and recited before all the people of Israel. On that same day Moses ascended Mt. Nebo to die.

This last song of Moses then addresses God as “the Rock,” a title that comes up throughout the rest of the song. A rock, of course, is a great foundation for a building, as opposed to sand. You know this already from the conference theme and from Jesus’s conclusion to His sermon on the mount (Matt 7:24–27). The wise man built his house upon the rock. A rock is a sure foundation, immovable, sturdy against the elements. The fools, however, build on sand. And the larger they build the harder they fall. The foundation is key. The cross is the key.

But besides a foundation, a rock can also serve as a fortress. As King David sings in Psalm 18: “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.” The rock is a place of protection. Or as Jesus teaches: “When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not be, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (Mark 13:14). Run for the hills! There you can hide out in the rocks. That’s what God is for His people, an immovable mountain fortress, built into the rock.

If you keep reading the rest of Moses’s song in Deuteronomy 32, you’ll see other images related to the rock. You’ll start to think of rocks, and of God, in ways you might not have thought of before! The rock is more than a foundation or a fortress. Moses also says that the Lord suckled Jacob with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock (v. 13). So the rock is also a place of sustenance and renewal, like the rock that quenched the Israelites’ thirst (Ex 17:6).

And yet Israel “scoffed at the Rock of his salvation” (v. 15). He wanted another rock, a prettier rock, a rock that appears more powerful! Moses says: “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (v. 18). This is a living stone we’re talking about! A rock who can give birth! In English class this is called a “mixed metaphor,” and you’re not supposed to use it. Forget that! Our Lord describes Himself as the Rock who bears children, and so He is. This is no empty word for you, but your very life.

The people turned to other rocks. They turned to false gods, to demons, who cannot save. So it has gone down through the ages. We are tempted to fear, love, and trust in other rocks than *the* Rock. The true Rock, the LORD, has this to say: “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge? (v. 37) . . . Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!” The other gods are no gods. Anywhere else you turn, you will find yourself not only continually disappointed; you will find yourself in constant danger. There is no God beside the LORD. He is

the one who kills and the one who makes alive. He wounds and heals. He turns stony hearts into hearts of flesh. The LORD will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants (v.36). He destroys those other rocks, those false gods, those idols and demons, and returns His people to the Rock of their salvation.

Moses sings: “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is He.” Jesus is the Rock. His work is perfect. All His ways are justice. He is a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright. “He committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Pet 2:22). Jesus is the Rock of your salvation, a sure foundation upon which you can build. Jesus is honey from the rock, “sweetness to the soul and health to the body” (Prov 16:24). He is the Messiah, anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the rock out of which living waters flow, watering the tree of life, the cross, for the healing of the nations. That’s why St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that our fathers “drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Jesus is the Rock of which Moses sings.

And you, dear Christian, were born of that Rock in Holy Baptism. In German, the baptismal font is called a *Taufstein*: a baptism rock. What a beautiful image! In the baptismal font you were born of water from the Rock. Jesus is a living stone, rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, and you yourselves are like living stones, being built up as a spiritual house on the foundation of Christ, the Cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4–8). He is the rock that bore you, the God who gave you birth—the new birth—of water and the Holy Spirit. He has made you alive and healed you and there is none that can snatch you out of His hand.

Moses tells us to “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you.” Let the fathers in the faith

teach you this song, O Israel of God! Learn those sweet lyrics of Moses, and pass them on to your children and the generations yet unborn. The LORD is your Rock, the Rock who bore you, the Rock who nourishes you. He is your Rock and your fortress, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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