



“ROCKS AND STONES”

Homily for the first public celebration of the Holy Eucharist at
Our Lady of Peace and Hope Liberal Catholic Mission

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I've been thinking about rocks and stones.

You know, rocks and stones are a frequent Biblical image, representing a number of important concepts, and some very good moral lessons.

Here are just a few in passing, but I want to comment on one of them in particular.

- * First, there's the founding of the Catholic Church: "I tell you, you are Peter, which means 'The Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)
- * And an important lesson about the stability we can find in following Christ: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." (Matthew 7:24)
- * The famous love and compassion of Christ: "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?" (Matthew 7:9)
- * Forgiveness (we're all less than perfect, by the way, but not necessarily for the reasons you've been told in other churches): "When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.'" (John 8:7)
- * Christ's resurrection itself: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." (John 20:1)
- * And spiritual nourishment: "...all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:4)

But there's one more I'd like to talk about today. I think it's the most important reference to a rock or a stone for me, and for many of you who sit here today, celebrating the founding of a new, loving, welcoming, inclusive and reconciling Catholic church in Tucson:

"Jesus said to them, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'" (Matthew 21:42)

Jesus built the Christian church on stones the builders rejected. On people seen by the society of his day as outcasts. Now, Christ's contemporaries – the religious leaders of His day - were wrong to cast them out – we know that now, from the perspective of history and advances in human growth and enlightenment. But here are some of the kinds of people cast aside in the time of Christ – people who were superstitiously thought to be possessed by demons; people who had socially-stigmatized illnesses, like leprosy, which we now see not as a punishment from God, but simply a medically-curable infection; many different women,



especially outspoken women, who were treated as property rather than as human beings. In fact, a prominent thread of Church tradition holds – wrongly, according to modern scholarship – that Mary Magdalen was a prostitute, when it is much more likely she was a patron and financial supporter of Christ’s ministry, and one of His original and most-beloved Disciples. Christ founded His Church with, by and for these people, all while reserving His harshest words not for those cast out by society, but for the very religious leaders, and their followers, who stigmatized them.

How many of you have been rejected, treated like second-class citizens, or even as outcasts by society at large, or by prominent religious leaders? Rejected because of gender or gender identity? Sexual orientation? Marital status, such as living together outside of marriage, or because of divorce and remarriage? Rejected for your theological views, or your beliefs about issues such as gay marriage, family-planning, or stem-cell research, or your views about end-of-life issues? Rejected because of your views of papal infallibility, clergy celibacy, or ordination of women? Rejected for wanting to have a voice in how the Church is operated and administered?

How many of you have been refused a Sacrament, like Baptism, because a baby’s parents weren’t ‘properly’ married in the eyes of another Church? I can tell you story after story about my eleven years in ministry, baptizing babies who had been turned away from other Catholic churches, because the parents were too poor, not married, not married through the church, hadn’t received all of their sacraments, and on and on and on. How many of you have heard of children rejected for First Holy Communion classes, because of a learning disability that impaired their ability to memorize prayers?

How many of you know of people seeking marriage, turned away from the Church – rejected - because one person wasn’t Catholic, or wouldn’t sign a document stating they’d raise their children as Catholics?

How about those seeking the Blessing of a same-sex union? Those rejected by Churches who preach love, but don’t recognize it when it stands before them?

Or rejected for Ordination, or even admission to a seminary, because of gender or sexual orientation or being married? Rejected for speaking the truth? For having an open mind? How many of you have been cast out for following this advice from St. Augustine, one of the twelve Doctors of the Church, and Tucson’s patron saint? “When your conscience and the Church conflict, follow your conscience.”

Rejected from joining Catholic spouses, partners or family members at the Altar Rail, because you’re not a Catholic, and aren’t good enough to share in what the Church teaches us is the most important gift we can receive – the Body and Blood of Christ? Did I miss anyone? Is there a single person in this room today who hasn’t struggled with one or more of these issues? Who hasn’t been condemned by other Christians – rejected – because you didn’t fit neatly into someone else’s mold?

Well, have I got good news for you!

“Jesus said, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.’” (Matthew 21:42)

And you – and you, and you, and you – can be the cornerstone of THIS church...of Our Lady of Peace and Hope Liberal Catholic Mission.

All of you who have been rejected by other churches, and everyone else too, will be the cornerstone here.

Now, I’m thinking about another “stone” story. You won’t find this one in the Bible. But it’s a story I’d like to tell you today.



A homeless and hungry man knocked on the door of a house one day. The door was answered by a woman and her partner...people of great love and Christian compassion. They asked how they could help this disheveled man.

“Oh, it is I who have come to help you,” said the man. “But I need some help to be able to teach this lesson. Do you know how to make soup from a stone?”

Now, the couple was intrigued. “No,” they said. “Is that really possible?”

“Oh, yes,” said the man. “In fact, I have a perfect stone right here in my hand,” and he opened it to show a small, smooth round rock in his palm. “But I need a pot of boiling water, and have no means to make fire.”

With a touch of hesitation, but filled with curiosity, the couple invited the man into their kitchen. Soon, a large pot of water was boiling on the stove.

“Now,” said the man. “Let me drop in the stone, and soon we’ll have soup.”

All three watched the stone rattle and bounce in the bottom of the stockpot, counseled in patience by the mysterious stranger.

The silence was soon broken. “Do you happen to have an onion you could spare?” asked the homeless man. “I find a little onion makes the stone soup taste even better.”

The couple selected a nice big onion from a basket in the kitchen, and soon it was sliced and dropped into the boiling water.

“How about a bit of salt and pepper?” asked the man. And a bit later, “You know, some people like carrots in their stone soup.” All were happily added, as eventually were a number of other ingredients – celery, noodles, tomatoes, some jalapeno peppers, and various other delicious additions.

Before you know it, Stone Soup was served! All agreed it was quite tasty, and the couple thanked the man for teaching them this marvelous lesson, before sending him on his way with the leftovers.

Here (motioning around the room) we have a small and simple space. Here (turning to the altar) we have our “stone.” Here (gesturing toward the people) we have some rocks. Now, compared to some of the large churches and cathedrals in town, we don’t have much, do we?

But with this “stone” we can make wonderful soup – we can make a strong, and vibrant, and healthy, and spiritually nourishing faith community! Because each of you has gifts you can add to the soup. I’m not talking about carrots or onions or celery, of course.

I’m talking about the gift of song. Or the gift to play songs on our CD player. Or artistic talent. Organizational skills. Fundraising ability. Strong heads, and hearts, and hands. Knowledge of accounting or the law. Business acumen. Teaching skills. A love of ritual and ceremony, and a desire to participate in it as an altar server, or member of our altar guild. Leadership skills, start-up skills. Experience serving on non-profit boards, or lacking that experience, the desire to learn! Or simply the ability to stop by the grocery store and pick up some cookies and juice on your way to Mass. Everyone can contribute something to our feast.



That's what it's going to take to make our soup. That's what it will take to turn these stones – these rocks - into a Catholic faith community where everyone is welcome, where everyone is included and loved – not for who they can or might be someday, but for who they ARE. Just as they are.

Christ again, from 1 Peter 2:5 - "...like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

We are the stones the builders have rejected. So we are the corner stones. We are also the stones that make nourishing soup. Like Peter, we are the rocks. Upon these rocks will we found our Church. Upon these rocks we have here today founded a new Catholic community – Our Lady of Peace and Hope.

Amen