

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter: On Pet Rocks and Living Stones**

Way back in 1975 a fellow named Gary Dahl lost his job at an advertising agency in San Francisco. His bills began to mount up, and he couldn't find any work. But he was a fellow who could think outside the box. Dahl came up with an absurd way to make a lot of money fast. He invented the Pet Rock. It was such a crazy idea that it took the country by storm. Of course, the pet rocks were not just plain old rocks. Most of them were round smooth river rocks. But that wasn't the thing that made them popular. The key was in the packaging. When you bought a Pet Rock, you weren't so much buying a rock, but buying a series of gimmicks. The Pet Rock came in a box resembling the boxes people used to get when they bought gerbils or turtles at the local pet store. It even had air holes for the rock to breathe through, and bits of wood shaving to keep it comfortable. Inside the packaging was an instruction pamphlet which gave "feeding" and other instructions to make sure the Pet Rock was well cared for. The booklet even gave a lineage for each rock, much like a fancy purebred dog. Of course, many of the rocks, unsurprisingly, had been part of the Pyramids, the Great Wall of China, etc. The pamphlet even taught people how to teach their Pet Rock to obey commands – the best ones were: "stay" "lay down" "sit" and if you wanted to get really fancy... "play dead." It was a strange fad, an absurd fad, because everyone knows that rocks don't do anything. They are just there, wherever they might be.

Now, in today's second reading from 1 Peter, Peter talks about rocks. He first says that Jesus is a stone, a rock, but not an inanimate mineral. He says that Jesus is a living rock. How can a rock be alive? That must have seemed absurd to the people who first heard or read this. Peter makes an even seemingly crazier assertion: not only is Jesus a living stone, but his followers are also called to be living stones. What does Peter mean by this? Or, more properly, what is the Holy Spirit saying through Peter? When Peter called Jesus the living stone, he particularly referred to the cornerstone of the building, the stone that unites all the other stones. We are called to be living stones, not inanimate pet rocks, but stones that unite all other stones together to form the Building of the Lord, the Church.

We are not just pet rocks. Nor are we any old rocks laying on the ground. We are living stones. We have Dignity. We have received dignity from the Lord. We have been chosen by God. We are the building that is the church.

It is in recognition of our dignity that Jesus told his disciples, and tells us, that he was going to prepare a special place for us. They, and all his disciples, would have a place in the Father's house. "There are many rooms in my Father's mansion," the Lord says. There is a place for each of us, recognizing our individuality.

Just think about that. God has a special place reserved for you and for me. We each have a door with our names hung over it. How do we get to this place? How do we find heaven? Jesus said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way."

Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If we stay united to the Lord, He will take us to heaven. That special place, the heavenly court of God, is there waiting for us. What will it be like? We certainly will not be sitting on clouds playing harps for all eternity. Boring. Nor will be listening to the eternal playing of the Barney Song, "I love you, you love me." That would be hell, or, at best, purgatory. In the Paradiso, the third Book of Dante's Divine Comedy, Dante presents heaven as a swirl of love. He might be correct, but we really do not know what heaven will be like. We only know that it will be better than our fondest expectations: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him," we read in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 2:9.

We do not know what heaven is like, but we do know what is required for us here on earth. We are to be living stones. Like our Lord our lives have to be intertwined with all those around us. The cornerstone connects the walls of a building. It supports the walls. We have to be people who connect others to God. We have to be people who support others.

Our Christian charity is a statement of who we are. We are followers of the One who is the Living Rock. As living rocks ourselves we support and strengthen each other and all others.

In the beginning of the second reading we are called precious in the eyes of the Lord. We are invaluable. We are cherished. We are highly esteemed. We are loved. We are not pet rocks. We are precious stones.

Why? Why does God love us so much? Is it because of something that we have done? Why are we so precious to Him?

Well, why do you, why do we love our children? Why are our children so precious to us? Is it because of what they do? No. Sure, there are many times that we are proud of our children's accomplishments. But we love them even without their accomplishments. Parents need to let their children know that. Do we love our children because they are cute. No, God makes them cute so the rest of us don't knock them off before they turn 18. When you first held your children as infants, you could not believe you had so much love in you. Yet, the baby did not do anything. Why, then did you love that baby? Why do you love your children? You love them for whom they are, not for what they do. You see God's love in your child. You see a reflection of God's beauty in your child.

Why does God love us? Why are we so precious to Him? He loves us for

whom we are, unique reflections of His love in the world. He loves us because He sees in each of us the love He has for his Son, Jesus. He loves us because each of us is a unique reflection of the Love that became flesh in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the rock that has been rejected by the world but has become the cornerstone of the New World. We are the living cornerstones. The Church is the physical building of the Spirit of God. We are the Church. Jesus is the great high priest who was rejected by the status quo and thrown out of the Temple. He was crucified outside the city. We are rejected by the intellectually arrogant atheists who control so much of our media and society. We are thrown out of the City of Man and laughed at as naive remnants of an ignorant age. But we remain here in the City of God. We are a holy priesthood, people carrying on the priestly ministry by making God present to others and others present to God. Jesus is the Light of the World, the one who dispels the darkness of sin. We are the people of the Light. We are called to bring hope and light to a world living in fear and darkness.

And we are precious. Precious to our God and precious to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

What dignity we have! We have the dignity of Jesus Christ. We need to walk through this world with our heads held up high. We need to proclaim to all the people of the world that the gifts of the Father, the special place set aside for his followers, is offered also to them.

We cannot be pet rocks that really do nothing. No, we are called to be the living stones of an eternal home.