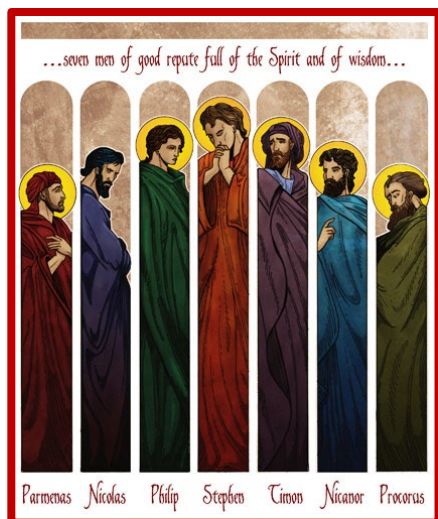


## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN EASTER ~ 07 May 2023

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

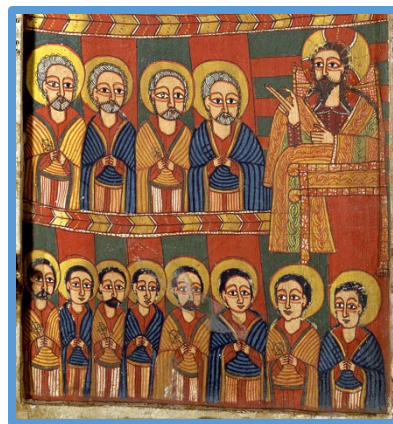
“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called you out of darkness into this marvellous light” (1 Pet 2:9). These words from the second reading in today’s Liturgy of the Word are a touchstone for all four of our readings. God chooses to create all beings – all who are created are worthy, all who are created are called to proclaim God’s presence and to live in God’s marvelous light.



In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the followers of Jesus the Risen One know very quickly that the ministry of preaching and teaching God’s Word is not enough for this Way of being Christ-followers. It must be accompanied by caring for one another, most especially, those most at risk within the community. They also recognize that central to Jesus’ teaching is inclusion. The first disciples are Jewish followers of the Way. Now they are challenged by Greek-speaking people to include them, and they are challenged to attend to the needs of those made vulnerable by the society – in this instance, widows.

The ministers that the Twelve choose all have Greek names, they are deemed to be “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3), and they are designated by the laying of hands and anointing (Acts 6:6). In other words, this new ministry has the same marks as the ministries of preaching and teaching. Despite the apparent sense that this ministry is less than the first ministry, it is quite clear that all the qualities required and the ways of being appointed to the ministry are the same whether your ministry is preaching God’s Word or caring for people and Earth.

After having wandered from this teaching for far too long and granting privilege to ordained ministry and ministers, we are slowly but carefully returning to the importance of all ministries, no matter what our age or ability or role in the Church. The Vatican Council reinforces this theme of all ministries being grounded in baptism when it teaches about the “call to holiness” (see *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 5). In his *Joy of the Gospel* (#120), Pope Francis gave us new language to say the same thing when he calls all of us to be “missionary disciples.” Now the *Working Document for the Continental Assemblies of Synod on Synodality* deepens this same thought (#67), “The theme of ministry as central to the life of the Church, and the need to articulate the unity of mission with the plurality of ministries, emerges from the consultation of the People of God.” It calls for a Church which is “a communion of different charisms and ministries.” The very title of this *Working Document* reinforces this teaching, “Enlarge the space of your tent” (Is 54:2). As we read in 1 Peter, **we all belong** to “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people,” and **we are all called** to proclaim the mighty acts of the one who called us out of darkness into this marvelous light.



[Christ Teaching the Disciples](#)  
Walters Art Museum

This central theme of the mingling of God's word and God's works is beautifully imaged in Psalm 33, "For the word of the Lord is upright, and all God's work is done in faithfulness. God loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Ps 33:4-5). God's steadfast love is shown in God's word and in God's faithfulness, righteousness, and justice. We who are called to proclaim God's presence rejoice that this is so – indeed, the psalmist cries out to us to "Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to God with the harp of ten strings" (Ps 33:2).

When we return to 1 Peter, we are given a simple but profound metaphor from the larger communion of all creation, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight" (1 Pet 2:4-5). The image of a rock or stone is used as a name for God throughout the Old Testament:

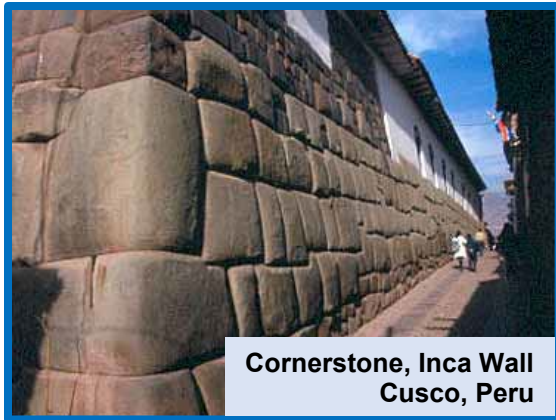
- "For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, God's work is perfect, and all God's ways are just" (Deut 32:3-4)
- "There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God" (1 Sam 2:2)
- "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge" (2 Sam 22:2-3)
- "For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?" (Ps 18:31)
- "God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken" (Ps 62:2)
- "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock" (Is 26:4)
- "Do not fear or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one" (Is 44:8)

Rocks and stones are Earth beings – they can be found everywhere on Earth, they are diverse, they come in many colours and shapes. They fall into three broad classes: (i) igneous rock (e.g., basalt, granite, quartz) formed through the cooling of lava, (ii) sedimentary rock (e.g., chalk, coal, limestone, sandstone) formed at the earth's surface by water and wind wearing down large rocks into smaller pieces, and (iii) metamorphic rock (e.g., marble, slate, soapstone) formed by subjecting any existing rock to high heat, high pressure, or to a hot, mineral-rich fluid to create a new kind of rock – all creatures of earth, fire, water, and wind. Rocks have been used by humans throughout the history of humankind – for building, for weapons, for walls and fences and dams, for religious altars, for art, for dating the age of Earth. . .



