

## Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

“Jesus is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

This morning in our first reading from the Book of Acts, we hear these powerful words coming forth from the mouth of St. Peter. Now talking about *stones* reminds me of the Eagle Scout project I did when I was younger. (And speaking of Eagle Scouts, one young man from Troop 127 here at the parish is in the final stages of completing this rank). But getting back to my own project, someone suggested for my project that I should assemble and position recycled plastic benches in a local parkway near my hometown. Having no better ideas, I went with it.

And so, after gathering all the help I needed, and having found all the necessary tools, and with bags of cement all ready, we were set to begin – or so I thought. Just before we started digging holes for those first posts, someone asked, “So where are the stones to mix with the cement?” FYI: You really can’t have concrete without stones or aggregate. And you can’t make benches stand upright without concrete. Fortunately, our scout master worked at a local stone quarry, and he was able to run out and come back with the last necessary ingredient: the crushed stone. It was pretty uneventful from there out. And I am happy to report that those benches are still standing, some 20+ years later, sagging just a bit, albeit with “Johnny loves Suzy” carved in a few of them.

Stone is important for benches, I now know. But when it comes to buildings, cornerstones are even more important! For those of you out there, who are not architects or in construction, the cornerstone was historically the first stone set in a building's foundation. It was very important since all the other stones would be set in reference to this one stone – which would determine the position of the entire structure. For example, the corner stone of the original “Mass house” (no longer standing) where the Catholics of this area first celebrated Mass is incorporated into a dry fountain to the right of the main entrance to the church. Clearly visible are the initials C.W. – for Caspar Weis, the owner of that house – and the date 1761, when the house was built.

So again, when we hear St. Peter utter those words, “Jesus is the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone”, we can see he's making a pretty powerful statement. First off, he's revealing the truth that Jesus Christ is that all-important guiding stone, who gives direction and shape to the Church He founded. But even more than this, St. Peter is also pointing out the error of those Jewish leaders, who denied this truth, and so were misleading the people who looked to them for solid spiritual guidance.

OK, that's a little bit on the historical lineage behind cornerstones. However, over time, these foundation stones, as they're also called, started to become more ceremonious and decorative in purpose. In fact, by the time we get to the modern era, they simply became fancy stones set in a prominent location on the outside of the building to show the initial date of construction, like the stone over the main entrance to our current church that states “Heart of Mary Pray for us – 1843”.

And so, we have one concept – the cornerstone – with two different purposes: the first, to provide visible and structural guidance for the whole of the building; and the second, to provide ornamentation and historical data.

My friends, I think there is a real question hidden in this for our own consideration. When it comes to Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of our Catholic faith, which type of cornerstone is He for us? Is He the solid rock, whom we, as living stones, align our lives to – conforming our daily choices and decisions based on Him and His Church? Or is He the beautiful decoration that we admire from afar – knowing facts about His life, but which have little consequence in shaping our own lives?

The Scriptures tell us today, “There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.” Jesus is our Good Shepherd who lays down His life for us, His sheep. He is the Son, who has enabled us to be called sons and daughters of God the Father. He is the Savior of the world and the source and origin of our faith. And so, as we continue our celebration of the Mass in this Easter season, we ask our Lord Jesus to conform us to His Father’s will. We ask Him for the grace to let go of our self-will that builds the lives *we* want to have. And instead, ask Him to build us up into that which *He* would have us be. God bless you.