

# Reject no stones

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*Homily on Psalm 118 – Friday of the Octave of Easter*

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Many of you have followed the Pilgrim's Blog, written each year by the Acolytes during their pilgrimage to the Holy Land. At some point during each pilgrimage, the Mundelein faculty and seminarians encounter a priest or bishop who will speak of the Christians of the Holy Land as "the living stones." A phrase I have heard repeated over and over again in the ten trips I have made to Israel and Palestine is an exhortation: "Tell your people when you return home, don't just visit the stones, visit the living stones."

The stones refers to the shrines, carefully maintained and cared for by the Franciscan Order, which are the principle destination of pilgrims. The living stones refers to the Parishes, schools and institutions of the Archdiocese of Jerusalem, where the local Catholics live out their faith life in trying and difficult circumstances. Shrines are important, a vital element of our Catholic faith. But our fellow Catholics are also important, more important, for it is their faithfulness that keeps the Holy Land a living Christian community.

So, the Mundelein pilgrims always follow that sage advice. We stay a long time so that we have the luxury of time to interact with our co-religionists. We take the time to listen to their stories, to learn of their cares and needs, and to begin to build relationships which we can at least carry into the future in prayer.

These are the same living stones spoken of in the Responsorial Psalm of today's Mass. Ah, but wait, some of the seminarians may be saying. This psalm is Christological. It refers to Jesus as the rejected stone. He is the cornerstone which the sacred author, knowingly or unknowingly, is referring. Yes, true. But remember I am by training an ecclesiologist and so I must assert that after the Ascension, Christ continues to be really present in the world, and one of the modes of his presence is his body, composed of the baptized faithful. The cornerstone is here, right now, in this Chapel, in us through the sacrament of baptism.

So the Holy Land is not the only place to look for living stones. No, we can find them right here, at Saint Mary of the Lake and in all of the parishes where you seminarians serve as interns and deacons, like Saint Mary of Vernon, who sponsored the ice cream social yesterday. Parishes where the baptized faithful worship live with their families and friends.

Today we gather to recognize the staff of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, and I speak for Father Barron when I thank you for your service to all of us, faculty, students and guests. When I say all of you, I am including a vast number of staff who will only be fully recognized in the Convocation program. Most people do not know the extent of the University. Recently, I was at the Mundelein Business Breakfast recently held by the Village and when I arrived, I was asked to fill out a card. On it was the name of the business and a space for my name and the number of employees we have. So, I did some arithmetic in my head, always a poor idea and wrote down the number I always used in the Provost's Office. After a cup of coffee,

and with a more alert brain, I went back to the desk and asked for my card back. You see, I had forgotten the part-time employees of the Office of Academic Affairs, which basically doubled our number. With that, I learned that Saint Mary of the Lake is the third largest employer in Mundelein. We follow Medline and the Village itself as employers. We have approximately 350 employees. They work in the seven schools and institutes of the University: the Seminary, the Pontifical Faculty, The Liturgical Institute, the Institute for Lay Formation, the Institute for Diaconal Studies, the Institute for Ongoing Formation and the Instituto de Liderazgo Pastoral. There are 43 full-time faculty members, about 107 full-time staff. There are about 200 adjunct and part-time staff persons. These people serve the 192 seminarians, 168 non-seminarian graduate students, the approximately 300 non-degree certificate students and the 1500 plus Catholic teachers and catechists who take our short courses. We deliver these courses here at the Mundelein campus, at DePaul's O'Hare Campus, the Meyer Center and at four other sites across the archdiocese. In the Fall, the Institute for Lay Formation will add a site in the Diocese of Joliet. And John Lehocky and I just finalized an agreement with the Diocese of Des Moines for the Instituto de Liderazgo Pastoral to establish a site in Iowa for training lay ministers and deacons! You have heard Father Barron say, "Mundelein is in growth mode" but I'll bet you didn't know the full extent of what that meant.