The writer of 1 Peter takes the image of the stone or rock used for God in the Old Testament to describe Jesus the Christ. The writer extends to Jesus Christ the metaphor of the stone which connects Earth and the built environment, the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the first stone set during the building process. Careful measurements are taken to ensure the cornerstone is square, providing the proper alignment of the rest of the building. All other stones will be set in reference to this stone. A cornerstone also marks the geographical location by orienting a building in a specific direction. Ancient cultures believed that the position of heavenly bodies regulated life, fortune, and success; therefore, cornerstones were commonly placed facing the Northeast because it was thought this location would bring harmony and prosperity to the building and its owners. The cornerstone reflects the truth (it is square, providing proper alignment), the way (it is

the first one laid and sets the reference for all the other stones of the building), and the life (the belief that the geographic location determined by the cornerstone would bring harmony and prosperity).



**Cornerstone, Inca Wall  
Cusco, Peru**

The Old Testament image of the stone is also used by the writer of 1 Peter to describe the followers of Jesus Christ. In the book of Exodus, twelve stones represent the people of Israel (“There shall be twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes” – Ex 28:21, 39:14). The context for these stones is the covenant between God and the people. In Exodus 24, the people promise, “All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do” (Ex 24:3). Moses then builds an altar and sets up twelve pillars of stone, representing the twelve tribes of

Israel. He dashes half of the blood of the sacrificed animals on the altar, and, after reading the book of the covenant, he dashes the rest of the blood on the pillars with the words, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’ (Ex 24:8).

Now we, the followers, are called living stones, and “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). With Jesus the cornerstone setting the way, the truth, and the life, we the living stones are built into a spiritual house, becoming “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9). As a living stone, Jesus enlivens the covenant relationship between God and the people. As a cornerstone, Jesus links humans and other-than-humans in communion.

In the Gospel of John at the Last Supper, Jesus speaks to the disciples immediately before his death. He reinforces the themes that we have seen in the other three readings. The passage begins with the comforting words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1), an echo of the words that we heard in Isaiah (44:8) as the writer there reminds us that God is our rock. For Sisters of Mercy, we are also reminded of the prayer which our founder, Catherine McAuley, passed down to us, “Take from my heart all painful anxiety.” In this prayer, she speaks about her trust in the mercy, tenderness, and love of God as she promises to be faithful to her God for time and eternity. We sing this prayer often, but we sometimes do so without truly reflecting on the intermingling of the themes: the matters which cause us deep anxiety, trust in the God of mercy, love, tenderness, and compassion who chooses us; and the relationship between God and us now and for all eternity.

In his words to his disciples and through them to all of us, Jesus makes this startling statement, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). In Sister Veronica Lawson’s words, “Jesus makes three claims: ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life.’ The prologue to the gospel, which functions as an overture to the gospel, has introduced the notion of the incarnate Word as ‘full of grace and truth’ and the bringer of ‘grace and truth’ (1:14, 17). The Word is the life that is the light of all (1:4), the bread of life, even the resurrection and the life. Jesus’ claim to be ‘the way’ is



**Lenten Labyrinth, Mike  
Moyers**



foreshadowed in the parable of the gate: I am the gate for the sheep (10:7)." Thom Shuman's prayer echoes these three "I am" statements:

Our Way: you call us to celebrate your peace in a world which worships war;  
to celebrate your freedom in the face of oppression;  
to celebrate the seed of faith planted in the doubts of our hearts.

Our Life: you would have us celebrate the safe ground of hope  
emerging from the flood of our tears;  
celebrate those who love us in the midst of hurt and hatred;  
celebrate our salvation as we struggle with sin.

Our Truth: you teach us to celebrate our new life in the gift of the Risen Lord;  
to celebrate the grace of your heart which melts our fears;  
to celebrate that all our moments are cradled in your hands.

Jesus makes two other startling statements: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9), and "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these" (Jn 14:12). Too often, we read these words of Jesus as if they are for the future time. As he speaks at the Last Supper, in fact Jesus is referring to the future time, but with his death and resurrection, that future time has come. The scripture scholar, Walter Brueggemann, tell us, "For us, the important message of today's pericope is that the risen, exalted Christ continues his words and works in his church." The good news is already alive and active among us since the moment of the Resurrection. Catherine of Siena says it succinctly, "All the way to heaven is heaven because he said, 'I am the way.'" We who are believers in Jesus, followers of the Way, are to do the works of Jesus on Earth in whatever place we now live. This is what it means to be missionary disciples, to be ministers of God's word and works, not matter what our age, our ability, our status, or our role.

Let us hear this reflected yet again in words attributed to Teresa of Avila but may have been written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Guy Pearse, a Methodist minister, and Sarah Eliza Rowntree, an English Quaker:

Christ has no body now but yours  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which He looks  
Compassion on this world  
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good  
Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world  
Yours are the hands, Yours are the feet  
Yours are the eyes, You are His body  
Christ has no body now on earth but yours

During this coming week, reflect on times when yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion or the feet with which Christ walks to do good or the hands with which Christ blesses all the world – looking with compassion, walking in mercy, blessing the whole world by your presence. This is what it means to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. This is the covenant into which our God of mercy has called you and me and every created being.

*I am the Gate*  
[Peter Koenig](#)

