

April 26, 2015 Upon this Cornerstone Homily

Sometime in the month of October, 2011, a rather interesting article turned up in the New York Times. Steven Roberts, one of the newspaper's reporters, wrote about the 175 million dollar restoration of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan. According to the Times' writer, in the preparation phase of the Cathedral's renovation, the architect and contractor learned that the cornerstone, which had been consecrated by the then Archbishop John Hughes in 1858, was missing. "It is the great mystery of the Cathedral" said the present rector of the sacred building. It seems to have vanished! There can be no edifice without a cornerstone, a point of reference for the construction of a new building. It is fair to say that the cornerstone exists but, at the present time, remains hidden from view! What is the cornerstone? It is the foundational stone and the first to be laid by the builders. Most cornerstones are marked with the date of construction, and many are engraved with the names of the architect, contractor, and various dignitaries.

In the early Church, Christ is referred to several times as a stone or a rock. A rock is a hard, nonmetallic mineral or earthly matter. It is solid and very often immovable. Moreover, it symbolizes permanence and the groundwork of a building. We recall the words of St. Matthew in the wake of Jesus' death "So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away"(Mt. 27:57-60). A great stone, indeed!

The foundation stone of a church is a symbol of Christ. As Pope Benedict writes, "The church rests on Christ, is sustained by Him and cannot be separated from Him. He is the one foundation of every Christian community, the living stone rejected by the builders but chosen and precious in God's sight as the cornerstone" (1 Pet. 2:4-5, 7). The very leaders whose commission it was to build the House of Israel have rejected the cornerstone of the building...Jesus Christ! On the cornerstone (Christ), the church is built by the apostles into the House of God and a Holy temple. And we, the people of God, are the "Living stones of the sacred edifice".

In his letter to the Christian community at Ephesus, St. Paul specifically mentions the cornerstone in his vivid depiction of the Church of Christ. Addressing the faithful St. Paul tells them that they are:

"fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-22).

What lessons may we derive from today's first reading (Acts 4:8-12)?

First, over the centuries many of the enemies of the Catholic Church have predicted her eventual demise and destruction. While it is true that in times of persecution many church buildings have been reduced to rubble, the most consoling truth is that the cornerstone of each and every Church is Christ Himself, and he is alive. Christ is risen! Christ will never die again! There is no more durable foundation than our Church! The witness of Christians, "living stones" will always prevail. The church is indestructible!

Second, let us recall the words of Christ in one of his justly famous parables: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rains fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been built on rock"(Mt.7:24-25).

Building our Christian life on the foundation of Christ's words is a gospel imperative. Are we attentive to the Word of God? Do we pick and choose what we like? Do we ignore the more difficult teachings of Christ? How firm is our faith, or do we build our life on a weak foundation?

Amen