

We hear this phrase quoted in the New Testament: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” It comes from Psalm 118 and is quoted by St. Peter in today’s first reading.

What does it mean? Peter is speaking to the leaders of the Jewish people about their rejection of Jesus. So the stone refers to Jesus who was rejected by the builders, that is, the leaders of the Jewish people who were supposed to be the builders of God’s temple, the builders of God’s people. So the stone, Jesus, rejected by the builders, the leaders of the Jewish people, has become the cornerstone.

The cornerstone of what? The cornerstone of a new temple, a new spiritual temple, a new house of God with Jesus as the cornerstone. This new spiritual temple replaces the one made of brick and stone that was in the Jerusalem as the place where God dwells.

And how is it constructed? St. Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians that this new spiritual temple is built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. And then we are built into it. The First Letter of Peter says “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house.”

Jesus → Apostles → Us

This is the church, which is the spiritual temple, the House of God.

St. Peter goes on to say “Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

I want to point out two things:

- 1) We are all priests – something you may not have realized. Let me explain.
What is a priest? A priest is one who offers sacrifice. In the Old Testament, priests were authorized to offer the animal sacrifices in the temple. They were chosen for this. This was their role before God. No one else was authorized to offer sacrifice except the priests.

At Baptism, we are made priests, priests who are authorized to offer, not the sacrifice of bulls and goats and other animals, but the sacrifice of ourselves united to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is completely different from the priesthood that I have (too much to go into in this homily).

I would propose to you that this priesthood that you have been given is what ultimately makes life worth living. Again, let me explain. This sacrifice of our lives that we are called to offer is a very concrete and practical reality. For all of us there are a good

number of things in life that we enjoy doing. There are many things in life that we don't enjoy doing.

Maybe sometimes when that alarm goes off, we grumble, "another day of dreary work" or we face a day of dreary housework, changing diapers, childcare, shopping, mowing, paying bills, trials and sorrows. Why do we do these things which sometimes we don't enjoy? Sometimes out of obligation, because we don't want others to think less of us. Hopefully for love for others, this is good and noble. But there should be on an even greater horizon. As offerings, sacrifices of love to God.

Because we are all priests, even the mundane things of life, the boring things, the things that we don't want to do can become the source of great joy for us because they can become true offerings to God. And it's not that we merely do things for God. To offer sacrifice means that we give ourselves to God. So through our daily work in which we engage, we are able in love to offer ourselves to God united with Jesus.

This understanding of life is tremendously transformative: it means that we don't have to wake up in the morning with dread and sorrow – rather we are ready and willing to give our best to God in all the different ways, sometimes in big ways and sometimes in little ways, sometimes in things we like to do, sometimes in things we don't.

In this way we imitate Jesus on the cross. He is the priest (the one making the offering) and at the same time the Victim (the one being offered). So in our daily living we too can be priest and victim. This culminates in our participation in Sunday Mass where we unite ourselves to the perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

Now of course this offering of ourselves that we make to God is not a one-way street, but part of a mystical exchange in which God also gives Himself to us. And no matter how much we think we might be giving of ourselves to God, God cannot be outdone in generosity and gives to us much more than we ask for or imagine.

So offer yourselves to God, give God the best of yourselves, every day and in every thing, even in the smallest and most mundane tasks, for you are a priest in the spiritual temple of God.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 4th Sunday of Easter, 2012.