And none of this takes into account the number of people who are not students of the University who are served by the Conference Center, Food Service Professionals and the Feehan Memorial Library and McEssy Theological Resource Center. These

components reach out to the public at large and to church and nonprofit groups, such as the Institute on Religious Life who will be visiting us this weekend. The last time the Office of the Provost did a headcount of non-student guests, the number was about 13,000.

All of this is made possible by you, our dedicated staff. Now, much of what you make possible is not seen either by the faculty or students. I can't possibly list it all here, so I will offer one illustration per building, just to call to mind the things we should today be thankful for.

Most of you never see the prayer being offered early in the morning in Building 101P - the Convent, where the Oblates daily perform the work of God. Each day, there is a different card displayed before their altar, with the intention of the day. The rest of us frequently appear on that card. In a real way, the center point of Saint Mary of the Lake is that small chapel in 101P. Across the street in 300 and 400P, rooms are being cleaned and readied for the arrival of the next round of guests, or attending to the practical matters of the graduate students who live in the South Residence. The 500P building, Administration supports the University wide services, the administrative and business functions, institutional advancement, facilities, switchboard and mail services. Even immigration matters are handled there. Custodial staff care for and ready 600 P, this Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, for use. In 800P and all of the buildings, electronic technology is maintained by Computer services so that classrooms are links to the many resources now part of higher education. In 900P - the North Residence you find the staff of the Formation Department. One boulevard houses the part of the staff

you know best, the women and men who most directly and visibly serve formation. The Faculty Building -- 1000P which is the location of many of the teaching faculty's office, where lessons are planned. In 1000P rooms are carefully maintained for your bishops and vocation directors, to enable the partnership between seminary and diocese to best support you. The staff there, so attentive to the needs of our important guests, act as ambassadors of the seminary. Circling back, we find the Greenhouse, where the seminary fleet of cars is maintained. And the laundry, which keeps the necessary things of life clean. And the Refectory, perhaps the building which serves the most, two or three times a day with our daily bread. And there is the shop where so much of the maintenance of this beautiful campus is done. And the powerhouse, where you will find the well that provides us with our water, at least for a little while longer. And then, out on the grounds, we will find our security team, keeping the campus safe and responding to our needs. I could go on, but the message is clear. Our life here is made possible by the work of many. In Father Barron's name, I thank you.

Let me speak to the seminarians about how you can thank these women and men. Father Franzman will be speaking after communion to tell you what you can do today for them. I want to speak a bit farther in the future.

The best thing you can do to thank the staff of the seminary is to become good, holy and competent priests. And one way you will do this is to think often of the Mundelein staff. As you are preparing and when you are ordained, keep them in mind. The baptized faithful need you to be the best priests you can be, because they are going

to entrust their spiritual lives and the lives of their children and families to your pastoral care. Here is where Father Barron's third path becomes most important, "Remember, your life is not your own."

You never know the journey a person took to come to church. But if you always think often about the men and women of the Mundelein staff before you plan or do something, you will stay on track. The faculty has a little rubric for when a man is ready to be certified for orders. We say, "Would I send my sister to him if she was in trouble?" It's the same for you. Have a little rubric, "How would I respond if this parishioner in front of me were N. from the Mundelein staff?"

Remember the living stones. Reject no stones! Sometimes the oddest or most difficult person you encounter will be a member of a family where a mother or father has been praying for years that they would return to church. The best thanks you can give to the woman and men who serve us here is to pick up that living stone and, with care, incorporate him or her into the building which is the edifice of Christ. Some stones are brittle and need to be handled gently. Some stones need support on all sides from mortar, carefully laid. But somehow, with a skillful priest, they can be built up onto a single edifice for the glory of God. This takes time, sometimes years. Be patient and gentle shepherds.

Reject no stones. You never know the journey a person took to come to church. Be not afraid of difficult situations. You have no idea who is praying for the person you encounter. And remember, you are never alone, the faculty and staff of Mundelein and the Oblate sisters are praying for you.

Your best thanks to the staff is to be a good, holy and competent priest, who knows that his life is not his own.