

Readings: Acts 4: 8 – 12; 1 John 3: 1 – 2; Ps. 117 (118): 1,8,9,21 – 23,26; John 10: 11 – 18.

As I wrote in last week's reflection, today's reading from Acts is the defence that Peter, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, made before the Sanhedrin after the healing of a lame man.

To the proclamation of Jesus as *the one you* (the Jewish leaders) *crucified, whom God raised from the dead*, Peter adds an Old Testament quotation – in fact from Psalm 117 (118), part of which is set for today's mass: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner stone* – or, as the reading translates, *the keystone* – that is the stone at the top of an arch which holds the two sides together.

Peter's hearers – and some, at least, of the readers of Acts – would have recognized the image of the rejected stone, which has become essential to the new building. It's an image which is used in several ways in books of the Old Testament. Isaiah speaks of God laying *a stone of witness, a precious cornerstone, a foundation* (28:16), and of a *stone of offence, a rock of stumbling* (8:14).

The New Testament writers use the image of the *chosen stone* in both ways.

This verse used by Peter is quoted in the gospels of Matthew (21:43), Mark (12:10 & 11) and Luke (20: 17 & 18), when Jesus, having told the parable of the Wicked Tenants, asks his hearers whether they have not read it in the scriptures.

The verse is also quoted in the First Letter of Peter (2: 6 – 8), as part of an extended description of Jesus as *a precious cornerstone, which I have chosen*, and as *a stone to stumble over*. In his letter to the Romans (9:33) Paul uses the image of a *stone* which is a cause of *stumbling* to unbelievers, but also a support to *whoever believes in him* (that is in Jesus).

This widely used image of Christ as the *chosen stone*, rejected by men but used by God, is a good example of the way the New Testament writers saw the fulfilment of the promises and threats of the Old Testament in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's also an example of their use of the psalms as prophecy.

The image of Christ as the *chosen stone* on whom the Church depends for its existence is used in several hymns – particularly those for the Dedication Festival of a church – including "*Christ is made the sure foundation and the precious corner-stone*".