

5th Sunday in Easter 1 Peter 2:4-6

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There are so many great areas for homilies in today's scripture readings. Our first reading in Acts is the essence of the beginning of the order of Deacon, established to care for the marginalized and to serve as a source of social justice. The Gospel is rich with imagery of Jesus ready to depart this earth to prepare a place for us. It has many "I am" statements in it that we could explore as well, since that is what God named himself and gave to Moses. But I would like to focus on the 2nd reading from 1 Peter and his many references to *Stone* or *Rock*.

First, he references Isaiah, *behold I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. A stone will make people stumble and fall.*

So, what is it with the use of the symbol of STONE that makes it so meaningful? For eons, humans have connected the divine or references to the godly in stone. Stonehenge, built about 3,000 BC, is considered an ancient burial site where the spirits of the dead are united with the divine world in the stones. Stones have been considered sacred for thousands of years! In nearly every culture, the properties of stones are timeless, steadfast, having almost eternal longevity, as was their culture's concept of "god." Stones were seen as "universal" as some would rise from the ground and others would fall from the cosmos in the form of meteors.

Because of the geographic location, the people living in the time of Jesus had an abundance of African influences in their culture as well as other notions brought to them by the Roman Empire. In Africa, stones are believed to carry the spirits of the dead. Similarly, in the ancient north what is now Germany, the people believed that the spirits of their dead remained in the tombstones. Stone entrances that were common structures to burial grounds represented a gateway to the divine and to eternity.

In the 1200's AD, thousands of miles from the mid-east, the people of Easter Island built more than 800 massive figures that encapsulated the spirits of their ancestors.

In Christianity, we have more references to stones than we would imagine at first glance. *Christ our rock, Rock of Ages*, and of course the several images in today's readings.

Rocks cause people to stumble and fall, cause us to become humble as we gaze on spectacular and breath-taking rocky mountain ranges found throughout the world and on places like the Grand Canyon that fill us with awe and wonder. Stones and rocks remind us of the timelessness of God. Smaller stones are sources of meditation. If we choose, we can hold one simple stone in our hands and gaze upon it. We can study the intricate colors, lose ourselves in the quiet contemplation of its surface and feel its texture and weight. My wife, Beth, is very attached to stones! She holds them, reflects on them, draws wisdom from them, is connected to God through them.

Here, closer to home, the Native Americans hold stones to be sacred. Often they refer to them as “Grandmothers.”

Long, long ago, the Creator made the earth fertile. From it, all life came into being. So the earth is Mother Earth. The earth allowed vegetation and trees to grow. Life arose out of the earth. Animals of all kinds walked on the earth as it supported their weight while they lived. Like any good mother, she forgives those who abuses her and nourishes all of us. And when the last breath of ever creature had been taken and death claimed them, she welcomed their bodies back home. For all these reasons, they call it “Mother Earth.” And for millions of years, this is how Mother Earth sustained us. But one day, the winds changed. A relentless cold came over the earth and glaciers formed. For millions of years, Mother Earth lay beneath the massive weight of the ice. Then one day, the winds changed again and warmth spread over the earth and melted the ice. But by now, the once fertile Mother Earth had become old. Her body had changed and she was no longer supple. Her body was now hard and her womb unable to bear children and she could not support life as she had before. She had been transformed and emerged from the glaciers as stone. She was no longer Mother Earth, but rather Grandmother Earth! She was not dead or inanimate! Not at all! Instead, she carried the timeless wisdom of God. She is the only being present at the moment of creation, and she carries with her that knowledge of and the millions of years of life on this planet. She is to be revered as sacred! She is invited and carried into all of our ceremonies with dignity and anchors our prayers. We treat her with the respect she has earned and she invites us to turn to her for guidance. She is a sacred path to the Creator. She is the only being that was ever physically touched by the hand of God, and, as such, is held in the highest esteem.

Today’s reading draws on all of our human experiences and wisdom handed down throughout ages of humanity regarding the sacredness of “stones” and “rocks.” The divine being of Jesus is attached to the symbol of stone and rock since they, too, have been held throughout human history as either being the divine presence or a pathway to it. Jesus is connected to the sacredness of stone and rock so that his presence on earth was not just a human event, but was proclaimed as the actual presence of God living then and now among us.