

## IMAGES OF THE CHURCH III: “L”– THE CORNERSTONE

An ancient metaphor for the Church is that of **Cornerstone**. One of the more endearing archival photos we possess is of the June 2, 1907 ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone. It is endearing in part because of the throngs who turned out for a festive beginning to a building they likely had difficulty even imagining in Saint Paul. Photos capture the clothing of the era (gored skirts and blouses for women, suits and hats for all the men) along with the smiles, festivities and all the pomp and circumstance. Imagine the excitement when congratulatory **telegrams** both from **Pope Pius X** and **President Roosevelt** were read aloud. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* estimated the crowd at 60,000, calling it “the greatest church event in the history of the Northwest.” The ceremonial parade to the building site also featured 84-year-old **Isaac Labissonniere**– the **sole survivor** who had worked on the original log Chapel of St. Paul.

Before construction could begin, extensive **soil studies** were done to see if the streetcar tunnel posed any problems for the new Cathedral’s foundation, and whether the ground was “capable of carrying the full loads” of the foundation. Archbishop Ireland was also concerned about streetcar vibrations– he thought of everything! Having concluded there were no issues, the **foundation** was set beginning in November 1906. A “Cathedral Station” was even planned, though a year later those plans were scrapped. Over **twenty-five items** were laid in a copper box, sealed during the parade and then placed in the cornerstone, measuring 12x14 inches. Items included newspaper articles, school catalogues, photographs of the first three Cathedrals, coins, stamps, etc. I am especially curious about the photo of the log chapel-turned-Cathedral. Too bad someone hadn’t tossed in a W600 Sporting Life **rookie card** of one **Tyrus R. Cobb**, sealed airtight in plastic. Had they done so, we might just be able to substantially whittle down the Cathedral debt. They say hindsight is always 20/20!

Vatican II explained the significance of the Church as cornerstone: “Often the Church has also been called the building of God. The Lord Himself compared Himself to the stone which the builders rejected, but which was made into the cornerstone. On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation.” (*Lumen Gentium* 6). Our Cathedral cornerstone bears two inscriptions, the first of which is brief, concerning the festive day itself: “To God, One and Three/ The auspicious holy stone of this Metropolitan Church/ bearing prominently the name of Saint Paul/ on the fourth day before the nones of June, A.D. 1907/ was laid/ To restore all things in Christ.” (Motto of Pope Pius X) The date (*Ante Diem Quartum Nonas Junias*) was calculated according to the old **Julian Calendar**– thus, **June 2, 1907**. The longer inscription gives a concise history, noting that a “humble chapel...gave the splendid name to our beloved city.” (see front cover)

The authoritative **Encyclopedia of Early Christianity** includes a detailed discussion on the origin of the *cornerstone* as related to the Church. *Gammadia* are letters that decorated clothing in ancient iconography. The Greek letter *gamma* (uppercase Γ) represented the number three and became associated with the Trinity. When flipped, in Latin it becomes the capital “L”. The letter’s angle reveals the **image of cornerstone** and its use as a common symbol for this became widespread. It appears in the beautifully preserved early 5th century mosaics in Ravenna, both in a mausoleum and in the Basilica of San Apollinare, where a double “LL” appears on the pallium of St. Hippolytus. A three-hour drive away in Milan, a youthful Christ, surrounded by the apostolic college, is pictured with a **pallium bearing an “L”** in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, built at the same time. (See sidebar)

**Didymus the Blind** of Alexandria (yikes–did they call him that when he was alive?) was a prolific 4th century writer who lived to a ripe old age. In commenting on a line from Psalm 118 (“the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”), he wrote of how Christ has united **two walls** into **one corner**. “After all, did it not join the two walls and make a single corner, when it was built of Jews coming to the Gospel and of those from the nations who believed? The Church, in fact, is composed of both Jews and Greeks, with Christ as its head making a single corner.” One wall represents **Jews** (i.e. Christians and Jews); the other represents the **pagans** (i.e. Gentiles) won over to Jesus. Thus, the Church is formed from these two walls, with its head being Jesus Christ. Our Lord joins the building into one sole corner, making one sole building. This theme was echoed by Augustine, who also noted that the corner is the **meeting point** for two walls, i.e. peoples, Gentile and Jews.

Let us take the early writers at their word, seeing the Church as the nexus between cultures, a holy meeting place where **every person is valued**, regardless of race, class or socio-economic status. One of the great features of our faith is its universality, with people of such disparate backgrounds united under the headship of Christ. We are held together by a **common belief** in Jesus Christ. If you can spare a moment, make your way to the cornerstone, located just outside the basement door on the **Dayton Ave. side**. Say a prayer for the many people who, arriving from Ireland, France, Canada and other parts of Europe, shared a common belief in Christ and his Church. They built St. Paul from a shanty river town to a sprawling urban center that attracted the attention of popes and presidents. May we be the living stones, built upon the foundation of the apostles, with our Lord Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.

- Speaking of Latin, we are working to put together a booklet listing all the **Latin inscriptions** throughout the Cathedral along with readable English translations and a map detailing the general locations. The hope is that people would find this to be a useful resource and that we'll have it before Christmas.
- The work on our **sacristy floor** is nearly complete. It was a privilege to see the craftsmanship of the installers from St. Paul Linoleum, who used lasers to pinpoint their lines. The resulting floor is truly a **work of art**, while remaining true to the original design. The concrete floor needed much work to repair the cracks and smooth it out before laying the new tiles. Finally, a **Coat of Arms** embedded in the floor will enhance the seating area in the back of the sacristy.
- **"Thou shall not steal."** I pray that this will not be taken too literally by St. Peter, guardian of the gates of heaven. **Lou Brock**, Hall of Fame St. Louis Cardinal outfielder, died last week at age 81. He held the single season record for **stolen bases** (118 in 1974), and in 1977 broke Ty Cobb's career SB record that had stood for nearly half a century. Known as a cheerful player, he was universally respected. He also crossed the magic number, accumulating 3,023 career hits.
- In anticipation of tomorrow's Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, our own **Dr. Christopher Ganza** presents a **30-minute organ recital** beginning at 4:00 p.m. **TODAY September 13**. The recital features the compositions of Franck, Mulet, and Biery. Mass follows at 5:00 p.m. as usual.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector



In the apse of the small chapel of St. Aquilino in Milan, the use of the gammadia may be seen. These were symbolic letters that for years scholars assumed were the first letters of the pictured saints. In fact, the circled letter became a symbol for "cornerstone" and this 5th century mosaic beautifully illustrates the importance attached to the metaphor of the church as cornerstone.