

A construction project builds up the people who are the church as well as the building that is the church. Over the past several years we've witnessed an outpouring of sacrifice within this community, expressed in the time it takes to plan a project, execute it, contribute to it, oversee it, and refine it every step of the way. We've experienced the give and take of community life, the inconvenience of being without our familiar church home for several months, and the hopes and dreams of a renewed building. All of that helps us become better people – people more able to listen, compromise, dream, and praise God, the rock of ages.

Our second reading today explores the image of construction. There is nothing more inanimate than a rock. It doesn't grow; it doesn't die; it has no life. Yet the First Letter of Peter uses the expression "living stone", which it applies to Jesus. It's a way of saying that he has all the properties of rock: he is solid, reliable, and able to support a large building. Yet he is something more. He is a rock that is alive. The Letter then compares Jesus to a rock that is rejected. In those days when builders started to work, they needed a rock substantial enough to be the cornerstone upon which the building would rest. They might examine several stones before choosing one. The First Letter of Peter says Jesus is like a rejected stone, one who during his life appeared weak and unreliable to unbelievers. But, in fact, through his resurrection, he was found to be the cornerstone, chosen and precious, upon whom believers may confidently place their faith and hope. Then Peter says that Jesus has been a stone over which some people stumble. Even we believers have experience of this. When you're out in the field, you may trip over a stone you don't realize is there; and in our lives we sometimes trip over Jesus when we don't expect to find him, or don't want to find him – when a friend asks for time, when a stranger stands in need, when we become aware of our selfish and sinful thoughts. We sometimes discover Christ when we wish we hadn't, and we stumble over him, an inconvenient rock.

The Letter of Peter uses the image of the stone in one more way. It says that we are like living stones, and we should let ourselves be built into a spiritual house, a royal priesthood that offers sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. When we are anointed with oil at our baptism, we are all anointed as priests; we are responsible to pray for others and to sacrifice for them. When we do, we build up the spiritual house that is the Church.

This week we have experienced the visit of Pope Benedict, the successor of Peter, whom Jesus named as the rock upon whom he would build the church, and we are witnessing the finishing touches on the renovation of our church building, a symbol of the rock foundation upon which our faith stands. As we prepare to re-enter our church in a couple of weeks, let us recommit ourselves to our faith in Christ and our work as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, sacrificing for the good of others, and praying for their salvation.