

5th Sunday Eastertime 2023

'Living stones' doesn't really make sense does it. So why does St. Peter choose this image in the second reading? Well, stones do have significance.

If you could have peeked under the throne during the coronation you would see another stone that King Edward I stole from Scotland after the Battle of Dunbar in 1296, the Stone of Scone, on which Scottish kings had been crowned since possibly the 4th century, starting with Fergus son of Erc! It was stolen to show English control of Scotland. It was later blown up by suffragettes. Stolen back by Scottish students in 1950 for a few months. And returned to Scotland in 1996, and lent back by Scotland for the coronation. A stone of significance. A stone marking a sense of community and identity, as well as monarchy.

At the same time many important buildings have a foundation stone. Our church has one, and we do have a silver trowel to mark the founding moment but that has disappeared into a draw somewhere. (Though looking at the front of the church you might wonder about the building it is supporting.) But when it was placed in the early 1830s it meant a great deal to the people of the parish. It was a sign to them of Catholic return and stability for the future.

And just as we talk about the church being the people not the building, so these stones represent communities, identity and, perhaps above all, hope for the future.

When he speaks to the disciples in the gospel today, just before he dies, Jesus is speaking about the future and community.

Jesus has come to save us, that much we know. But, just as Philip with his question was uncertain what this meant, we have to ask ourselves today what this means. In both the Church and the monarchy there has been a realisation that both institutions are meaningless without the people. Politically this has been a battle between the Crown and Parliament over the centuries. The King now rules with the people's consent. And in the Church, what has always been true but lost at times, like Scotland's stone, is that from the beginning Jesus wanted us to build on what he had set up, and for all of us to realise the importance of each one of us to the structure he was founding.

The future is defined for us by him. He is the path to follow, the Way, and the purpose, the parameters, are set by him, he is the Truth, and he both is our Life after death, but he flows through our lives even now, through his gift of the Holy Spirit. We are all bound together.

When he says to each of us, and to all of us as his community, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, what he is saying to each one of us, is that though we have priests consecrated for the day to day work of the church, (just as though we have a King consecrated as Head of State), each of us is equally important in the future of our Church (and for that matter of our State). Neither institution makes sense unless both, Church (and Monarchy-government), value each one of us as vital building blocks of their structure too. In the same way we each have a responsibility for those institutions we belong to.

What Christ does, what he continues to do, is to believe in us and invite us to believe in him, and so in ourselves as well. To see ourselves as one, bound together with him, both in faith and in our Mass, which is the foremost expression of our unity as a community. He is precious as he continues to enable us to be builders of his house. He is a living stone that is never a sign of domination but only of unity and mutual support, and faith in our future.