**Homily for May 7 2023 1 Peter 2, selected verses “The Church’s One Foundation”**

*Come to Christ Jesus, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and 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. For it stands in scripture: “See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner.” But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

I was a pimply 15 year old in 1975, the year that one of the silliest fads *ever* dominated the Christmas shopping market. Nestled in shredded paper, with a forty page instruction manual, and encased in a carrying box complete with breathing holes, for a small sum you too could be the proud owner of a Pet Rock. The inventor was from a place I had never heard of – Los Gatos, CA – and the launch of this preposterous product was in a place I had never dreamed of visiting – San Francisco. In my young mind it only confirmed the bias, held back East, that Californians were kinda kooky. I mean, really, who would pay good money for a rock in a box?

You might wisely wonder where on earth this train of thought is heading, and for better or worse, it is heading right into the Bible and landing squarely in today’s text. Because if we think a rock as a pet is absurd, imagine how silly we will feel trying to defend our religious choice of a rock as our Savior. Our Christ, our Lord, described by Peter as the cornerstone, the rock that the builders rejected, and even as a *living* stone, whatever that might be. Peter, one would think, would be an expert on such matters, since he himself was nicknamed ‘the Rock’ by Jesus himself, the rock upon which the earthly church would be built.

We need to leave this frothy world of analogies and metaphors for a few minutes and talk about more substantive things. Historically, as you may know, Peter was the foundational disciple who became the default leader of the church in Jerusalem following Jesus’ time on earth. He was, by modern standards, a moderate, trying to keep the church intact when James the Just (the most orthodox) and St. Paul (the most expansive) were both advocating *very* different versions of the fledgling faith. Peter left the Jerusalem church to do mission work, founding the church in Antioch and eventually co-founding the church in Rome with Paul. He was, of course, the first Pope of record, and served a long and vibrant papacy, being martyred just a few years before the Gospel of Mark was written. Tradition has it that both he and Paul were swept up in a wave of intolerance led by Nero, history’s most infamous fiddler.

In addition to being a key player in all four gospels, Peter wrote numerous works, some of which were included in our Bible, including the letter we are learning from today. Hear his words again: *Come to Christ Jesus, a living stone, rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.* We can only speculate as to what he meant by ‘living stones’, but it is a pretty darned good image: living, breathing, mobile, active components of the spiritual house that eventually became the Church. Like stones, Christians are solid, dependable, but able to be fashioned by the master sculptor, removing the unnecessary bits and revealing the holy within. In a time of growing exclusion and persecution of the early Christians, this image projects confidence and strength, and sets us solidly on the cornerstone, Jesus himself. How does the hymn writer say it? On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

Nobody expected Pet Rocks to actually sell, but they sold in the millions. Similarly, nobody expected this breakaway sect of Judaism to actually survive, and many actively pursued their extinction, but they thrived and grew and eventually became the pre-eminent religious choice of the entire human race. But the faithful didn’t accomplish all that by just sitting around like a box of rocks – hear again the encouragement Peter offers us: *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Christ who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* How did Peter’s colleague Paul phrase it? *Now, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* Living stones, resting on the chosen and precious foundation of Christ and his teachings. Each of us autonomous and yet interdependent, individual but also part of the wall, or the gate, or whatever structural part of the Church we are gifted to assume. One of the primary needs of humans is the ability to be part of something bigger than themselves. I say, we have chosen wisely.

The Pet Rock phenomenon was launched, successful, and then over in about a year. Pundits speculate that is succeeded because of the general boredom of life, and the need to be part of a rather well promoted in-joke. The Jesus phenomenon was launched, successful, and is not remotely over yet, twenty centuries later. We too live in a time when the crushing sameness of life calls us to bigger and broader minds and hearts; we too want to be part of history’s greatest in-joke, when Death itself was overruled. We come to the Lord’s Table soon, and add living stone to the images of soft bread and flowing wine. When you come, I invite you to take Peter’s words to heart, and remember that you are not just another rock by the roadside of Life. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. We don’t shuffle up here like Pet Rocks, friends…we are God’s own people. Amen.